

Ephesians 1:15-23

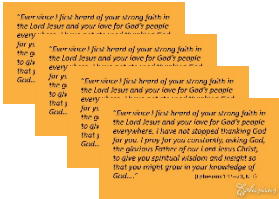
“Relentless, Doctrine-Driven Devotion”

August 28, 2022 • Tonganoxie Christian Church

Prologue

This morning we will continue our worship by honoring the Word of God. While it was written long ago, our God has actively preserved it and guided its transmission so that we can sit here, thousands of years and thousands of miles from its origin...hearing it in our own language, and allowing the Spirit to reveal Truth to us.

(If you're able) Let's stand as we listen to today's passage:



“Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God’s people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly, asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God’s power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God’s right hand in the heavenly realms. Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.” (Ephesians 1:15–23, NLT)

[PRAYER]

Father, thank you for your Word! We are grateful as we hear it today, and expectant as we listen. We wait for you this morning. Open the eyes of our heart so that we may see you in this passage. Grant us spiritual wisdom and insight, and fill us with hope, through your mighty power.

Amen? Amen!



Opening

I'm glad that you are with us as we continue our study of the book of Ephesians. Last week Ross introduced us to the book and began exploring its content with the opening part of chapter 1. He challenged us to be in prayer regarding the "spiritual blessings" found in the opening 14 verses. This week, each day, you were asked to focus on one of the following:

God chose us, He adopted us, He redeemed us, He forgave us, He revealed His plan to us, He gave each of us a role, and He sealed us.

➔ **Did anyone incorporate those into your prayer life?**

Great. That was the one chance you had...don't ever pray about them again. (Just kidding!!! Work them in often)

Today we are moving into the second section of Paul's letter, found in Ephesians 1:13-25. If you've been in any of my classes before, you'll know that we're in familiar territory with Paul's letters.



Ancient letters follow a common format that is somewhat hidden by our modern Bible translations. We're accustomed to seeing chapters and verses...but the originals were different. Many of the "books" in our New Testament were actually "letters," written BY someone TO someone.

This particular letter, Ephesians, is a letter **BY** or **FROM** the apostle Paul (probably the most influential figure of the early church) **TO** a church in the city of Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern-day Selçuk [SEL chook] in Turkey).

Paul has a history with Ephesus, planting the church and ministering there for a couple of years during one of his missionary journeys. Now, during a stint in which Paul has been imprisoned for preaching the gospel message, he writes this letter to the church and the Christians in the surrounding areas.

So, he begins with an opening which we covered last week in Ephesians 1:1-2 (NLT). Instead of "Dear Ephesians, Hi! How are you?" we have:

*"This letter is **from** Paul, chosen by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus..."*
(the FROM section)

*"I am writing **to** God's holy people in Ephesus, who are faithful followers of Christ Jesus..."*
(the TO section)

*"May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you **grace and peace.**"*
(Paul's standard opening)

Paul's usual approach in his letter-writing is to next add a section of Thanksgiving and Prayer, followed by the body (with some doctrinal teaching and practical application), then a wrap-up with some personal notes and greetings.

Last week we began the THANKSGIVING/PRAISE portion, and today we'll be more in the PRAYER section:

*"Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere, I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you **constantly**,"* (Ephesians 1:15–16, NLT)

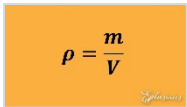
...Paul says, as he begins this new section.

Before I get to the central focus of my sermon, I just want to point out a feature of this book that is simultaneously awesome and annoying: its DENSITY.



Dense Theology

$$\rho = \frac{m}{V}$$



The density of an object is equal to its mass divided by its volume. In other words, something is more dense when you cram a lot of stuff into a small space.

[Demonstration – Use Aluminum Foil]

You can do this with aluminum foil. It's kinda fun when you're hanging out after dinner. You can crumple a section of aluminum foil into a rough ball shape. But then you start compressing it. The aluminum gets smaller and smaller and smaller...and harder and harder and harder. As that same mass gets pushed into a smaller and smaller volume, the **density** increases.

Fun Fact: An aluminum foil ball almost ruined my marriage before it started. My first date with Deb was almost derailed by the creation of dense aluminum. (Ask me later if you care)

You can do the same thing with your Bible. Physically, yes you could squeeze your Bible into a smaller volume and make it denser...but Paul has already done some of the heavy squeezing with his **information**. The book of Ephesians is **DOCTRINALLY dense**.

