

Rev Bob Sinclair: Ephesians 1:15

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 00] I'll like it for a turn once again to Paul's letter to the Ephesians chapter 1 and reading it verse 15.

Ephesians 1 verse 15. For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and a revelation in the knowledge of heaven.

Now, Paul here is writing to the Ephesians, but in a very real way it's a circular letter, it goes not only to this church, but to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These letters would have done their own in the same ways sometimes preachers go to different congregations and the Methodists, but in a very real way it's a circular letter.

In different congregations in the Methodist church, they have a circuit where they go from one church to another, preaching the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. So these letters were really like messengers from God going to the different places and different churches to express Paul's love for them.

[1 : 58] And they would have been encouraged as they heard what Paul had to say to other churches and in a real way to themselves. So what Paul here is doing, first of all, is praying for their faith.

Pray yes that they might have a spirit of wisdom and revelation, but pray also for their faith, that their faith may grow, that they might become well-rounded Christians, that they might grow up in the grace and in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The primary need of the Christian church today is to realize what it means to be Christians. We've perhaps forgotten what being a Christian means.

The early church did not. So what does it mean to become a Christian? We need to know because that's how early Christians, the New Testament Christians, impacted the world of their age, the society of their time.

And we're so unlike the New Testament descriptions of what Christians should be. Well, a Christian is, first of all, a saint.

[3 : 28] We need to know that the New Testament word, Christian, haeos, means the holy ones, those who are set aside.

A Christians are those who are holy. They are saints. So a saint is someone who is holy. Holy not in some sense whereby it's a familial, in some sense whereby we can't define it, but holy in a very real way, in a concrete way.

A Christian is someone who is set apart by God. In the same way, the nation of Israel was set apart by God to be his own holy people, his own peculiar people.

So we are also set apart by God to be God's chosen people, to be a chosen generation, a peculiar people, a people whom God loves, a people whom God has declared himself to.

We are in the world, but we should not be off the world. But that, I mean, we are in the world. We have to make our living in the world. We have to do our shopping in the world.

[4 : 51] We have to engage in all the needs to keep body and soul together. But we are not off the world. We don't engage in the world's pursuits, in their interests, in their pastimes, in their desires.

And so we are in the world, but we are not off the world, we are not with them in the way they like to live.

Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, he's been quoted many times in many sermons. I just want to say one point about him. He wrote a book called The City of God.

And in that book, he defines two different classes of people. It is this great city in where there is a mixed human population.

But from that mixed population, God separates himself out of peculiar people. And that is the city of God that Augustine talks about, and how God directs them and leads them and guides them to glorify him during their own life and in their own testimony and witness there.

[5 : 58] And so we are set apart outwardly by God and cleansed inwardly. For it's what we're set apart outwardly by God.

He cleanses us from the guilt of sin. He frees us from the pollution of sin.

Again, two different aspects. The guilt of sin that we experience when we've done something wrong and we know in ourselves that we're wrong and our hearts convict us that we're wrong.

And also from the pollution that sin brings to when we sin, it pollutes us in our relationships with God and with one another. And so this setting apart that God engages in, it cleanses us from the guilt of sin and frees us from the pollution of sin.

But we're cleansed outwardly. There's a man, a hymn writer, and he wrote, there's a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins.

[7 : 09] And sinners plunged beneath this flood, lose all their guilty stains. And so in this hymn that Calpa wrote, he's talking there about the cleansing that takes place externally, that makes us separated unto God.

But we're also cleansed inwardly. And that's the work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us new desires. He fills us with new hopes.

He gives us a new degree of holiness in our lives. He works all of this in us. And so every Christian is a saint.

A saint who's been redeemed, a saint who's been forgiven, a saint who's been justified. But again, the word saint, it means holy.

Holy in a real sense. The word Christian, of course, comes from the Acts of the Apostles, where in Paul's dealings with the people in Tarsus, they were called the Christ ones.

[8 : 27] And it wasn't a term of approbation, of greatness. It was a term of ridicule. They were the Christ ones. They were not to be considered to be part of the local society at all.

And so here we have this outward cleansing and this inward cleansing. We are a spiritual recreation.

And so a Christian is a saint. But we're also told that the Christian is someone who is faithful, full of faith and loyal, full of believing of who God is and able to defend the faith that we are given.

