

Ephesians 1:15-16a

Introduction

We've come to the end of the longest sentence in Ephesians, and also in the entire Bible. But in Ephesians, there are actually eight extraordinarily long sentences, and the second long sentence begins as soon as the first one is finished. From 3-14 in the Greek was a single sentence of 202 words. And now verses 15-23 in the Greek are a single sentence of 169 words. Notice how in this sentence Paul transitions from giving thanks, to making requests, to praise and worship almost without us even feeling that it's happened.

- ✓ Ephesians 1:15–23 — For this reason I for my part, having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I never cease giving thanks for you, ***remembering you in my prayers, that*** the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might ***that he worked in Christ when*** he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come, and he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Paul's thanksgiving *leads him on* into petition, and then Paul's petition *leads him on* into doxology. This is *one seamless* sentence, and yet it has three distinct parts – thanksgiving, petition, and doxology. So our goal is to meditate on this passage in light of its seamlessness, but also in light of its parts – just like we did in verses 3-14. If we didn't focus on each part, I think we'd definitely be tempted to skim over Paul's giving of thanks. We might read the opening verse and a half as introductory “filler” – until we get to the really deep and important stuff.

“For this reason I for my part, having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I never cease giving thanks for you, ***remembering you in my prayers, that...***”

This could be all the more tempting because the thanksgiving section is only 25 words – compared to 75 words for the petition and 69 words for the doxology. But for Paul, no matter how short this first section might be, it's by no means just introductory “filler.” Not at all! We'll see that his giving of thanks is an absolutely *essential* part of what he wants to say and what he wants his readers to hear.

I. “For this reason”

He may be starting a new sentence, but for Paul, it has everything to do with the last 202 words. We *can't* miss this connection. “For this reason...” points us *backwards* to everything we've just seen about all the blessings God has lavished upon us in Christ. So we could paraphrase: “*In light of the manifold riches of God's grace poured out upon us... For this reason...*”

II. “I for my part”

Paul could have just said, “I” (ego). “For this reason I, having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints...” But instead, he uses a word that combines “I” (ego) with another word that intensifies and adds emphasis (kai). Put “ego” and “kai” together, and what do you get? Kago! And that’s the word Paul used. “For this reason *I also*.” “For this reason *I myself*.” “For this reason **I for my part**.”

This also helps us to see how this second sentence relates back to the first one. Since the *opening* words of Ephesians when Paul first identified himself as the writer of this letter, he hasn’t made any further reference to himself. We saw last week that he’s spoken almost always of “we” and of “us” (of he and his readers together), and then just briefly at the end he spoke of “you” (of just his readers). But now Paul is about to speak of *himself personally*. It’s as though Paul says this: “In light of the manifold riches of God’s grace poured out upon us (3-12, 14), and in particular upon you (13-14), I have something to say now *for myself*.”* “For this reason I for my part...”

III. “—having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints—”

So once again, Paul keeps us hanging. Remember how the first six sections of Paul’s last sentence all *started out* with the new pearl – the new blessing that Paul wanted to celebrate? But when Paul came to the last section and the last pearl, he did some extra setting of the stage, which had the effect of heightening the sense of anticipation.

in whom also you, having heard the word of truth
– the gospel of your salvation –

in whom also, having believed,

YOU WERE SEALED WITH THE SPIRIT OF PROMISE, THE HOLY ONE

And so I wonder if here, too, Paul keeps us hanging because he wants to give extra *emphasis* to whatever it is that *he* is *doing*. He wants to make sure that the Ephesians’ *hear* exactly what it is that he has to say for himself. “In light of the manifold riches of God’s grace poured out upon us, and in particular upon you (13-14), I have something now to say *for myself*: Having heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints...” That’s quite a lot of introduction and explanation. And now it’s as though Paul is adding a second reason for whatever it is that he is doing. Paul has just said, “In light of the manifold riches of **God’s** grace poured out upon you, I have something to say for myself.” And now he also says, “In light of **your** faith in the Lord Jesus and **your** love toward all the saints, I have something to say for myself.” Not only does Paul do what he does in light of God’s grace poured out upon the Ephesians – he also does what he does in light in light of the Ephesians’ faith and love. So somehow these two things *must go together*.

What does the Ephesians’ faith and love have to do with the many spiritual blessings that God has poured out upon them? What does *their* faith in Jesus and love for the saints have to do with **God’s** grace lavished upon them? Well, it’s simple! Our faith in the Lord Jesus and our love for

* Lincoln points out that “a number of Pauline thanksgivings have the actual expression of thanksgiving in the singular form... but this is the only reference with the emphatic first person pronoun *kago*.”

all the saints are the *signs and the evidences* of God's *grace*—of His salvation blessings—in our lives. One commentator puts it this way, “*the readers’ faith and love are tokens of the grace of God which they have received*” (Bruce). And so whatever it is that Paul, for his own part, is doing – he does it because he has heard of the *evidence* of *God’s grace* poured out in the lives of his readers.