Look at the passage from last week and from this week, and you'll notice that Paul has crammed a lot of stuff into a small space. In the course of two sentences (run-on though they may be), Paul throws out key concepts that are essential for the following topics of doctrine:



- **Theology:** the study of God
- **Christology:** the study of Christ
- **Soteriology:** the study of salvation
- **Pneumatology:** the study of the Holy Spirit
- **Ecclesiology:** the study of the Church
- **Missiology:** the study of the mission of the Church
- **Eschatology:** the study of last things (or, what will happen in the end)
- **Bibliology:** the study of the Bible
- **Hamartiology:** the study of sin
- ...and more!

As I said, this density is both awesome and annoying.



Why it's awesome...

Why is it awesome? Ephesians gives us the opportunity to learn more about these topics. Take the last two verses of our passage as an example:

“God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.”
(Ephesians 1:22–23, NLT)

This is a great statement of **ecclesiology** (study of the church). The church “IS” the body of Christ. This passage gives us some awesome insight into the nature of this relationship.

- **Authority** (“made him head”). Jesus is our ultimate authority. Our church has elders who oversee the church and serve as the top decision-makers, but their service is subordinate to Jesus, our ‘Commander in Chief.’
- **Roles** (“the church is his body”). The relationship between the “head” and the “body” is a central concept. When we talk about the church being the ‘hands of feet’ of the body of Christ, we are referring to this concept.
- **Purpose** (“for the benefit of the church”). The church runs best when it follows Jesus’ leadership. All that He does furthers his good plans and goals for the church.
- **Source** (“made full and complete by Christ”). The church isn’t acting independently of Jesus; it exists because of Him and succeeds through Him. We are not our own!

When you have a passage like this that is theologically dense, each statement is an opportunity to unpack and uncover important truth! This is awesome! It’s like unwrapping the foil ball and with each bit you reveal something great.

That’s why it’s awesome. But perhaps you see why this can also be annoying!



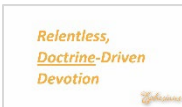
Why it's annoying...

For someone who is looking for deep truth, a theologically dense passage is like shopping with your teenage daughter at the mall. “Oh! Can we stop there? Can we look at that? How about that one?”

The passage becomes difficult to read without going on rabbit trails, without dissecting it. We end up missing the forest for the trees – being so focused on the *smaller details* that we don't see the **bigger points** Paul is making. It's like being so focused on the structure and composition of the foil ball that we forget to ask why the person was making the foil ball in the first place!

I hope that you'll spend some time with this passage during the week, and maybe use the sermon discussion questions to explore some of the dense doctrinal statements Paul makes. But for the rest of this sermon, I want to focus on what this passage shows us about Paul's relationship with the Ephesian church.

It is relationship with some great application.



Relentless Doctrine-Driven Devotion

Paul's relationship is one of *relentless, doctrine-driven devotion* to this congregation. It's the connection that forms this relationship.

Connections



Each relationship we have in life is grounded in something we have in common.

- **Common DNA.** I have some relationships because I'm related. I'm connected to my mom and my sister and my children through shared genetics. That connection is the foundation of the rest of our interactions.
- **Common location.** I have some relationships because we were in the same place enough times. This is my connection to Lynn at Casey's; this is Deb's connection to Ping at the Bubble Box tea shop.
- **Common experience.** Some relationships go a little deeper than just a location; they are built on what happened at a location. It's not that you shared a foxhole; it's that you faced a fierce battle together in that foxhole. Whether it was war or Junior High, you went through something challenging, and it built a connection.
- **Common person.** Some relationships are connected to a person. I don't share a DNA connection to Roger Bickel. But he's the dad of someone I love. My wife loves her father, and because of that love, I love her father (my father-in-law). I don't know the people sitting in an arena, but we all love the same players on our team...so we share a connection when we high-five in the stands or see them wearing team gear on the street.
- **Common passion.** Some relationships develop because we love the same things. Maybe it's fishing, or food... or fishing *for* food. Maybe it's board games or motorcycles or sports or music or dad jokes. When you share a passion for something, you want to spend time with others who enjoy the same things.

Connection to the Ephesians



Paul had several of these layers of connections with the Ephesian church. He had lived in that location, he had some intense experiences with them...

But the foundation of his relationship is deeper than any of these connections we mentioned. Paul's relationship is one of *relentless, doctrine-driven devotion* to this congregation.

Listen again to the way he conveys it.