Full of faith, not like Thomas, who would not believe unless he was able to put his fist into the Lord's side or finger into the prince of his hand.

The Lord says, you believe because you've seen. But blessed are those who will believe and not see. And he says to Thomas, be not faithless, but believing.

[9 : 43] Be not faithless, but faithful. And the word faithful and believing are the same there in that particular passage.

So what makes us Christians? We've defined what a Christian is. He's cleansed outwardly. He's cleansed inwardly. He's not worldly.

He's a spiritual recreation. But what makes us Christians?

Initially by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We cannot be Christians unless the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us. That's what makes us Christians. We can be upright and moral and good and upright in a society in which we live.

But we're not Christians unless the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us. And we believe in Christian truth. See, a Christian is not really a good man or a nice man.

[10 : 49] A Christian is not really a member of a Christian church or a moral man. But he is a new creation in Christ Jesus.

A new creation who believes certain things about Christ. Things that the world will not believe. But as Christians that's what we are led to believe.

The incarnation. That God became man. He took to himself a true body and a reasonable soul. And so continues to be God and man in two distinct natures and one person forever.

We believe that. That God became man. We believe also that he was the Word of God made flesh. But again in the Gospel of John in the beginning was the Word and the Word of God in the Word was God. All things were made by him and without him was not anything made that was made.

[11 : 52] And goes on to say in that same chapter. And the Word was made flesh. He was incarnated. He became man. And he dwelt among us full of grace and truth.

We believe in the virgin birth of Christ. That he was born off the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. And born of her yet without sin.

We believe in the miracles of Christ. We don't try and explain them away. But we believe that they actually happened. That he cured the blind and the deaf and healed the lame.

Erased the dead. He fed five thousand at one time and four another thousand. All by his power. Showing who he was and fulfilling his claims and the deeds that he did.

We believe in his vicarious death and sufferings for you and for me. That he did not for himself or anything that he had done but for what we had done.

[12 : 56] And so this is our hope that Christ died for our sins. That he has become our substitute. We believe in the resurrection of Christ.

Out of pigment of some imagination, not some sort of spiritual experience, the disciples went through but he actually physically rose from the dead. We believe in the reality of the Holy Spirit being sent down to earth on the day of Pentecost there in Jerusalem.

A dateable, placeable time where it happened. On that particular day the Holy Spirit came into Jerusalem. And the people there witnessed it.

People were there speaking in many different languages. From the people who had gathered from all over the Roman Empire they heard them speak in their own languages.

The wonderful works of God. Believe in what happened there at Pentecost was the beginning of the church.

[13 : 56] And so we believe all things concerning Christ and all things that the scripture tells us concerning Christ. We're also steadfast, loyal, keeping the faith, defending the faith, contending for the faith.

We are as those who are known and read of men as to who we are and whom we seek to serve. If we are in Christians, we are in Christ Jesus.

If we are Christians, He is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption.

In every aspect of Christ being, He is given to us whereby we are made acceptable to our Father who is in heaven.

Now Paul having taught the early readers of this epistle in verses 3 down to verse 14, the doctrine of what he's trying to impart to them.

[15 : 13] He then goes on from verse 15 to make application of that doctrine in their lives. He's given them the doctrine of who Christ is, of what he's done, of what he's accomplished.

And now he says this is the outworking that should be accomplished in your own lives. Now Paul begins to apply what he said, saying, wherefore giving thanks unto God, Paul rejoices over their faith, over their way of life, knowing that they are men and women of prayer.

They are those who have been brought to a new life and new desires in Christ. How does Paul know? How does Paul know that he's speaking to those who have been born against the Spirit? By their life, by their doctrine, by their practice. What they say and what they do are the same thing. They're not different. They don't perhaps in one situation say one thing and another situation live out that practice in a totally different way.

[16 : 32] And so Paul often says examine yourselves. Examine yourselves, examine your faith, examine how you're living out that faith.

And so do we have faith in Christ? Do we love Christ? Do we pray for the church? In our own family order, in our own quiet times when we are alone with God?

Do we profess our love for Christ? Do we profess our thankfulness to God for what he's done for us in Christ Jesus? Do we pray for the church?

Do we pray for one another? Are we part of that great body of prayer that should ascend to God?

And so you've got to ask yourself, do we believe in God and not just in God?

See there are many faiths so called in the world today that believe in God. The Jews believe in God. Islam believes in God.