Paul mentions first of all the Ephesians’ *faith* in the Lord Jesus. In other words, he’s heard of the “*Godward*” focus of their lives. This isn’t about something that happened a long time ago when they first believed. It’s about a continuing way of life. He’s heard that they are not trusting in themselves, but trusting in Jesus and in His sacrifice on the cross. He’s heard that they are daily turning away from idols and from sin to serve and obey the *Lord Jesus*. He’s heard of their *trust* and *obedience*; of their *faith in the Lord Jesus*; of the *Godward* focus of their lives. And when Paul hears this, what he sees is evidence, or a token, of God’s *grace* – of every spiritual blessing – poured out in the lives of his readers. Are we known for our faith in the Lord Jesus? Is this token of God’s grace abundantly evident in our midst?

Paul has heard not only of the Ephesians’ *faith* in the Lord Jesus, but also of their *love* toward all the saints. He’s heard not only of their “*Godward*” focus, but also of their “*others*” focus. He’s heard that they genuinely love all the saints. Notice that instead of mentioning their love *for the saints*, Paul is careful to say that he’s heard of their love *for all the saints*. The point is that if they love *all* the saints, this obviously can’t be a love based on the saints being worthy or deserving (cf. Hoehner and especially Braune). Otherwise, how could you possibly love *all* the saints, as flawed as we are? If the Ephesians love *all* the saints, then they must love the saints just because they are saints – just because they are fellow Christians and brothers and sisters in Christ. If they love all the saints, then they love not because of what the saints have or haven’t done, but very simply because of who they are because of God’s grace (cf. Fergusson and Hodge). *We* are called to love *all* the saints, not because they are worthy or deserving (many times they won’t be), but rather because *God* has set them apart as His own. That’s the true mark of a Christian. A Christian genuinely loves *all* Christians just because they *are* Christians – and that’s it. When Paul hears of the Ephesians’ love for *all* the saints, what Paul sees is evidence, or a token, of God’s *grace* – of every spiritual blessing – poured out in the lives of his readers. Are we known for our love toward all the saints? Is this token of God’s grace abundantly evident in our midst?

Now when we hear of “faith” and “love,” don’t we immediately think of “faith, hope, and love” (1 Cor. 13:13; 1 Thess. 1:2-3; 5:8; Col. 1:3-5; Gal. 5:5-6; Eph. 4:2-5; Rom. 5:1-5)? Paul doesn’t mention “hope” right here in this verse, but he did mention it only three verses earlier in verse 12 (“we who have already *hoped* in Christ”), and he’ll mention it again only three verses later in verse 18 (“that you may know what is the *hope* to which He has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints”). As a part of this famous “*triad*” of Christian virtues, we can see that *faith* and *love* are two of the most basic evidences, or tokens, of God’s grace in our lives. Apart from faith in the Lord Jesus (trusting and obeying) and apart from a genuine and unconditional love for *all* who are saints, what other evidence is there that we are the recipients of every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ? What other evidence is there that God’s grace has been lavished upon us? There is none!

And so now we might paraphrase Paul like this: “In light of the manifold riches of God’s grace poured out upon *us* (3-14), and in particular upon *you* (13-14)... *for this reason*, and having heard of the evidence and tokens of this grace in your lives—of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints...”

IV. “I for my part... never cease giving thanks for you”

What an amazing and wonderful thing to say! Paul *celebrates* the evidence of God’s grace in the lives of others. And that’s not all. He encourages others with his celebrations of God’s grace in their lives. Paul not only gives thanks unceasingly for the Ephesians, but he *tells the Ephesians* that he gives thanks for them unceasingly. “*I want you to know*,” he says, “that I never cease giving thanks *for you* – because of the evidence that I see in your lives of God’s wonderful, marvelous, saving grace.[†] This kind of celebration of God’s grace in the lives of others was something that Paul was very much in the *habit* of doing (cf. 2 John 4; 3 John 3–4).