"Ever since I first heard of your strong faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for God's people everywhere..."
(Ephesians 1:15, NLT)

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- The basis of this relationship is rooted in their mutual connection to Jesus and His people. It's not based on race or culture or politics. It is a devotion because they share the spiritual blessings we discussed last week: *God chose us, He adopted us, He redeemed us, He forgave us, He revealed His plan to us, He gave each of us a role, and He sealed us.*

"... I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly"
(Ephesians 1:16, NLT)

"...I have not stopped thanking God for you. I pray for you constantly," (Ephesians 1:16, NLT)

- This is what I mean by "relentless." Paul will not relent, he will not stop. He brings his thanks, praises and requests to God on behalf of the Ephesians...**constantly**. Some among you are more regular and structured in your prayer lives, others are more spontaneous. But Paul isn't modeling a method – he's modeling a *frequency*. This is more than occasional; it is ongoing and relentless.
- And then Paul shares some of the content of his unceasing prayer:

"...asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight"

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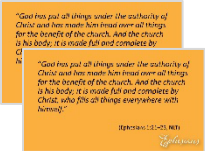
(Ephesians 1:17-20, NLT)

"asking God, the glorious Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to give you spiritual wisdom and insight so that you might grow in your knowledge of God. I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the confident hope he has given to those he called—his holy people who are his rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated him in the place of honor at God's right hand in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 1:17–20, NLT)

- Paul asks for "spiritual wisdom" (or "the Spirit of wisdom") and "insight" (or "revelation") so they might know God more.
 - o **Note** that he *doesn't* pray for a *church building*, a church member with *cancer*, a *job* situation, or the corrupt *government*. That's not to say such prayers are wrong (they aren't) or unimportant (they are). It's just to say that Paul's most pressing concerns aren't issue-based...they are **doctrinally-driven**. His concerns are connected to spiritual realities. His biggest concern is their knowledge of God. THAT is what he never stops praying about.
- Paul elaborates that he wants God to *open the eyes of their heart* so they can see God better, **to know**:
 - o The **hope** that they have and the rich inheritance they will share
 - Our hope is a future resurrection, an eternal life in the heavenly realms, united with Jesus, swimming in grace and mercy and love!
 - o The **great power** they have working on their behalf

- Not that they are powerful themselves, but that God’s power is working in them too
- Calls to mind a song by Jeremy Camp: *“The same power that rose Jesus from the grave, The same power that commands the dead to wake, Lives in us”*

- He then goes on to focus his attention on the Ephesians’ Savior, Jesus, the One who made those blessings possible.



“Now he is far above any ruler or authority or power or leader or anything else—not only in this world but also in the world to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made him head over all things for the benefit of the church. And the church is his body; it is made full and complete by Christ, who fills all things everywhere with himself.”
(Ephesians 1:21–23, NLT)

- This is their identity!!! They are a church under the headship of a powerful and mighty Jesus, whose victory gives them hope and confidence and an unmatched inheritance!

This is who Paul relentlessly prays to, and who Paul wants the Ephesians to know. His relationship to the Ephesians church is rooted in this truth that he wants them to know and unpack and love.

It is a relentless, doctrine-driven devotion!



Sharing that Mentality

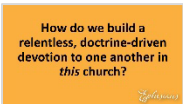
My question to you this morning is: *How do we share that drive?*

How do we become the type of people who write this kind of stuff?

I want you to consider the connections and relationships you have within this church. Sure, there are the normal kinds of connections:

- **Common DNA.** A lot of you are related... *(after 15 years I’m still trying to figure those connections out!)*
- **Common location.** You know each other from here...
- **Common experience.** We celebrated 150 years of experiences as a church earlier...
- **Common person.** Almost everyone loves _____ *(pick a person...or Ross)...*
- **Common passion.** You love the FatBoy brand ice cream sandwiches at our Nite Life meal and the maps I draw in my classes

All of these things form a connection...but like Paul we want our relationship to be built on something more important. We NEED our relationship to be built on something more important.



How do we build a relentless, doctrine-driven devotion to one another in *this* church?
And what should it look like?

This has been a topic of conversation around here lately with our leadership. I've had conversations 1-on-1 with people, and we've talked about it at meetings. I really feel like God is at work, calling us and moving us to *re-define our relationships* in this church to align more with Paul's mentality than with the normal type of connections we often seek.

We can still share common bonds, but my relationship to you, and your relationship to me, and our relationship to one another needs to be more deeply rooted in Jesus Christ!!!

Do we invest in others this way?

Think for a minute...

- What is the content of your regular conversations with other believers?
Is it focused on the Chiefs or is it focused on Christ? Is it surface-level or spiritual-level? Is it trivial, or does it draw them into a reminder of eternal hope?
- Who is the last person to say something about Jesus to you?
- Who is the last recipient of you saying something about Jesus to them?

I'm not saying there's no room for small talk or for conversations about others things. I just want to encourage you to develop a **relentless, doctrine-driven devotion** to the other members of this church. In other words, I want your identity in Jesus to color how you view them. I want your beliefs to guide how you approach them. I want your Bible to be our common language. I want you to see them in light of the work of Jesus. I want you to view them as men and women who are being changed by the same mighty power that raised Jesus from the dead. I want you to work beside them as the hands and feet of Christ.

