

15–16 For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Yeshua which exists among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers;

Verse 15 begins a new section in the opening of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians. Like the opening doxology (vv. 3–14) which comprises one long sentence, this section, which describes the general themes in the Apostle's prayers (vv. 15–23), is also one sentence composed of 170 words in the Greek. While such long sentences are not uncommon in Paul's epistles, they can pose some difficulties when being translated into English.

For this reason I too (Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ γὰρ) – To what does the Apostle refer when he writes “For this reason”? Three options are suggested by commentators, both ancient and modern: that by the phrase “For this reason”

1. *Paul is referring to the entire opening doxology, vv. 3–14 and the blessings that he has enumerated there, namely:*
 - a. God's sovereign election in Messiah, so that all who are chosen would be holy and blameless before Him.
 - b. God's sovereign predestination securing the adoption of the elect as His children through Yeshua Messiah.
 - c. full and eternal redemption of the elect through the payment made by Yeshua's death for them.
 - d. full and eternal forgiveness of sins as the gift of God's abundant grace.
 - e. God's kind revelation of His love and grace to all those whom He would save, showing them how all things would be summed up in Yeshua the Messiah.
 - f. God's elect possess an eternal inheritance securing eternal life with God to the praise of His glory.
 - g. the elect are given the abiding presence of the Ruach Ha-Kodesh as God's seal of ownership upon them, securing their final and eternal redemption.
2. *Paul is referring specifically to the blessings granted to the elect in vv. 13–14 because:*
 - a. he changes from the more general “we” used in vv. 3–12 to the more specific “you” in v. 13, and thus his attention is directed specifically to believers in Ephesus.
 - b. he therefore narrows his scope specifically to the work of the Spirit as the seal and earnest of the Ephesian believers

specifically, and it is this reality that prompts his prayers for them.

- c. Thus, since his point in vv. 15ff is that he remembers the Ephesian believers in his prayers, this must define the scope of his opening words of this section, i.e., “For this reason....”
3. *Paul is referring to the blessings he is about to mention in the upcoming verses as he prays for the Ephesian believers.*
 - a. That God would give to the Ephesian believers a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.
 - b. That God would open their hearts to comprehend the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.
 - c. That they would know the surpassing greatness of God’s power toward those who believe.

While all three of these options are possible, it seems best to combine the first two as that to which Paul refers in his opening words of this new section. He is referring to the many blessings that come to the elect through God’s sovereign and abundant grace, but he is also specifically applying these blessings as being experienced by the believers in the Ephesus community to which he is writing. It is when Paul rehearses the greatness of God’s grace and the benefits God’s grace has afforded the Ephesian believers, that he is filled with thanksgiving in his prayers for them, for they are themselves trophies of God’s grace and examples of God’s ability to transform lives. Those Gentile believers in Ephesus would previously have most likely been members of the pagan cults that marked this third largest city in the Roman empire. Though Artemis was the primary deity worshiped, there were as many as fifty other gods and goddesses worshiped by various cults in the region.

Therefore, when Paul gives thanks in his prayers on behalf of the Ephesian believers, he is extolling the sovereign power of God to overcome the lies of the devil and bring to faith those He has chosen, even when they were personally and culturally enslaved to the worship of demons. Paul joins with the Ephesian believers who give thanks to God for the gift of their salvation by emphasizing “I too” (καγῶ, *kagō*) give thanks to God for the manifestation of His grace in the salvation of his Ephesian brothers and sisters in Messiah.

...having heard of the faith in the Lord Yeshua which exists among you – It is possible that Paul had not been in Ephesus for five or six years.¹ The aorist participle ἀκούσας (*akousas*), “having heard,” is therefore most likely temporal, referencing the time span between when Paul received various reports about the Ephesian assembly and his actual writing of the epistle. Prisoners in ancient Rome depended upon friends to bring them the necessary things for life, including food, clothing, etc. So it is certain that Paul had visitors, and they would have carried news to him of what was happening in the various believing communities to which he had ministered.