[17 : 47] The cults believe in God. But not the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is peculiar to Christianity as such.

It is only those who are Christians who worship Christ. That's what makes you a Christian. You worship Christ. You don't worship God in some nebulous way, some hazy idea. You worship the Lord Jesus Christ as your Lord. And your God. Many people in the world are good people, moral people, upright people, live out lives that are Christian in their outward being. But they're not Christians because they do not believe in Christ. And if you, I'm sure, in your place of work know good people who are upright or moral, who are hardworking and yet they would not have anything to do with your faith and belief and your practice of worshiping Christ and believing in Christ.

And so that they're not Christians. And really there is no hope for them in the afterlife. That's part of our testimony and our witness here in this world that we live out our faith.

[19 : 12] So the world in which we live might know who we are and whom we are seeking to serve. See our belief is that the Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God.

He is the second person of the Trinity who came down to this earth. He is, but he's also a babe, a man in a low condition.

He is the God man who came to this earth for us and for our salvation. See the natural man has no time for any of this sort of doctrine, for any of this sort of reasoning.

Only the new man in Christ Jesus. If it thrills you, if it thrills you to know that Christ has come to the earth and has become man, for your sin in mind, well then God is working a work in you.

He is bringing you to know the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. And so, his belief is not just in God and love is to all the saints.

[20 : 21] Not just to those who perhaps are kind and good and have a good personality and temperament, but to all the saints.

The love one another out of a pure heart forever. Here again the natural man has no time for Christians.

He thinks Christians are boring, but they're narrow-minded. The things that they do are not exciting in the sense that natural man finds things exciting.

The places they go to, things that they believe in, are ridiculous. As Christians we would rather spend our time in the company of the humblest Christian than the most exalted person in the land who is not a Christian.

That's what makes us Christians. We believe certain things, our desire is to be with other Christians, our hope is in Christ, whereas the natural man has no time or no thought for any of these ideas that are so much part of what we've come to be.

[21 : 42] As I said earlier on, a Christian will love all the saints, not just the present and the clever and the learned and the lovely, but every other thing.

We don't ask where a person is from. Yes, we do ask on this island who you belong to, what family you are. That's because we want to know what connection there might be perhaps with a family, we want to know perhaps what part of the island they've become to.

We don't want to know what school they went to or what college they went to. We want to ask, are you a child of grace?

Are you a brother or a sister in the Lord Jesus Christ? Are you saved? Are we related and going to the same place?

That's what our desire is and as such our love is to all the saints. How we rejoice over those who you believe us who are brought into the Christian faith, those who make professional faith and perhaps some will do next Lord's day.

[22 : 45] We rejoice over a sinner saved, even as they're rejoicing over sinners in heaven over one sinner who repents.

And so also then, poor praise for them. Seizing not to give thanks for them, making mention of them in his prayers.

These prayers are not simply words that we've somehow learnt. I think prayers perhaps we learnt as children, or prayers perhaps that we repeat as the Lord's prayer.

Some people do engage in corporate prayer in that way where they all repeat the Lord's prayer together. So that's not in its essence, prayer.

Prayer is wrestling with God, pouring out our soul before God in prayer, acknowledging our sins, acknowledging our need of Him, acknowledging without Him we are nothing, acknowledging that He is all in all, that without Him we can do nothing.

[24 : 04] And so that's what prayer is, and we have to know in ourselves what prayer is.

The wonder the disciples ask the Lord, teach us to pray. And He taught them that model prayer that is there.

That's not for us simply to follow it word for word, but to use the precepts that are there as guidance. To glorify God in heaven, to confess our sins before Him, to acknowledge that He is Lord and God of all.

These are models of the way we should seek to enter into His presence, to seek to know the mind of God and to praise Him for all that He has done for us and in us, and all that He continues to do in us continually.

This week there's going to be a national day of prayer in the hall of the free church. I read some of the intimations you have put in place for this congregation.

[25 : 12] That is a presbyterian day of prayer in storeway. In every congregation, so the free church, there is this national day of prayer. That prayer is going to be made for the nation, it's going to be made for the uncertainties of what is occurring in the world today, for the leaders of nations, perhaps for the heightened tension that is in many places, and perhaps with Russia, perhaps what's going on today in the division that is in the years of A. Perhaps in our own nation, the division between those who want to leave Europe and those who don't want to leave Europe, what's going on there in the Middle East.

