

A Way of Life Ephesians 1:15-23

In 1979 a super-secret group formed in Los Angeles. It was made up of several High school students and the group has existed now for 34 years. They have a historian who records and films their bizarre escapades. The organization was recently filmed in a documentary titled "Rolled" (you will get the title in a moment). The documentary chronicles the events of the group from its inception until today even interviewing the founding leader. The perpetuation of this super-secret group is founded on the practice that an outgoing high-school graduate is replaced by an underclassman. Today the group has shifted from its initial charter and just mostly hang out playing video games but occasionally will venture away from the confines of their "club house" located in an abandoned warehouse in order to participate in the activity that brought them together 34 years ago. In case you are wondering what kind of secret-group this is and what they do, they go around TPing houses, cars, trees and even pets.

The church isn't a super-secret group and it's been around a lot longer than 34 years. I guess you could say we meet in a "club house" of sorts and work at replacing outgoing members. I think to a degree we have strayed some from the charter that was given as instructions by the founding member to His initial group. Occasionally we go out and do what we have been called to do. We have seen in our study of the church the mandate given to us by the Lord Himself and the reason this mandate was given. We also considered the empowerment that comes from the indwelling Holy Spirit in order to carry out this mandate. Our focus has primarily been a challenge to be witnesses to a world that needs to know about God's great love through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ through whom by our faith in Him is our only hope of securing eternal life.

Today we shift our focus from our external responsibility to the lost and consider an internal focus on the body of Christ that makes up the church that is so precious to Jesus.

Please turn in your Bibles to **Ephesians 1:15-23**.
Would you stand to honor the reading of God's Word?

From our passage I want to consider two points -
Paul offers praise to the church
Paul outlines prayer for the church

I. PAUL OFFERS PRAISE TO THE CHURCH – v. 15-16a

"For this reason...I haven't stopped giving thanks for you."

Can we say that about the church? Is that how you feel about the people who are part of Fellowship Bible Church at 2500 Hartland Rd. in Hartland, MI? That's how Paul felt about the church in Ephesus. He had praise for them.

Now you may ask, why did Paul praise them?

There are two points that are noteworthy to consider that are for us as well.

A. Paul Praised Them for Their Faith

"Ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus...I have not stopped giving thanks for you."

1. There is praise for saving faith

Now understand that Paul is not writing to a bunch of strangers. Paul had visited Ephesus about four years prior to this letter. We read about it in Acts 19. During his time there many came to know Christ as Savior. A short time later while on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, he traveled past Ephesus and stopped long enough to send for the leaders of the church and encourage

them (Acts 20). Paul is now in prison and he's writing a letter of encouragement to them. We have no way of knowing how big the church in Ephesus had grown in those four years, but throughout that span of time reports would come to him from various sources telling him about what was happening in Ephesus. Paul was writing to some who were new in the faith. They were recent converts and Paul was grateful to hear of their saving faith, but all had experienced the same saving faith.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Paul's words in **Ephesians 2:8-9** **"For by grace are you saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast."**

You have been saved by grace and the means of this salvation is by faith alone. **Romans 3:22, 25** **"This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe...God presented Him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in His blood."**

Galatians 2:16 **"Know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."**

Paul gives thanks for the faith that brought these believers to Jesus Christ. We as well ought to give thanks for the faith others have who are saved and who get saved. We should rejoice with the angels of heaven who give glory to God when someone trusts Christ as Savior. One more person is added to God's forever family. Give God praise – His grace is abundant and His patience is enduring.

He not only gives God praise for their saving faith that has now made them a part of this universal

church, the body of Christ, He also gives thanks for their sanctifying faith.

2. There is praise for sanctifying faith

Faith not only saves, it sanctifies. Faith not only brings us to a point of believing, it also brings us to a place of being or becoming. Faith is more than just what assures us of salvation and eternal life; it assists us in daily living a godly life. Paul also gives thanks to God for this faith as well.

The writer of Hebrews puts it this way – **"But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he that comes to God must believe that He is (exists) and that He is a rewarder of those that diligently seek Him."** (11:6)

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that we are to **"seek first His kingdom and His righteousness."** (Matthew 6:33)

The faith Paul is also talking about is a day by day faith that helps us through our journey in life. It is faith in a God who we believe loves us and has our best interest at heart, even in tough times.

