Faith in Christ and Love of the Saints

Let us turn to our Bibles to Ephesians chapter 1. Ephesians chapter 1, verse 15. So after going over these verses last week, 15 to 23, and I'm now drilling into various aspects of what he is covering. As you know, Paul is very dense in his writing.

He says a lot of things. One of his main points here, of course, was he prays that they would learn more about the might and power and redemption they have in Jesus Christ. But he says everything else around it as well.

Let us listen attentively to the Word of God, Ephesians 1, verse 15. Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you. Let us pray.

Here in God, we read and drill into and understand, I pray, this description of the saints, which should be a description of our lives as well, that we have faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Savior and Mediator, and also at the same time, a love for His people, the saints, the church of the living God. May this be the true mark of all of us. We ask and help us therein.

We pray if we are fallen short or distracted otherwise in such things in our lives, to be encouraged, strengthened by your spirit to carry on in this task and calling as believers. We pray this by our Lord's Savior's mercy upon us. Amen.

Paul's written desire clearly here in prayer is mostly about growing in knowledge and wisdom of the person and work of Christ Jesus and unpacking from verse 19 onward of the power therein in particular, the knowledge of that power. And specifically here, the apostle hones in on the learning more of that power as I said, but just before he gets to all this point, he thanks God for the saints, the believers at Ephesus there for two things in particular. As you heard, their faith in Jesus Christ and the love of the saints.

And I contend it is no accident that Paul here puts these two ideas together. Now often, of course, things are said and written in the Bible that of course are significant. And the relationship is sometimes sequential that Paul or the author wishes to say one, two, three, four.

I think this is one-on-one. He's putting them together. He's coordinating them for a reason.

Faith In Christ

So the first point here, faith in Christ, faith or trust or reliance upon another. Of course, specifically here, he means a saving faith and reliance upon another. And I point this out, that adjective, saving what? Faith.

So what kind of faith? A faith with respect to redemption of salvation. Because the human condition is a condition of faith or trust. Let us not forget this because we are increasingly in a paganized society, for lack of a better word.

And there's a growing number of atheists and deniers of God and the like. We must remember the human condition is one of trust. Children are a good example of this.

What do they know about China? Whatever you tell them. And they what? Believe you. They grow up learning about this place called China, like my daughter did.

And you get a little globe for them when they're a little older and say, we're here, and here's China over there. So she not only hears us, but she also sees us describe this thing called the world, this globe, and this other place called China. But she's never been there.

She's never experienced it herself. What is she doing but still trusting and relying on us, isn't she? There's no way around it. It's the human condition.

This is how we are made. Things you don't know, you rely upon someone else to tell you. And things that you think you know, you still rely upon other people to tell you.

The word know here, I'm using equivocal, right? Know in the sense of I've experienced it, I've seen it myself, or I have proven it through logical syllogism, for example. Many of the things, however, are beyond our experience. We're never going to experience it.

I still haven't been to China. But there's enough of you that have seen it or have evidence of it that I still believe it exists. I've seen people on TV talk about it.

People from China being interviewed and the like. And I trust and rely upon that media source isn't lying. Because we know they do lie at times, right? They've been caught.

This is the human condition. There's nothing about the Bible. You don't have to bring up the Bible.

It's the human conditions. Where we are in a world, even if it wasn't fallen, because our knowledge is finite. We can't know and experience everything at once simultaneously.

We do things sequentially over time. And of course, sometimes it fails. But often it works.

This is pretty much how society has to operate. And we kind of get a lot of things done. If you think about it, it's quite amazing.

And children, of course, still survive by still trusting in their parents. So this sense of trust and reliance is important, again, when we have more and more atheists and people we interact with in society who make fun of us as believers for having faith or believing in somebody as though they don't believe and trust in science and the scientists, like every atheist you met has actually proven everything he's ever believed. No, he still relies upon someone else who teaches these things to him.

He reads books. And he believes the author as though books can't be made up out of whole cloth now. Oh, indeed they can through large language models, sometimes called AI.

Completely made up stuff. So the atheist doesn't know everything either. So he still relies upon someone else who relies upon someone else or a collection of someone else's.

And it goes on and on. Now, often they're defining trust and faith as an irrational leap into the dark. But rather, it's most rational for children to trust their parents as though we're against a stranger.

They birth them. They take care of them. They preserve them and protect them.

They give all evidence that they have their best interest at heart under ordinary and normal circumstances. It is rational. And it's rational for adults to trust in experts, presuming they are reliable experts, obviously.