In this opening section of the epistle, Paul applauds “the faith in the Lord Yeshua which exists among you.” We learn later on in the epistle (4:17ff) that not all of the reports Paul received were those that affirmed the faith and faithfulness of all within the Ephesian assembly. But Paul wisely begins the epistle with encouraging and uplifting words to those who remain stalwart in the faith, reserving his warnings for later on in the letter.

The Greek offers an interesting word order when describing the faith of those to whom Paul writes. The Greek has τὴν καθ’ ὑμᾶς πίστιν ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, which, if translated woodenly would be: “the according to your (pl) faith in the Lord Yeshua.” The prepositional phrase καθ’ ὑμᾶς, “according to your” modifies the word “faith” and describes it as being manifested corporately. Surely Paul teaches that saving faith is an individual reality, each person having placed their faith in Yeshua and trusted Him for their salvation. Yet such genuine faith in Yeshua is clearly demonstrated corporately as members of the body of Messiah display love to one another through exhortation (Rom 12:8; 1Tim 4:3), edification (Rom 15:2; 1Cor 14:12, 26; Eph 4:29), bearing one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2), and generally building one another up in the faith (Jude 1:20–21). Thus true saving faith is marked by loving God as well as loving one’s neighbor (Matt 22: 36–37). Someone who professes to have believed in Yeshua for salvation but whose life does not demonstrate the fruit of righteousness has no true assurance that they have actually been redeemed from the penalty of sin.

This is further emphasized by Paul in that he writes of “faith in the Lord Yeshua.” This is the only time that Paul uses “faith in” followed

1 See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, pp. 89ff; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (IVP, 1970), pp. 515f; Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 93. Hendricksen, *Ephesians*, p. 95, notes that it had been four years since Paul was in Ephesus.

by “Lord Yeshua.” The preposition “in” (ἐν, *en*) identifies the sphere or location in which one’s faith is placed.¹ Yeshua is both Lord and Savior. Accepting Him as one’s Savior means loving submission to His lordship. These two aspects of saving faith cannot be separated.

...and your love for all the saints² – Paul refers to believers in Yeshua as “saints” 39 times in his epistles, 9 of which are in Ephesians. The Greek word is ἁγίοις (*hagios*), meaning those who have been set apart unto God and seen to be so by the fact that they are known as living righteously. Here, in our verse, Paul uses “saints” to add emphasis to the truth that faith in the Lord Yeshua is a faith that transforms one’s life to become more and more like Yeshua.

...do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers – This phrase needs to be connected to “For this reason” of v. 15. It is because Paul has heard the good reports about the vibrant and evident faith of the Ephesians that he never ceases to give thanks to God for them. Given the preceding context (vv. 3–14), it would seem clear that Paul gives thanks to God both for drawing them to Himself and thus unto saving faith in Yeshua, but also that they have been sealed and given the pledge of the Ruach (vv. 13–14) as proven by their evident lives of faith expressed in love for fellow believers.

Here it seems beyond doubt that Paul is referring to the fact, well displayed in the Ephesian assembly, that Jewish believers in Yeshua had readily and openly accepted their fellow Gentile believers as equal members of the community and “fellow heirs” in the family of God. The breaking down of the cultural and religious barriers between the Jewish and Gentile believers was a clear sign of the work of the Spirit in regeneration, giving the believers in Yeshua a new heart and thus giving them both the desire and ability to love each other in obedience to the Lord.

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- 1 Some, seeking to make a distinction between the prepositions εἰς (*eis*, “into”) and ἐν (*en*, “in”) when used with the word “faith” or the verb “to believe,” consider “faith into” (e.g., τῆς εἰς Χριστὸν πίστεως to describe “believing in Yeshua” while “faith in” describes faith lived out in the sphere of Yeshua, i.e., by His power. Thus some would translate the phrase in our verse as: “Therefore, after hearing of the faithfulness [shown] among you to the Lord Jesus...” (Brown, *Ephesians*, p. 145.)
 - 2 On the textual issue in this phrase, in which some early witnesses lack τὴν ἀγάπην, “the love,” see Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p. 249, n. 5, who shows the weight of evidence favors the view that “the love” is original and dropped out rather than being added in. Metzger agrees with this assessment (*Textual Commentary*, p. 533).

