

Henry Hamm (2026) – The Hallmark of a True Christian: [Eph 1:15–16\(a\)](#)

Ephesians 1:15–16a

Intro

Have you ever seen someone who, when you look at their social media page, they seem like the most pious Christian that ever lived? They're endlessly posting about all the new stuff they learn and trying to encourage other people. They post inspirational quote after another. They post about all the help that they give in their community, and maybe they've gone on a YWAM missions trip—not that they actually have a burden for the lost people and those in need—but just to get the experience of missions (romanticizing it), and of course, make 700 social media posts while they're at it. But then, when you see them in person (or possibly even hear of them), you see an entirely different person—much to your surprise. All the social media stuff is just what they want people to see about them. But they don't live in a way that honours God—but they want people to think that they do. Brothers, that is Pharisaism 101. Then, on the other hand, you have a brother or sister who's quiet and diligently serves the church with no camera in sight to motivate their efforts—only God. You see them in person, and you praise God for them. Their actions speak much louder than fake social media posts. For the real Christian, it's not about making a show for people; it's about living for God. And in more ways than we may realize, that is much more attractive than living for a camera.

Or, think of a gardener who endlessly talks about his grand and majestic garden like it's The Garden of Eden. But in reality, he never takes care of it. He never waters it, he never prunes it, he never weeds it; he just talks about how great it is. But his quiet neighbour, on the other hand, never says anything about his garden; he just diligently tends to it every day. And it flourishes. He's quiet, diligent, and works hard at it in a way not to be noticed. This neighbour is like the true Christian. He doesn't just talk about faithfulness, lovingkindness, and thankfulness; he lives it out. And so...

PROPOSITION: If you are not marked by faithfulness, lovingkindness, and thankfulness, you are probably not a saint (ordinary Christian).

To say it another way, if you are not marked by these fundamental characteristics, you have probably never genuinely repented of your sins. Because these characteristics (faithfulness, lovingkindness, and thankfulness) inevitably flow from a genuine repentant heart. That's why the believers in Ephesus were characterized by these attributes as seen in our text.

TEXT: 🙌 [Ephesians 1:15–16\(a\)](#) “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, (16a) I do not cease to give thanks for you...”

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OUTLINE:

Faithfulness v.15
 Lovingkindness v.15
 Thankfulness v.16a

Faithfulness

Like verses 3–14, verses 15–23 are also one long sentence in the original Greek.

It wasn't until the 13th century that the Scriptures were given chapters, and later in the 15th century the OT chapters were given verses, and in the 16th century the NT chapters also received their verses. And so, we now turn to [Ephesians 1:15–16\(a\)](#) “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you...”

“**For this reason,**” this is a prepositional phrase that connects what Paul is about to say with what he has just said; it is the connector phrase (the bridge) of all that's just been said. So, “**For this reason,**” for what reason? What has Paul just told us? What did we see in the preceding passage? Well, we saw Paul's apostleship and salvation were by divine appointment (like our salvation), he explained the triune work of redemption (the Father planned redemption, the Son accomplished redemption, and the Spirit applies to us the work of redemption) Paul spoke of predestination, eternal security, the promised inheritance, and with that, we saw that salvation does not depend on human will, but on God who has mercy, and that if we are saved, we are saved for all eternity, the same way that the initiating work of salvation does not depend on human strength, the same way the keeping of their salvation does not depend on human strength. And last time we looked at the will of God (His decretive and preceptive will). We saw that God always operates on two levels simultaneously, because if God would not do so, then He would never have promised the Redeemer in [Genesis 3](#).

So, in light of this great salvation, “**For this reason,**” he's moving on now; this is why he says what he is about to say, “**because I have heard of your faith...**” **I don't care who you are or what you may think of yourself—how highly you think of yourself or how lowly you think of yourself; people will see something about you (other than your physical appearance) by which they will be able to make at least some accurate assertions about your character (about who you are).** Like Paul is writing here about the Ephesians, “**because I have heard of your faith...**” It'd been several years since he'd seen them; people will see and hear things about who you are and what you value most.