- ✓ Colossians 1:3–4 — *We always thank God*, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your **faith** in Christ Jesus and of the **love** that you have for all the saints, because of the **hope** laid up for you in heaven.
- ✓ Philemon 4–5 — *I thank my God always when I remember you* in my prayers, because I hear of your **love** and of the **faith** that you have toward the Lord Jesus and for all the saints.
- ✓ Romans 1:8 — First, *I thank my God* through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your **faith** is proclaimed in all the world.
- ✓ 2 Timothy 1:3–5 — *I thank God... as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day...* I am reminded of your sincere **faith**, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.
- ✓ 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3 — *We give thanks to God always for all of you*, constantly mentioning you in our prayers, remembering before our God and Father your work of **faith** and labor of **love** and steadfastness of **hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.
- ✓ 2 Thessalonians 1:3 — *We ought always to give thanks to God for you*, brothers, as is right, because your **faith** is growing abundantly, and the **love** of every one of you for one another is increasing.
- ✓ Philippians 1:3–5 — *I thank my God in all my remembrance of you*, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your **partnership in the gospel** from the first day until now.
- ✓ 1 Corinthians 1:4–7 — *I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus*, that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge... so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

We bring glory to God when we celebrate His grace in the lives of others. But as one commentator very simply and very rightly points out, “Such an attitude of thankfulness for others is all too often neglected” (Hoehner). Sometimes we fail to recognize in others the signs of God’s grace because we’re too focused on what they’re still lacking. So often, it’s easier to

[†] “Paul expresses gratitude for the divine work [vv. 3-14] in the lives of his readers” (O’Brien).

focus on the failings and shortcomings, rather than on the wonderful things that *God* has done – and is doing in others. But I think of Paul, who certainly knew better than anyone else all of the warts and shortcomings of the Churches, and yet even in the midst of the worst situations, he was still able to give thanks. He was still able to *find* and then celebrate those evidences and tokens of God’s grace – sometimes even when the evidences of grace were in some way connected with their failures (cf. the Church in Corinth; 1 Cor. 1:4-7 and 1 Cor. 12-14). I wonder if *we* are so faithful in our commitment to see God glorified and exalted? Are we glorifying God by never ceasing to give thanks for the displays of His grace that are literally all around us – if only we’ll not be blinded by judgmentalism, or bitterness, or just plain old selfishness and self-centeredness?

We can not only bring glory to God by giving Him thanks, but then we can also build up and encourage others by *telling them* of our celebrations of God’s grace in their lives. Sometimes I wonder if we hesitate to do this because we’re afraid of encouraging others when there’s still so much need for change and for growth in their lives. But once again, we need only look at the example of Paul. One commentator points out that even right here in Ephesians “Paul [**encourages**] his readers for *displaying* precisely the quality that he will **urge** them later in the letter to *cultivate*” (Thielman). We can also think again of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians when he encouraged them because of God’s grace that showed itself in their lives in all speech and all knowledge – even though the gifts of speech and of knowledge were the very things that had been so abused by many in the Church. Now Paul is not inventing things to celebrate, and he’s certainly not flattering. He’s just using a gift that many of us today have simply chosen not to cultivate and practice. Paul was able to find *and then publicly celebrate* the evidences of God’s grace in *all* true Christians – no matter how much of a work in progress they may still have been. Do we hesitate to encourage others in this way for fear of puffing them up, and promoting pride? Well, then we hesitate wrongly, because with this kind of encouragement *there can be no puffing up!* This is not a celebration of the *works* and *achievements* of others, but rather of the evidence in others of *God’s saving grace*.

So when it comes to how we view one another and how we view the church, do we see the glass half full, or do we see the glass half empty, *or* are we able to recognize and embrace *both* realities – honestly recognizing the constant need for change and growth without ever losing sight of the evidences of God’s grace which are there to be found *and* celebrated in the life of every true Christian, and in the life of every true Church.

Three hundred fifty years ago Fergusson wrote these words: “It is the **duty** of Christians to be joyfully reporting and speaking of the grace of God... which is in others.” So if you have a believing spouse, you can start with your husband or your wife. If you have believing children, this is truly a wonderful and important thing to be practicing with them. What about brothers and sisters? But even apart from believing family members, we should especially give thanks to God, *and never cease* giving thanks to God, *for each other* – for *all*, without exception.

One of the most wonderful ways to celebrate the lavish riches of God’s saving grace (which we’ve just seen in verses 3-14) is to celebrate the evidence of that saving grace in the lives of the people around us (15-16a). So this morning, I want you to know that I truly give thanks for *all* of you. I’ve seen first hand the evidence of your genuine faith in the Lord Jesus, and your genuine

love for *all* the saints. And now my prayer is that I may *always* and *constantly* be giving thanks for all of you – without ceasing – so that I'll never deprive God of any of His glory, and so that I might always have more and more joy. Truly we are, *all of us*, ***displays*** of His ***grace***.