It is faith in a God who we believe cares about the things that happen to us.

It is faith in a God who we believe walks with us through every bump in the road.

It is faith in a God who we believe keeps His promises.

When the bills are due and we aren't sure where the money is going to come from, we believe that the One who owns all the cattle on all the hills will in some way provide.

When we get the news that the suspicious lump is cancer we believe that the One who is the Great Physician is there to help us through.

When we sit down to take that test we need to pass to get a grade to pass a course we believe that the One who is Wisdom and Knowledge, who created all things, is able to help us.

When we face temptation we believe the One who made us and knows our every weakness gives the strength to overcome yet again what Satan would want to use to trip us up.

He is the One who has given us His Spirit so that on one hand we are able to resist the Devil and to flee from the character of the old nature and on the other hand produce in us the fruit of the Spirit, the very nature of Christ.

Faith not only saves it sanctifies. It helps us mature in Christ and grow in faith. It helps us learn to trust more in Him each day and less in ourselves.

According to **Proverbs 3:5-6**, faith is what directs our paths so that we learn to walk in righteousness.

Paul gives thanks for their faith –

Saving faith

Sanctifying faith

Paul also gives thanks for their love.

B. Paul Praised Them for Their Love

Notice some omissions here. Paul did not praise them for their programs. They may have been busting out at the seams and busy doing ministry, but he didn't praise them that they had an active church with stuff going on every day of the week. He didn't praise them for a phenomenal choir or their musical talent.

He didn't praise them for a gifted pastor who could expound the Scriptures with the ability to keep the audience glued to their seats, spellbound by great oratorical skills and Biblical insight.

He praised them for their love for each other.

All that other stuff is just fluff. At the heart of Christianity is love. **After all isn't that what God demonstrated to us? Isn't that His very nature?**

The Bible declares that God is love.

John 3:16 – “For God so loved the world that He gave...” But gave us what because of His love? A

big bank account? A country club life style with no worries or cares? All A's? A great job with lots of perks? Not any of those. He loved us so much He gave the very best.

What was the catch phrase a few years ago for some product **“when you care enough to give the best.”**

That was God. He loves us so much He gave the very best He had to give.

“God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son.” John 3:16

“God demonstrated His love to us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

Romans 5:8

It was something that Jesus told His disciples. It's what we call the Great Commandment and from it flows the Great Commission. **“A new**

commandment I give to you that you love one another as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are My disciples if you have love one toward another.” (John 13:34-35)

How do people know whether or not we are Jesus followers? We might tell them or they might see us every Sunday morning getting in the car with our Bible and headed to what they believe is a church service. But more readily as Jesus points out, people know how serious we are about being a Jesus follower by how we love others.

John wrote **(I John 3:18) “My little children, let us not love in word neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”**

Active love for others is where the rubber meets the road.

Here's the Philip's translation: **“My children, let us not love merely in theory or in words - let us love in sincerity and in practice!”**

Bottom line – your walk speaks more than your talk. Don't just talk about loving others, show it.

Show it in how you treat others, how you talk about others, what you do for others. Love isn't shown in how big a Bible you carry or how many times you come to church or how long you pray or how many classes you teach or even how many Bible study books you have filled out sitting on your bookshelf. Jesus said you demonstrate love for Me when you love others and He added that we are to love them just as He loved us.

John 15:12 “This is My commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you.”

And in the event they didn't hear Him the first time, He said it again in **verse 17**. It's His commandment.

That was Jesus.

Here's what Paul said.

Romans 12:9 “Love must be sincere.” **Is it possible to practice love insincerely?** Apparently so. We can pretend to love someone. We can have ulterior motives. We can use someone and call it love. We can abuse someone and call it love.

Paul goes on to say in **verse 10** “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.” Read **Acts 2:42-28** sometime this week. That's how the early believers treated each other.