And it's the most rational of all for the creation to trust and rely upon the Creator. So saving faith, brothers and sisters, is not a leap in the dark. It's based on the evidence of the Word of God, your own conscience and creation.

There is a God, but of course it's in the Bible we learn about redemption and salvation. You cannot find outside the Bible about Jesus Christ, relying upon Him and believing in Him. And of course here, He describes their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, their reliance upon Him, salvificly, clearly, with respect to their soul.

The implication is that you should keep on relying and believing. It's not as though they believed once and they're done. I don't have to worry about it anymore.

I'm going to heaven. But you live a life of faith, of building up your reliance and trust in our Lord and our God. It's an ongoing work of the soul, empowered by the Spirit and grace, of course.

And it needs nurturing. And it needs growth. And it needs an object as well.

One of the interesting things that's happened in Christian circles at that time, in my experience, has been, we talk about, I have faith. There's a lot of emphasis upon faith. And that has its proper place, of course.

But sometimes it just turns into a bumper sticker way of speaking. I believe. Okay, that's great.

Now what? Lots of spiritualist people, that's a growing number of Americans, are not atheists. They're actually spiritualists of some sort. They believe in God or spirits or something.

They're like, okay, what do you have? Well, they often emphasize their faith or trust. I just believe. And what? Faith has to have an object.

Your trust and reliance has to be upon somebody or something. And it should be upon Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the text here has for us. Using the word Jesus often reminds us that Jesus Christ, the God-man, is man.

He's known as Yeshua here when He was born on earth. In theology, typically, we reserve the title Son of God to emphasize His deity, for example. Jesus as man who has a body and a soul, which is hard to grasp, of course.

He was hungry and thirsty. He was our representative. He's prophet, priest, and king.

This is the idea here when He says, your faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ, that He is a man, that He is your prophet, priest, and king, that He is your deliverer, but not merely and only a man. He combines two words here, right? It's Lord Jesus. The word Lord, I believe, means God here, as it often does, to distinguish the second member of the Trinity from God, the Father.

You'll have a number of cases in the New Testament where the authors quote the Old Testament passages about God, Elohim, or something like that. And though, of course, in Greek, they're giving their translation, Peter or Paul, and they'll translate Kyrios. You've probably heard of that one, right? Lord.

There, clearly, you understand that they're saying the word Lord means God, from the Old Testament text to the New Testament text. So, don't fall for, I say fall, but don't think every time the word Lord is used, it just means something like a master. It does mean master, if you understand it to mean divine, capital M, master.

So, it's not just Jesus the man, not just Lord, the Lord God Jesus, it's the God man that emphasizes Him being our mediator. Now, something has happened in the history 2,000 years ago, a great change with respect to us, of course, and our redemption, and that the trust is therefore not in a man as such, but in the divine person, the Son of God, who is both God and man. He is the only one who can save us.

He's the only one we can have faith in. And the fact that He commends them, right? Therefore, I also, after I heard of your faith and your love, do not cease to give thanks. What? Because of their faith and love.

Faith in Jesus, He gives thanks to God that they have faith and trust in someone else other than God? Of course not. What kind of religion is that, that Paul teaches them that, you know, you don't trust in God, or you trust in God and you trust in a mere man. So, that He commends them for having faith or reliance upon the Lord Jesus indicates that He's also divine and worthy of faith and trust.

This is salvific, right? It's saying, you're going to deliver my soul. That's the whole point of Jesus. That's the whole point of Paul's message, of course.

And so, having faith and reliance upon anyone else other than God, a deity to redeem you, to save you, is idolatry. That's what He's commending here? No. Therefore, the Lord Jesus must be divine Himself, the second member of the Trinity.

Trusting in Jesus to save them from the consequences of sin and death is the implication, of course, of guilty conscience. A faith that not only looks backwards towards our sins, but

forward towards the preservation and protection of God Almighty as He works and sanctifies us by His power, as we'll see in the later verses here. So, faith is not just backward-looking in the sense of what did Jesus do 2,000 years ago, but also present and forward-looking.

What is He doing now in your lives? He's watching over you. He's bringing you to church and the future, of course, when He returns, and all the sorrows of the world will be wiped away. But what is it? What kind of faith is it, if it's just the kind of faith we read in James 2.18? But someone will say, you have faith.

I have works. Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. We all understand this.

Again, even if we weren't believers and we're just living in the world without the church, we understand words can be hollow. Yeah, I believe in Jesus. Okay.

