

# Ephesians

## Ephesians 1:15 - Love for all the saints

In **verse 15**, Paul highlights two amazing things happening to the Ephesians, that clearly proved God was working very personally with them, and so much so that Paul found himself thanking God for them again and again.

And the second of those two amazing things (the first one covered last time), was their “love for all the saints.” That such a love was even possible in Ephesus was staggering, because the main focus of the Ephesians was money and devotion to the goddess Artemis. The two went hand-in-hand too, because the magnificent temple built to Artemis, four times the size of the Parthenon in Athens, attracted thousands of visitors, who brought their money with them. So, imagine being a Christian in such a city, where people were obsessed with wealth and making money.

But it’s not so difficult to imagine - when money rules our world too. It’s what we depend on and look to for security, having nice things, travelling to fascinating places, dabbling in the stock market, owning a swish car, keeping up with the latest technology, being able to afford good food, dress nicely, buy gifts, and not have to worry about downturns in the economy. It’s money, and lots of it, therefore, that’s become the ultimate dream.

And like the Ephesians we look to our gods to provide it too, the god in our case being the government. Just like the Ephesians looked to Artemis to, quote, “bring new life into the world and to take life away,” we look to our governments to keep bringing “new life” into the economy to keep us well off. And just like the Ephesians looked to Artemis to “take life away” as well, by “bringing about a quick death to end suffering,” governments today are making it easy for people to end their life if they’re suffering too.

So we too are stuck in a world of dependence on what we humans create, even granting our government, medical and academic institutions god-like status, like the Ephesians calling Artemis “her divine majesty” in **Acts 19:27**. But into Ephesus came Paul, who stated flatly that “**man-made gods are no gods at all,**” **verse 26**. Anything made with human hands, or voted into power by human means, is not a god. But that’s a hard sell in a world addicted to its gods, unless, like Paul, we can prove the existence of something far greater that **no humans are able to create**.

And that, we discover in Ephesians and Colossians, came through the gospel of **“God’s grace in all its truth,” Colossians 1:6**, that **“filled people with the knowledge of God’s will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding,” verse 9**, the result of which was people **“bearing fruit in every good work,” verse 10**. So something very real and different would be seen happening to people, which is exactly what Paul was hearing about in the reports he was receiving from the Ephesian and Colossian churches, which both told of **“the love you have for all the saints,” verse 4**.

The love, that is, that ordinary folks had for each other in the middle of this money and goddess obsessed culture. It was really quite extraordinary. The question begging an answer, therefore, is **“How and why would this wonderfully inclusive love emerge in such a culture from Paul simply preaching about God’s grace in all its truth?”**

It goes back to **Ephesians 1:13-14**, where Paul talks about **“the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance.”** The inheritance he’s talking about is the **“Father blessing us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ,” verse 3**. That’s what we have to look forward to in full one day, but the proof of it is the taste of those spiritual blessings the Holy Spirit gives us now. The Spirit acts like a deposit sealing those blessings as ours, so we can begin enjoying our Father’s blessings right away, rather than having to wait until we inherit them all in full.

So we’re living in the time the Father set up before the creation of our world where those **“who were the first to hope in Christ”** are given the chance to experience what the Father has in mind for his children forever, in their lifetimes now. So when Paul talks of **“God’s grace in all its truth,”** this is what he included in it. It was the amazing plan of the Father to start dropping his blessings on us now - so we know what we’re in for later.

But also included in that grace in all its truth was **the means** by which the Father makes those blessings possible. And it doesn’t involve anything we do, or that we have to work for or earn. Imagine that in Ephesus, where blessings from Artemis depended on religious rituals and incantations, building a massive 60 foot high temple out of pure marble in her name, making little amulet idols of her in silver, littering the city with statues of her, and religiously turning up at the temple to offer sacrifices and offerings, and living your entire life depending on something built by humans for spiritual blessings.

They never realized that all things spiritual do not **“depend on man’s desire and effort, but on God’s mercy (or grace),” Romans 9:16**.