All these many tensions are all matters of prayer, which the national day of prayer will take up. But what is prayer? Prayer is an offering up to God for things agreeable to His will in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For things agreeable to His will very often, and we're all guilty of it, sometimes prayer becomes a shopping list, what we want.

I'm not saying that we should not have a shopping list for those who are unwell, and those who need special prayer, times of need, grief, hurt, illness, and to do it often.

[26 : 50] But I'm saying the sort of shopping list is to give me. The little child would say, give me, I want it, I want it. So often our prayer can descend into that.

And it's not, prayer is an offering up of a desire to God for things conformable to His will, for things that He agrees with, for things which will glorify Him.

For the conversion of saints, for the growth of His church, that there might be a joint together of all the different denominations throughout the world so that we worship one God in the same way, without idolatry, and without fraud and without pretence.

But there might be a two coming together to worship and to call upon the name of God. And throughout the Bible, there are many examples of corporate prayer, and that's what's going to be happening here, and throughout the future, which people will meet together.

They will gather together and pray in such a way. One will lead and others will say, there are men. And that's what prayer always says. The minister leads in prayer, and those who are in the congregation listen to what he say and add their are men.

[28 : 14] Add their own silent agreement and praise God for what they're being led to believe and understand. As I said, the Bible has many examples.

You think of what happened in Egypt, the cry of the people went up to the Lord, and He heard them in their distress, and He freed them from their bondage in the land of Egypt and took them out into the land of Cane.

There was Mount Sinai, when the people there were gathered together, and they exceedingly feared and quake when they saw God, and they prayed to Him to be merciful, and they prayed to Him that He would guide them and lead them in the way they should go.

We think also what happened in Nineveh. Remember Nineveh and Jonah? Jonah appears, and he comes telling them in the space of three days, this whole city is going to be destroyed, and the king and all the people put on that cloth and asked us to send them to repent, and they prayed, and God changed his mind, and he did not destroy Nineveh at that time.

We think of Daniel's prayer, which Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, when Nebuchadnezzar wanted, declared to him, what prayer he had dreamed, and no one could tell him.

[29 : 34] So Daniel's telling Nebuchadnezzar that the secrets of prayer was with God, he goes and takes his other friends Shadrach Meshach and Abednego, and they pray, corporately, they pray together.

And that's what a prayer meeting is, people pray together, they went apart to pray. The Lord often goes apart, brought along anisotys dipers to pray together and to offer up prayer and petitions and praise to his Father who was in heaven.

There is the time of Pentecost, when they were all gathered together in one place, pray, and the Spirit comes, and there's the sound of a mighty Russian wind, they were there and the Spirit comes, their anticipation, their praising God and the Spirit comes in power.

There's when Peter's in prison, remember the incident with Rhoda, she goes to the gate, well Peter's been in prison, and the people there are holding a prayer meeting, that Peter would be freed from prison, and he is, he's led by an angel out through locked gates and prison doors and bars, and he goes to the house where they're praying, and there's great joy and great gladness at what prayer has achieved.

Think again of Cornelius and Peter, Cornelius is a jumper, and he and his friends have been praying and they send for Peter who's in Joppa, they're led by the Spirit through that item of prayer, to send for Peter to Joppa, and he comes in answer to their request, and again there's great joy as God answers prayer in the Sermon on the Mount, not the Sermon on the Mount, in the Sermon at Pentecost, at the end of chapter 2, we're told that the disciples continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship and the breaking of bread and in prayer, they would meet together continually on the Temple Mount, and there they would be under Sermon's porch, and there they would pray, and they would intercede, and there they would call upon the name of God, they were being persecuted, they were being scattered, and yet in the midst of that persecution, what they do, they print, they call upon God, they sort his health, they sort his guidance.

[32 : 10] Today we're living in an age of uncertainty, and uncertainty brings people to prayer.

When everything is going our own way, when the Lord is giving us our heart's desire, He givesliness to our souls.

We have no need for God, we have no time for God, even those who are Christians or professing Christians, even those are bachelors and lazy, it's only times of uncertainty, in times of grief and sickness and sorrow and sadness that we suddenly find the urge to pray.

What we are seeing today is God's response to a church's lack of prayer, lack of prayerfulness, a godlessness, moving away from Him, and they should be moving closer and closer.