Do we need to be professionals or doctrinal students in order to speak theology to one another?

NO! You don't have to be eloquent. You don't have to be deep. You just have to practice taking the truth you know and putting it into words.

Apply the truth of the gospel to one another. For example:

- Ask someone about their hope (What excites you about eternity?)
- Frame current events in light of Jesus authority (I wonder how Putin would be different if he knew Jesus was really in control?)
- Declare your trust in Jesus (I'm nervous about the economy, but I'm trying to remember that one of God's titles is *Jireh* – "provider.")

What wisdom has been revealed to you? What knowledge do you have? What riches do you treasure? **SPEAK OF SUCH THINGS!!!!** Weave them into your conversations.

Can't say it **eloquently**? Who cares? Most of the people you're with don't want weird, fancy words anyway. They just need to hear you talk about your Jesus.

Can't **remember** it all? If you don't feel equipped to talk, then by all means be curious and study more. Go to a class or meet up with some friends just to study. Read in your spare

time. But you can talk about the parts you DO know or the parts you're trying to learn about... right now!

Can't **think of anyone** to say it to? Get more connected in the church! Seriously, don't just leave today. Introduce yourself to someone you don't know. Ask about their story. And in the community do the same things. Get to know your (gasp) neighbors! Or classmates. And take a chance to be bold about your faith.

Whatever you say, just work on making Jesus the center of this relationship!



Conclusion

When I read this part of Ephesians, yes...it is a theologically dense passage of Scripture. It is great to unpack and explore. And yes...it is a run-on sentence that fulfills Paul's habitual "prayer and thanksgiving" section of his letters.

But it's not just boilerplate material. It's not just God-talk. It reflects what matters most to Paul. It is an example that we can see and try to emulate. It is a goal for us as a church: Like Paul, we should want to share a **relentless, doctrine-driven devotion** to one another. We should want our love for Jesus to be so captivating and consuming that it forms the most meaningful level of relationship with one another in the church.

I pray that it is the mindset our ministers have.

I pray that it is the mindset our elders and deacons have.

I pray that it is the mindset our teachers and volunteers have.

And I pray that it is the mindset that you grow and cultivate here in our church.

Father, thank you for your Word! We were grateful to hear it today, and we ask for your great power to help us put it into practice. Open the eyes of our heart so that we may know you better. Grant us spiritual wisdom and insight, and fill us with hope, through your mighty power. Allow us to be relentless in our prayers for each other, and let your truth drive us to greater devotion to one another as we share the confident hope of a glorious inheritance through Jesus. It is in His name we pray, Amen.

Invitation

So at this time, let's shift the conversation to Him! Let's talk of our victory in Jesus during our song of invitation. During the song, if you have a prayer request (doctrine-driven or otherwise), we invite you to come and share it.

And if you'd like to begin talking about following Jesus as your Lord and Savior (or if you're done talking and want to do something about it!), we invite you to come to the front and share with us as well.

PRAYERS

- Ross and Dan. Mission Trip -

Ephesians 1:15-23

DENSE Theology

Why it's _____... (Ephesians 1:22–23, NLT)

Why it's annoying...

Relentless, DOCTRINE-Driven Devotion

Connections

Connection to the Ephesians

SHARING that Mentality

Sermon Discussion Questions – 8/28/22

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- How well did you do in last week's prayer challenge? What helped you succeed...or held you back?

(Review: Take one blessing per day and thank God for sharing it with you—God chose us, He adopted us, He redeemed us, He forgave us, He revealed His plan to us, He gave each of us a role, and He sealed us.)

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- Read Ephesians 1:15-23. What is the overall focus of Paul's thanksgiving and prayer? Which part of it stood out most to you? Why?
- In what ways does God share his wisdom with us? Do you think that He is clear when He does this? Explain.
- Based on this passage, how much access do you think non-Christians have to the wisdom of God? See 1 Cor 2.
- Describe the "hope to which he has called you" in verse 18. What does Paul mean? How often do you consider this hope? How much do you share it with others?
- List some of the Biblical examples of God's great power. Knowing that the same power indwells Christians, is that knowledge humbling, empowering, or both? Why?
- Who are some of the "rulers and authorities and powers and dominions" (v. 21) that Jesus is above today?
- In what ways do you see the fullness of Christ in the church (v. 23)?
- If we better understood Jesus as the "head" of the church, what might change? Explain your answer(s).

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Personalize Ephesians 1:15-23 as your own prayer to God on behalf of Tonganoxie Christian Church!