So, from Paul the Ephesians get to hear about a divine being who out of sheer grace, mercy and pleasure asks nothing of us humans, because - and here's the first bombshell - **he's our Father and we are his children.**

So **he's** the one who does the providing. We don't; because we're the children being provided for. But it's the means by which our Father provides for us that drops the second bombshell, because he handed everything over to the Son he's already got and deeply loves (verse 6), and it's his Son who is now providing everything spiritual we need to become fully fledged, holy and blameless sons of God like himself.

Imagine being an Ephesian, then, and hearing for the first time that there really is a God, and he's a Father with a Son who's making us into sons of the Father too, so we can experience all the spiritual blessings of the heavenly realms like they do. Compare that to being a pathetically dependent slave of a hand-made goddess, tying everyone down to a life of religious ritual they'd better do to be blessed, by a stone statue that can't bless them anyway.

Into this grace, or mercy, in all its truth, then, is creeping a completely new picture of the spiritual realm. It's about love and family - in that we have a Father who came up with a way before our world even existed to bring us into his family, and that way is sewn up in his Son. And it's because of his deep love for his Son that he's given him the dream job of transforming us physical humans into being a wonderful "family" with them forever.

It's their dream that, by maturing us humans into Jesus' own likeness, we can experience the same love relationship they have always had. They know exactly what that relationship is like, having experienced it together forever, so to them there's no greater joy than to have us humans experience it too. And Jesus openly expressed that wish in **John 17:24**: "Father, I want those you've given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you've given me **because you loved me** before the creation of the world."

So it's their relationship of love that Jesus wants us to experience. But how on earth are we going to know what that's like in the state we're in now? How can we possibly know what love is like on the God level? Well, this is where God's grace in all its truth comes in again, because in his grace he provided the means for that too. Which may come across as a bit of bombshell for us as well as the Ephesians, because again, it doesn't involve anything we do.

That's because God as our Father is being just that, our Father, and as a good father **he's providing all we need as his children.**

And he tucked it all away for us in that “Holy Spirit deposit,” because that’s what gives us a taste of what we’re inheriting in full later. Well, we know from Jesus what we’re inheriting, it’s love and family as he experiences it. But how, through the Holy Spirit, does he help us experience it?

Simple: it’s through the love we’re given for each other. And it is “given” too, because in the report Paul received about the Colossians love for each other, Epaphras, the one reporting, “also told us of your love **in the Spirit,**” **Colossians 1:7-8**. So this amazing gift of all inclusive love was also part of what the Father had provided in the Holy Spirit deposit.

So when Jesus says in **John 13:34**, “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another,” that’s the goal. It’s that kind of love, the same love Jesus has, that marks us out as the ones Jesus is nurturing and maturing according to his Father’s plan. It’s a “must,” then, because this is how “All men will know you are my disciples if you love one another,” **verse 35**.

So that’s the job the Father has given his Son, to enable us to love each other like they as Father and Son love each other. Or as Jesus phrased it in **John 17:20-21**, “My prayer is....that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you,” so that, **verse 22**, “**they may be one as we are one.**” So this is what Jesus is “making known,” **verse 26**, “that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself (and the love I have for you, therefore) may be in them.” And to Jesus there’s nothing more “glorious” than that (verse 24); it’s the best inheritance we could possibly have.

And it’s the Holy Spirit (“deposit”) now answering these verses in us, because he’s the one assigned by the Father and Jesus (John 14:16, 26) to take what belongs to them (John 16:14-15) - the amazing relationship they’ve shared for eternity - and making it known to us, so we get a taste of it too. And we know we’re getting a taste of it, “that we live in him and he in us (enabling us to experience love like Jesus experiences it), because he has given us of his Spirit,” **1 John 4:13**. It’s all the Spirit’s doing, again as part of God’s grace in all its truth.

So we know where the love comes from, but God in his grace has also provided a very special means by which that love grows too. It’s in **verse 17**, that “Love is made complete among us.” Notice the “us.” This is how we get a taste of the love we’ll be experiencing forever, **it’s among us**, in the love the Holy Spirit gives us for each other. And this is the great miracle the Ephesians found themselves with, that none of their obsession with money or their gods had given them. For the first time in their lives they knew real love.