So, what does that mean? You tell people, depart in peace, be warmed and filled, and do nothing for them? Your actions speak louder than your words. And that's why the two are tied here together. After I heard, I rejoiced, your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, a faith that is not just private, just a big emphasis in today's world, keep it out of the spotlight, keep it quiet, in the closet.

Others are coming out of the closet, you need to go back in the closet. That's what's happening. But a faith that's lively, that has the fruit of the Spirit, that has the power of God working through us, so that we do care for one another, that we love the saints, of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We have here a text, not in here, but as I'm reading to you here, Galatians 5, 6, is a good text to remind us that, yes, justification, the forensic public declaration that we are declared righteous in Jesus Christ is by faith and faith alone, and not by a faith that is working as such. That is, I have the obedience because of my belief in Jesus Christ, I have the fruit of the Spirit, all that together comes together and justifies me. No, it's faith and faith alone that justifies.

That's true. But it's a faith that is never alone, and at the same time, you are sanctified and you are striving to be obedient and loving God and His people. Galatians 5, 6, for in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything but faith working through love.

So there, of course, he's not talking about justification, he's talking about sanctification, the life of purity and obedience and holiness that we struggle with every day. And it's interesting that Paul writes there, for in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything. Well, clearly, uncircumcision must be important because he hammers them in the same book about being circumcised.

Why are you running around being circumcised as though you think that justifies you before God? That's terrible. Of course it doesn't. What's he emphasizing here? They have a problem, and their problem is they're not having a lot of love and care for one another,

apparently, but emphasizing how much they can be brought to heaven by their own good works.

Today, we would say something like neither baptism nor non-baptism avails much but faith working through love, if you needed to hear that message. Not unlike 1 Corinthians 1. So it's an emphatic way to undercut pride and to redirect their efforts towards love, not towards who baptized you, like in 1 Corinthians, and who's your pastor, or the circumcision, uncircumcision issue that they had at the time, but rather faith working through love,

Love of the Saints

which brings us to, therefore, the second point, the love of the saints. Again, love, I know in English we just pretty much have the one word love.

We have something similar like affection, or care, somewhat synonymous, but those are more like manifestations of love. It's common to the human condition like faith. Everyone loves somebody, even if it's themselves.

They love somebody. They love their family, they love their friends, they love their nation, they may love their job. Sometimes, as you know, they love better than even believers.

Other times, they love way too much, excessive love, obsession with things of this world, and certainly love anything and everything more than God himself. Love is more than an emotion. We have a romanticized view of love in America.

You've heard before, you know this yourself, promoted by the media, businesses, because they're selling a product, and it's better to bypass the brain and go after the emotions and desires of the flesh to get you to buy their product. Feelings of kindness, of course, are good. I want you to have good feelings in the best sense, in the proper context, etc., right? But it's not enough.

What you run across often in the New Testament is the emphasis here, of course, upon love, loving one another, and love in the sense of commitment, regardless of how you feel. You take care of your family, you help your friends, and you pray for your church. It redirects the sources, the resources of our mind and soul towards some more than others.

There's always going to have to be degrees of love. This is important, again, because clearly, I don't believe Paul is saying your love for the saints means that you treat every Christian the exact same way all the time, everywhere, at all. You just can't.

You are with other Christians more often than other Christians, because you can't be best friends with every Christian. We know this. And so there are degrees of love and care, but our hearts are always there, of course.

We don't instantly think, well, you're not near me, you live in Africa as a Christian, so I think you're worthless. No, of course not. That's not what that means.

We mean a commitment that has hands and feet and actions therein that offers aid to the object of love, parents towards children, friends towards one another. Love must act. It can't stand still, because it wants to help.

But first, before we get into love and practice, let's look at the word saints. I've heard of your love of or for all the saints, or holy ones. The Roman Catholics have taken that word and run with it.

They have this special category called saints. We're all saints in Jesus Christ. That is, holy ones, those set aside, those sanctified, those consecrated before God through our baptism.

We are holy, objectively, in Christ. Of course, we are justified by grace. That's an objective declaration, whether you feel it or not.

We are sanctified by grace as well, both internally in the sense of subjectively, it takes time. We know that we sin, that we've fallen short, we ask repentance. But externally as well, objectively in the sense of that we are baptized, that we are members of the church and set aside before the world, that they know we're supposed to be unique, even if we fail and fall short of that in our actual actions.

