

—{1}. **Ephesians 1:15-16a** **What Counts in a Church**

A. Introduction

1. What counts in a church? What is it that really matters in the local body of Jesus Christ, in His church? For what things does God, through Paul, commend a church. Our text today, in part, provides an answer to these questions:
 - a. ¹⁵ For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which *exists* among you and your love for all the saints, ^{16a} do not cease giving thanks for you, ... — Ephesians 1:15-16a
 - b. Paul gives two reasons for his thanks to God for them
 - (A) their faith
 - (B) their love
 - c. now that's about as simple a sermon outline as possible!
2. here are two qualities that count in a church body
 - a. Paul says so to the church at Rome (1:8), "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world."
 - b. ... the church in Thessalonica, "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows *ever greater*" — 2 Thessalonians 1:3
 - c. Peter in the first chapter of his first letter to churches says that their faith and love are the proof of their salvation
 - d. John in his first letter, exhorting believers to mutual love one for another, also wrote that faith is the victory that overcomes the world (5:4)
 - e. faith and love are of utmost importance in the church; and so they are also in an individual: "⁴ I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, ⁵ because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints;" — Philemon 1:4-5

B. Faith the Foundation

1. the Object of faith

- a. before proceeding any further on the subject of faith
- b. let us make very clear that we are not speaking generically
 - (A) not of faith as one of a number of creeds or dogmas
 - (B) not of faith as a mere quality of our personality
- c. but of faith which has a specific and unique object
 - (A) that object is the Lord Jesus
 - (B) not simply Jesus; Jesus of Nazareth that taught in the land of Palestine some two millennia ago
 - (C) but Jesus who is Lord — Lord, a term never used in the OT in this fashion without qualification but that it is speaking of the sovereign God
- d. the Object of faith is God incarnate in the man Jesus

2. the nature of faith

a. just what is faith?

- (A) first, note that in the Bible, the action, 'believe' is what a 'believer', one who has 'faith', does – in Greek these words have the same root – like 'enter' and 'entrance'
- (B) Hebrews 11:1 gives us a definition, but it is two-fold
- (C) the AV translates this in objective terms, what faith is as a concrete reality, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (AV)
 - (1) faith provides a foundation on which we can base our hope for the promised prospect of heaven that lies before us, of eternal life spent with God
 - (2) faith is the evidence that the unseen spiritual realities are just that, real
 - (3) the rest of Hebrews 11 describes the marks of faith
 - (a) in the people listed, faith is intertwined with its necessary counterpart
 - × obedience
 - × obedience to God's commands
 - (b) these were people
 - × who believed great things of God
 - × who attempted great things for God

- (D) but the definition can also be translated in subjective terms, what faith is in the one possessing it, as the NAS does, “**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**” (NAS)
- (1) saying faith is subjective does not make it any less real but rather relates it to our experience
 - (2) in fact, this could be translated as “**faith is the title deed of things hoped for**” ^{–{2}}. or, “**faith is the sum or amount on deposit of things hoped for**” ^{–{3}}.
 - (3) which reflects a verse 14 that we looked at a few weeks ago: {the Holy Spirit} “**who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.**” (Ephesians 1:14 NAS)
- (E) thinking about this, can we not say that faith in the child of God is that which gives him spiritual eyesight so that he can see clearly his promised prospect and thus gives evidence to his spiritual relationship as being a child of God? ...and that this faith thereby influences every aspect of his or her life day by day?

b. whence does faith arise?

- (A) this is a subject upon which we could long debate
- (B) as the Bible speaks of receiving the Holy Spirit, so it also does of faith: “**Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received {AV, obtained} a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ:**” (2 Peter 1:1) – faith as something given by God
- (C) yet Lord and the apostles preached saying, ‘**believe,**’ expressing a command ‘**to have faith,**’ which tells us that we have a responsibility to exercise faith
- (D) perhaps, the source of faith is best stated in the cry of the father of the sick child in Mark 9:24, “**I do believe; help my unbelief.**” – an outcry of dependence on God

C. Love the Result

1. the source of love

a. the direct outcome of faith should be love

- (A) not simple love as an emotional response
- (B) but love as giving response to what we have received