Here's something else Paul told the Romans about love for others. “**Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law...Love does no harm to its neighbor.**”

Romans 13:8, 10

Multiple times throughout the New Testament by various authors we are exhorted to love one another. Paul praised them for their love for each other. Here are some ways that may have been seen.

1. Love serves

Galatians 5:13 “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.”

That means you don't do it grudgingly or out of duty, but willingly, voluntarily.

Sounds simple and really when you think about it, it is simple. It doesn't have to be any big thing. It could be calling someone to tell them you are going to the store and could you pick up some milk or bread.

It could be mowing someone's lawn who can't or shoveling the drive or scrapping windows. **A couple years ago we had a lock in for the teens and I had to leave by 7 to get home and take a nap before going to the funeral home to do a funeral at 11. It had snowed quite a bit that night and we had 5 or 6 inches of snow. When I went to leave from church, Luke had gone out before me and scraped all the snow off my car.**

There are so many ways to serve someone else. It's a demonstration of love. But even more important as we learn from **Romans 12:1** that service to others is an act of worship to God. When you serve someone else you are worshipping the Lord.

2. Love encourages

Hebrews 10:24-25 “And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the day approaching.”

Love is seen when you notice someone missing from church and you call them and encourage their attendance.

Love is seen when we encourage others to love and when we encourage others to do good works.

3. Love unifies

Colossians 3:14 “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

Without love there will not be unity.

4. Love forgives

Ephesians 4:32-5:2 “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”

In **I John 4:7-5:3** we are confronted with the thought that we cannot really say we love God if we don't love others.

I got a phone call a couple weeks ago from a lady who professes to be a Christian, yet her actions and attitudes don't match. As she talked you could hear the tone in her voice grow from one of contempt to one of bitterness and anger and resentment. She talked about how the two sons of her husband were selfish and unconcerned about their father. He started a business and she felt the business owed her husband money. Before she hung up she said that she was not ready to forgive. **Does she really have the love of Christ in her heart?**

In chapter 3 John speaks about the love that has been lavished on us who by God because we are His children. In the same fashion we should lavish others with the same love.

I Corinthians 13:3-7

This is a simple yardstick to measure whether or not we love others as we should.

Paul praised them for their love. It was a love that was unconditional, unceasing, and uncompromising and indiscriminate.

Can we be praised for our love for one another?

Can we be praised for our faith?

That was Paul's praise.

Now let's finish with Paul's prayer.

II. PAUL'S OUTLINES PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH – v. 16b-23

“I have not stopped...remembering you in my prayers.”

How often do we pray for one another? We have our weekly prayer sheet in which we remember the sick and the afflicted. We pray for those who are out of work. We pray for those going through emotional difficulties of one kind or another. Those are notable things to petition the Lord for.

As the church, Paul gives us an outline of things that we should be praying about for one another, things that the Deacons and I should be praying about for you as part of this church, things that you can pray about for our Deacons and teachers and me as your pastor.

Notice the specific things that he prays about for them to receive.

A. Paul Prays For Intimacy With God

Verse 17 – “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better.”

He doesn't pray for wisdom and revelation about their work or about improving relationships or about handling a difficult boss, he prays that they might have wisdom and revelation to know God better and to know the blessings that come from Him.

When I counsel couples who come into my office who want to get married, I will repeatedly remind them throughout our counseling that the kind of relationship they have with God will have a direct bearing on their relationship with each other. That same advice holds for all of us. The kind of relationship we have with God will determine the kind of relationship we have with others.

Paul wants them to know God more intimately, to better understand the many blessings and benefits that belong to us because of this relationship we have with God. The word **“knowing”** here does not mean “knowing abstract knowledge about God or even objective facts about Him, but knowing Him personally and intimately. It includes an intimate awareness of God’s character and will.” Philosophy tells us to know ourselves. Christianity tells us to know God.

J. Vernon McGee writes “A brilliant mind doesn’t guarantee an understanding of God’s truth.”

How well do you know Him?

Warren Wiersbe notes that Paul “did not ask God to give them what they did not have, but that He would reveal what they already had.”