You know as we look around the world today, we say, what's God going to do in response to what the world is getting up to? As we hear all the scandals with young boys, and hear all the scandals of churches with young boys, and we say, what's God going to do about these things?

[33 : 45] These are already God's judgment upon a world that has moved away from Him. A God who is far away, but a God who is ever present, a God who deals with His people in mercy, hedging up their ways, admonishing them, and justifying them, not to drive them away to bring them back to Himself.

And so wherever we see discipline, wherever we see things that are happening, it's to bring us back. Whenever we see trials and troubles in the world, it's to bring us back.

As we see the difficulties in the age of uncertainty the world is in today, it's to bring us back to God. And God can turn things around. Think of Nine of Eight, he's a pentecost of what he was going to do, and it didn't happen.

That can still happen today. That can still work in the hour of prayer. During the last war, it's repeated that there were national days of prayer called, when things were very dark, when there was times after Dunkirk, when there was times in the Battle of Britain, they were called for national days of prayer.

And the whole nation set aside time, from the very top, from the King, from his family to the whole nation.

[35 : 16] Calling you and God seeking is intervention. And God did intervene. God made a man who was on the very threshold of invading Britain to on the way and go and try and invade Moscow at the same time.

See how God's providence and God's guidance and God's mercy can be brought to pass in the experience of people, in the experience of nations.

We now have that opportunity. We now have at that time, we are called upon to set time aside to pray, it may be that on Wednesday or Thursday or whenever you gather, there might be a time when you'll be part of that great body of prayer that ascends up to God for mercy and grace and help in time of need.

Well Paul here prays to God, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what he says, I pray that God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation.

The Father of glory. In James chapter 2, verse 1, the Lord Jesus Christ there is called the glory. [36 : 48] He is the glory. The glory of God, yes, but he's also called the glory, it's one of his titles. And here Paul prays to the Father, at the Son of the Holy Spirit but to the Father, calls him the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ or the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory.

It doesn't play to the Lord Jesus Christ, he is the mediator of the New Covenant. It doesn't play to the Holy Spirit.

He is also the one who mediates our prayers. He's the one who indwells us, he's the one who's been sent by the Father and the Son.

What he prays to God the Father, the Father of glory. In the Old Testament they prayed to the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

They had seen God's power. They had seen what he'd done in Egypt with the plagues that he brought upon that land of Egypt and Pharaoh and all his armies.

[38 : 07] They'd seen what God had done to the Egyptians and the Red Sea and destroyed that whole nation. They'd seen God's power on Mount Sinai when they exceedingly feared and quake.

They were praying to a God that they knew. They knew he existed, that he experienced his power, that he'd been led by his mercies.

They knew this God and although often they departed from the right way and they worshiped idols, yet they knew. He was the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of the living.

So Paul also prays to a God he knows, the God, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. He prays that the eyes of our understanding might be enlightened.

Sometimes in our spirituality we are blinded by the world in which we live, by the interests we have, by the relationships sometimes that we've formed, our spirituality is blinded.

[39 : 27] It's what Roy Jones one times called spiritual myopia or a cataract covers the eye. You were clear sighted but suddenly you become short sighted or your eyes are dark until you cannot see.

So Paul here is saying pray that the eyes of your understanding, the eyes of your heart might be enlightened.

So we need help, the help of the Holy Spirit to see things clearly again. We can be drawn aside so easily by the world in which we live.

So much to distract us, I said to the children earlier on, there's so much noise entering into our heads and ears. Same thing applies to us. So many things to distract us, to lead us astray.

Yes we're Christians, yes we believe, yes we want to glorify Christ but the devil with his great temptation, the early temptation, what they have seen that is good to look at, is good to taste, is desirable to make one wise that still applies to each and every one of us today.

[40 : 49] Same temptation, temptation to draw us away from God as you do other believe away from God. But here there are three things that Paul prays for, I'm going to have to leave it here, that we might know the hope of his calling, that we might know the riches of his inheritance, we might know the exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe, perhaps some future time perhaps might come back and might develop those three thoughts.

But that's what Paul is praying for. We might know the hope of the calling that is in Christ Jesus, we might know the riches of his inheritance and the greatness toward all those who believe.

I mean the Lord bring us to know that in our own experience, may he bless us, not only today but throughout the coming days in Christ. He is always there■■■■