Now, love and practice here. I want to go to chapter 26 of the confession, talks about communion of the saints. Saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God, paragraph two, as also in relieving each other and outward things according to their several abilities and necessities, paragraph 26 of the confession.

So the first part here, saints by profession are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God. We are one body, we have one Lord and one baptism, as Ephesians reminds us in chapter four. We have therefore a holy fellowship and communion in worship of God Almighty, Hebrews 10.24. You know this passage, Hebrews 10.24. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together as the manner of some is.

Let me look at the first part here of Hebrews 10.24. And let us consider one another, not anyone else but within the church context, in order or for this purpose to stir up. The KJV has provoke. Stir up is just fine.

I'm using provoke because that's the language we have in our confession when it talks about using the law of God and all the means, causes, occasions and provocations or provokings thereof. And they mean that in a neutral sense of provoke towards goodness and provoke against badness, that is to verbally reprimand somebody, for example. Why? What do you think? Don't you know better? What's your problem? That's a form of provoking as well.

Here it's stir up or provoke love and good works. And clearly that verb there, provoke, is direct and active effort. Used negatively in Acts 15.39, for example, and the contention was so sharp between them that they departed asunder one from another.

So Barnabas took Mark and sailed unto Cyprus and Paul went elsewhere. The contention was so sharp, the provoking, they meant that negatively. But so it's not a passive thing, it's an active thing to incite, to get them, as it were, riled up, perhaps, it's another word, in a good sense.

If someone lazy or distracted, a kid often, provoke them unto good works and love. Get it done, kid. Or perhaps even depress.

Depressed people sometimes need to be provoked or perhaps a swift kick, as we say, and another metaphor at times, depending on the circumstances. And it continues here in Hebrews 10.25, not forsaking the assembly of ourselves. So he's describing part of what the good works and love that we ought to provoke for one another in the church of God, the assembly of ourselves.

And that clearly is tied here in the confession, chapter 26, paragraph 2, the saints are bound to maintain a holy fellowship and communion in worship. Communion in worship, of course, here being public formal worship on the Lord's day, not forsaking the assembly of ourselves, the synagoguing of ourselves together as the manner of some, but exhorting one another. So he says it again with another description besides provoking, exhorting or building up.

And so much more as you see, I think clearly that's an act of love. It should be an act of love. I mean, obviously, I can't read your intent.

Sometimes people would like to provoke because they like to provoke. But we ought to do it because we are a group. Group activities help individual sanctification.

Forsake not the assembly of yourselves. Now, of course, small groups and family camp and the like are used by God as well. Let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob.

Out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. So clearly here, the saints are calling one another and exhorting and encouraging and provoking that let us go to the house of the Lord. Let's learn more about God, not less, and worship and honor him and sing praises before him.

The prophecy in Isaiah 2, 3. Relieving the needs. So chapter 26, the confession continues about the saints and the communion therein as also in relieving each other their outward things according to their several abilities and necessities. So relieving needs among the saints in the church of God.

Acts 2, 44 and following. Acts 2, 44 and following. Now, all who believed were together and had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all as anyone had need.

This reminds us, one, it's not just the job of the diaconate. They could take care of people who are in need. All of us can, to the extent that you're able or even know about something, of course.

Individuals and families do this behind the scenes. The diaconate is public and formal, although often what they do is behind the scenes as well. They're not going to tell you I'm giving this much money to X, Y, Z person typically, although the session knows.

Galatians 6.10. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Especially. Yes, we do good to others.

We do good to our neighbors, even churches, as it were, formerly with funds and the like, help during emergencies, but especially we ought to be having our eyes upon those in the church who need aid and help of the external things, it says. That means the things of this world. 1 John 3.17. Whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? So there you have all this talk about love, but their actions show otherwise.

Going on in the church under the apostle John's watch, the apostle of love, as we describe him. Nothing new under the sun. It's clearly an echo of Christ who told his disciples that the world may know that you love one another.

And this is emphasized, of course, in the New Testament church because of the disparity of the ethnicity and social economic disparity as well. The churches, of course, up to this time were Jews. Who were all the converts at the day of Pentecost? Jews.

All kinds of Jews. And so the Jews, up to that time point, the time of Jesus, so the Old Testament saints and up to the time of Jesus, had a double bond of love and care and consideration for one another. They had a shared ethnicity, a culture, and a shared kinship biologically and a religion.

It's a double bond. You can see how powerful that would be. Here in the New Testament, now you have the Gentiles coming in.