Paul’s consistency in prayer for the Ephesians is emphasized by all of the present tense verbs in the phrase, but also the very words themselves. This clearly indicates that prayer was an ongoing, regular aspect of the Apostle’s life. We see a close parallel of our text in Paul’s epistle to the Colossians:

We give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Messiah Yeshua and the love which you have for all the saints; (Col 1:3–4)

That Paul writes that he “makes mention” of them in his prayers (*ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν μνησάντων ποιούμενος ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μου*) would indicate that he not only offered thanksgiving to the Lord for His work of grace in their lives, but also that he regularly entreated the Lord on their behalf, doubtlessly requesting that the Almighty would strengthen them in their faith and keep them from the snares of the evil one. God is pleased to bring about His eternal purposes through the prayers of His people as they are led by the Spirit in their prayers.

In regard to regular prayer, Paul sets a prime example for all who are believers. But he does so especially for those who have the responsibility of leadership within the body of Messiah. If we survey Paul’s epistles, we discover that this matter of praying for the communities to which he has ministered is a common aspect of his serving the Lord. To the Romans he writes that he thanks God for them and for their faith which is “proclaimed throughout the whole world” (Rom 1:8). He opens 1Cor with similar words, thanking God for the believers in Corinth for “the grace of God which was given you in Messiah Yeshua (1Cor 1:4). He writes in his Epistle to the Philippians,

I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all.... (Phil 1:3–4)

Likewise to the believers in Thessalonica:

We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers.... (1Thess 1:2)

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; (2Thess 1:3)

Paul not only prayed for communities to which he had traveled and ministered, but he also prayed for individuals—those with whom he had a discipling relationship. In his letter to Philemon we read:

I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, and I pray that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Messiah's sake. (Philemon 1:4, 6)

And to Timothy he wrote:

I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. (1Tim 1:3–4)

Paul therefore practiced what he preached, for in his first epistle to the Thessalonians, he exhorted them with these words:

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Messiah Yeshua concerning you. (1Thess 5:16-18)

May we, like Paul, make prayer a constant aspect of our walk of faith in Messiah Yeshua.

17 that the God of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him.

Here Paul gives us the core request of his prayer for the Ephesians believers, and we may take this as something which the Apostle considered absolutely foundational for the life of a believer in Yeshua. But before describing his request, he reminds us that when we pray, we have come into the very presence of God through our heavenly High Priest, Yeshua, and that it is necessary for us always to remember to Whom we are making our request and thus to be reminded that He is all powerful and all knowing, and therefore able to bring to pass all that He has determined to accomplish.

First, He is the “God of our Lord Yeshua Messiah,” the same designation he uses in v. 3 except that there he adds the name “Father.”

The God to whom we address our prayers is the one and only God, for in the mystery of the incarnation, He is the God to Whom Yeshua addressed His prayers. If our risen and victorious Savior Yeshua addressed His prayers to the Father, then surely we must likewise pray to Him and only to Him.

Secondly Paul refers to the Father as “the Father of glory” (ὁ πατὴρ τῆς δόξης), where the genitive “of glory” is doubtlessly a genitive of description, meaning “glorious Father.” This means that

the God to whom he prays is the origin and defining example of glory... The glory that God displays is the splendor or brightness that is often characteristic of God’s power, authority, and honor in the OT and that he graciously shares with his people.¹

Being the God of glory emphasizes the fact that He is to be constantly praised, for all good things come from Him. And in this context, it is the abundance of His grace in saving sinners that is the very height of His glory.

1 Thielman, *Ephesians*, p. 95.