(C) a practical love which is the message of James

- b. "if your faith has not resulted in your becoming a more loving person... it is not genuine faith. It is merely an intellectual acceptance, which means nothing. ... James stresses ... that faith is revealed by the concern that it awakens for the hungry, the homeless, the needy, and the heartbroken, and our willingness to reach out to heal the hurts ... He said, in effect, 'Show me your love, and I'll see your faith; but don't talk to me about faith unless love is present,' {cf, Jas 2:18}. And Paul agrees. He has heard of their love, and so he is aware that their faith is genuine. ^{-{4}}."
- c. and, like faith from which it is an outcome, love has as its source God Himself: for we read in Romans 5:5 that "... the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."
- d. it is an accompanying grace of regenerating faith

2. the scope of love

- a. now, this love has in this application, a very specific scope
- b. this love is expressed 'for all the saints'
- c. that doesn't mean our love should not be expressed toward the unsaved, beyond the boundary enclosing God's people – if we are to reflect the love of God who loved the world then of necessity it must do so
- d. but, in this verse the scope is particularly within the body
- e. for if such a Holy Spirit applied love is not part of the binding glue of a local church, one that mutually exists between all the believers constituting that church, one that overlooks differences in opinion, interests, personality
- f. then Satan the enemy will have established a beach-head for his invasion into our midst

3. while faith and love are qualities individually expressed

- a. here they not simply found in them as individuals
- b. but also that these are earmarks of their union as a local body of believers; collectively they express faith and love
- c. so, for their receiving such faith and love, then, says Paul, 'I have not; I am not; I will not stop giving thanks to God'

D. Conclusion

1. what is it that will make this church, make Faith Fellowship
 - a. stand out in this community as a lighthouse of the gospel?
 - b. a source of gospel sightings to the town of Aurora?
 - c. as an evidence in the power of God unto salvation?
 - d. as a demonstration that God dwells in our midst?

2. is it not in practical evidence that faith and love reside here?
 - a. not simply that we have those who attend who manifest these qualities: individuals with faith, persons showing love
 - b. but that these are to be found in us as a corporate body
 - c. that the undertakings in which we as the body of Christ engage are carried out in trust and dependence upon God, in faith following the leading of the Holy Spirit, that we act corporately so as to be able to say with the apostles, "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us ..." (Acts 15:28)
 - d. that the service in which we engage are performed with a mutual love one for each other and in union toward God
 - e. ¹³ Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. ¹⁴ Let all that you do be done in love. (1 Corinthians 16:13-14 NAS)
 - f. if we so do, then the beauty of Jesus will be seen in us

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Various other English versions of the Holy Bible may be used in this sermon. Some (for example, the AV, ASV, and NAS) seek to be strictly translations, while others (and especially PHIL) contain paraphrasing which involves a certain amount of subjective interpretation. Nevertheless, there is little material difference in meaning among these. Some prove slightly clearer on some verses than others. Looking at more than one version sometimes sheds additional light on any particular verse. Explanatory additions to the Bible text are shown in {braces}. The versions are identified as:

ASV	American Standard Version of 1901
AV	Authorized (King James) Version
ERV	The Revised Version of 1885
NAS	New American Standard version © 1960, 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIV	New International Version © 1984 by the International Bible Society
NKJV	New King James Version © 1979 Thomas Nelson Inc., Publishers
NLT	1996 New Living Translation © 1996 by Tyndale Charitable Trust
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
PHIL	New Testament Translation © 1972 by J. B. Phillips
RSV	Revised Standard Version © 1946, 1952 by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U. S. A.
WEY	The New Testament in Modern Speech © 1902, 1912 R. F. Weymouth

Further sermons and illustrations may be found at the web-site, www.holwick.com. Materials in this sermon from Rev. David Holwick’s database are identified by “Kerux” followed by a sermon or illustration number.

2. The Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament, Moulton & Milligan – 1930
3. Liddell & Scott, Greek-English Lexicon, supplement –1996
4. From “Turned on by Prayer” by Rev. Ray Stedman – Kerux sermon #5206