So you don't have that double bond as much, although some churches may be homogenous at the time. There seems to be indication of that in the book of Acts, for example, when they were complaining about not helping the widows, for example. But whatever the case may be, those in the church must strive to love in spite of our background differences, especially we live in a society where all that's even breaking down now.

2 Corinthians 8, well, the proof text they use is 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. I'm not going to read both chapters. I'm going to read verse 8. 8. I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. So when you read from verse 1, you see that they were giving aid, churches at Corinth, to those in need.

And the question remained to Paul's mind, will they keep giving aid and help to one another? And so therefore, from this language, we can see good works towards others is a kind of test. I am testing their sincerity. Do you continue to love and care for the saints in their need? And that's what we ought to teach our kids as well and ourselves.

It is a test of sorts. What will we do and show forth love and care for the church of God? Acts 11.29 and following, we have, then the disciples, each according to his ability,

determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This text is important because it reminds us, yes, people help and we ought to help, but you can help only as far as you are able, each according to his ability.

And therefore, you should not feel terrible or bad if you can't help much or if you even can't help at all sometimes. God only requests what you are able. And that's a gracious thing indeed.

I know it can be very frustrating. What can I do? Especially in this day and age, where we have so much interconnection of what's going on in the world, we see the disasters in Africa or in the Ukrainian war, whatever else, and these Christians are in need, and you just feel torn. You're like, I can't give money to everybody.

Exactly, you can't. According to your ability. That's not your ability.

It's beyond your ability. In fact, means, causes, occasions, provocations, thereof, you may want to get off the internet. That's too much for you.

Stop learning about so much stuff because it can drive you batty sometimes because you can't help and you're just far away. So sometimes ignorance is bliss. What you can mostly help with is here and now people that you see often in the flesh.

So, even if you give less, it's commendable before God because your heart and desire is there. It's not just money or paying rent. There's other needs in the body of Christ.

It just says the language is outward things. It's very broad there in the confession. Skill training, resume writing and the like, education, especially for the younger ones.

Whatever is needful. It's not just money all the time. The church should be there as they are able.

Other particular ways to love the saints. Love through friendship, of course, not always about needy material concerns. I guess you could say in today's language, psychological concerns, but just friendship.

Just friendship and love for one another. Listening ear is sometimes sufficient. That's all that is needed.

And of course, prayer, particular prayers about particularities of life. It's not just love through friendship, love through helping hands. And in the sense of a variation of before, not just other needs, as I mentioned, money, but the way you can help is not just money, not just listening, but just simply with your hands.

People move and the person who's moving doesn't have to be dirt poor to have to get help. It could be a rich person. You still want help.

You got to load up the truck. You got to get there and clean the house and everything else. It's a time of fellowship as well.

So don't just think in terms of poverty. I got to help the poor people. All of us could have help one another and have helping hands, even if it's just moving from one place to another.

And love through instruction, through teaching, through admonition. Let us consider one another in order to stir up or provoke love and good works. Hebrews 10 exhorts us.

And so this is especially helpful, I think, for children and teenagers who don't always see and understand the ways in which you could be helpful in the church. Because, of course, they're busy at school. They're busy at home.

They're at home more than anything else. And they're not always observant, shall we say. And the adults are supposed to be there to be observant for them and help them become observant as they get older, of course.

And so teaching them and instructing them ways in which they can show love and care. And it begins at the home, of course. What are they doing at the house? Are they helping the children? Are they helping the younger ones below them? You, too, older teenagers, have a responsibility to the younger kids below you to help them, to provoke them, even, unto good works and love of the saints.

And you have saints in the household itself already. And new converts, of course, may need help in this regard as well, which means patience for the adult sometimes. You're like, well, this is how a Christian acts.

And they're like, I don't know. I grew up in a pagan home. I didn't even go to church my whole life.

My parents never went to church their whole life. What do I know exactly? So we need patience. And that's part of love of the saints.

All kinds of ways to express love and care and consideration for the body of Christ, which begins in our family, of course, and our local church. All of us, brothers and sisters, are called to continue to trust and to rely upon Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, of course, day by day, as well as love the saints. May the Spirit of grace grant us more faith and more love and care among us, we pray.

Amen. Let's bow our hearts and heads before our God above. Father, bring more of your Spirit upon us and sustain us to continue on in good works therein, which is an expression of love towards one another.

And more importantly, in many ways, to continue to grow in our faith and trust in you, Jesus Christ, to learn more of your ways so that we can be rooted in your gospel all the more. Give us more grace to this end. We ask this by the blood of the everlasting covenant.

Amen.