William Hearst was a very wealthy newspaper publisher. From his vast wealth he had invested a fortune collecting art from around the world. One particular day he read the description of a piece of art that he just had to have so he sent his agent to look for and purchase this rare piece of art. After a considerable amount of time and money had been spent on pursuing this piece for his collection the agent returned home, empty handed. Hearst asked where the piece of art was to which the agent told him that it was in the warehouse. He had it the whole time.

The more intimately we are acquainted with God, the more we come to understand what is already ours. We need to pray for ourselves and each other that we might know God better, to more fully understand what we He has given us. Paul prays for intimacy with God.

Paul also prays for enlightenment.

B. Paul Prays for Enlightenment

According to Wikipedia “the Age of Enlightenment (or simply the Enlightenment or Age of Reason) was a cultural movement of intellectuals in the 17th and 18th centuries, first in Europe and later in the American colonies. Its purpose was to reform society using reason, challenge ideas grounded in tradition and faith, and advance knowledge through the scientific method. It promoted science, skepticism and intellectual exchange, challenged superstition, intolerance and some abuses by church and state.”

Immanuel Kant wrote "Enlightenment was mankind's final coming of age, the emancipation of the human consciousness from an immature state of ignorance." They would consider matters of faith to be out of step and out of place.

But that’s not what we’re talking about here. Paul wants the believers to have the spiritual eyes of their heart opened so that they can see the truths that God has for them to know and live by. **And just how are these things revealed to us?**

I Corinthians 2:9-10 “But as it is written, ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man the things which God has revealed to them that love Him. But God has revealed them to us by His Spirit, for the Spirit searches all things, yea the deep things of God.’”

We can only come to know the things God has for us from the Holy Spirit and then only those who have been saved can those things be revealed because He only indwells the believer. At times we sing the old hymn

Open my eyes that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou has for me;
Place in my hands the wonderful key
That shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine.

Christian recording artist Michael W. Smith sings
 Open the eyes of my heart, Lord
 Open the eyes of my heart
 I want to see You
 I want to see You

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What is it that he wants them to be enlightened about?

Enlightened about their hope
 Enlightened about the riches of their inheritance
 Enlightened about the power of God available to them

When we place our faith in Christ there is a hope that assures us of what has been promised.

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

The pessimism of French philosopher Francois Rabelais is a sad commentary for those without hope in an age that flaunts reason. “I am going to the great Perhaps.”

Aristotle in all his wisdom got it wrong when he announced that death “is the end of everything.”

The hymn writer’s (526) pen eloquently attests that
 My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood
 and righteousness

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean
 on Jesus name.

On Christ the solid Rock I stand.
 All other ground is sinking sand.
 All other ground is sinking sand.

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The church must rest in the assurance of the promise made by the one who said that there is nothing to fear because He was going away to prepare a place for us He would as well come back to get us so we could be where He is – forever. We have hope.

Paul also prays that we may be enlightened about or better understand the riches that are ours in Christ. We mentioned some of those from verses 3-14.

Paul prays that they might understand God’s
“incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms.”

Many Christians today spend a great deal of time asking God to give them something they already have. They pray for strength to overcome a temptation.

They pray for strength to help them through some trial or difficulty.

We already have His strength.

Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Isaiah 41:10

His power is available to us already. It isn’t doled out in portions like some time released capsule based on our maturity level as a Christian or how many verses we memorize or how many spiritual battles we win. It’s not like a video game where I can earn more power by collecting hearts or life tokens. Because I am in Christ I have all of Christ and His power available to me. When I am defeated by some temptation or defeated by some difficulty in life it isn’t because I don’t possess enough spiritual power, it’s because I haven’t appropriated or applied what I already have.

II Peter 1:3-4 “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

As a matter of fact Paul says here that the same power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him on the throne in heaven is the same power that is available to us and will also raise us from the dead and seat us in the heavenlies with Him.

Here is the capstone for us in verse 22-23. **John MacArthur** “Since He [Jesus] has such a unique and intimate relationship with the redeemed whom He loves, all His power will be used in their behalf to fulfill His loving purpose for them.”

As His church, His body, our response is to know Him more intimately. When we do that we will grow our faith, show our love and pray for others. We aren't to be a secret group. We have a purpose that is to be visible to all.