So, what do people see when they look at your life? What do people hear when other people talk about you? (That can be a good thing. Though, unfortunately, a lot of the time it's just gossipers running their mouth a little too hard when they should keep it shut). So, in other words, when your name comes up in a conversation, what's the first thing people say about you? Do they see

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a fool? Or a man of God? There is absolutely no doubt that people see something when they look at you. **The question is not just, *what* do they see? But *who* do they see?** Do they see a selfish, me-centred, prideful, ignorant, boastful, self-righteous, attention-seeking, self-sovereign individual? Or do they see a humble, kind, loving, sacrificial, patient, Christ-centred, Spirit-filled, sinner saved by grace? Do they see you fulfilling all your fleshly desires without a care in the world? Or do they see someone completely devoted to serving Christ and His church? Maybe they see neither, or maybe they see a mixture. Now, both of these cases are near the extreme.

But my point is this: **In the midst of struggling with life in a fallen world, do people see a faithfulness to Christ?** Do they see a good tree that bears good fruit? From a distance, does the overall tree and its fruit look desirable? Sure, people will see failures in your life. People may see you get angry, people may hear you say a cuss word, people may see you get impatient, people may see you give in to some sort of sin. But know this, it matters not so much that people see you sin (for it is in our nature to sin), **but what matters more is what they see you do after you've sinned.** Do they see you repent, or do they see you justify yourself?

Paul founded the church of Ephesus in AD 54, so by the time he's writing this letter (around AD 61), it had been several years since he had seen this congregation. Nonetheless, he still "**heard**" about them, and it was about their "**faith in the Lord Jesus.**" As humans, we are created to worship. **We all worship something,** we all place our faith in something, we all have hopes and aspirations, we all have desires, we all have passions, we all have goals, we all chase after something! But think for a moment, what are you characterized by? **What** and **who** do people see when they look at you? **What** has marked your life? **Who** has marked your life?

By and large, there are two groups of people in this respect. Sometimes, three. Unbelievers, unbelievers who may look like believers for a season, and true believers. But ultimately, it always narrows down to two different responses that indicate an entirely different life within.

Here are some self-examining questions for you. Based on how you answer, you'll be able to discern which party you belong to.

Here's the scenario: Say you're at a social event; all your high school peers are here, the neighbours that you try to outdo, the people whose kids you compare your kids with, some wealthy men you respect, and basically, some of your biggest competitors are here. Say you're in a circle with these people (keep in mind, most of them are unbelievers), and you try to one-up Mr. Jones, who's just spoken about how successful he's been, and you say something that's just a little bit better than what he's said, but only because you exaggerated it. You lied to make your story just a little bit better than neighbour Jones over there. Maybe some of the people standing there know that you lied, but are gracious enough not to call you out in front of all of them. And immediately, your conscience is eating away at you. What are you going to do? Are you going to humble (and possibly humiliate) yourself in front of these people for the cause of Christ? Or, are you going to wrap yourself in your robes of self-righteousness?

Or, say you're in line at Tim Hortons. You're not just in a rush; you're in such a big hurry that if people know how busy you've been this morning and how much you still have to do before 10 am, they would all make way for you and give up their day to serve you. You've been waiting

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for 4 minutes and 26 seconds; what was supposed to be a quick “grab-and-go” is now beginning to feel like an eternity. After 4 minutes and 38 seconds, you finally receive your order. And sure enough, they didn’t add the cream cheese to your 12-grain bagel. And you lose it on this poor worker. Immediately, your conscience is eating away at you. Are you going to humble yourself and let the name of Christ be magnified? Or, are you going to self-righteously stiffen your neck and just say “sorry” to God as you drive away?

Or, say you’re at work. You’re on your lunch break, and you’re sitting with a group of employees (all unbelievers, though they know you profess faith in Christ), and you get caught up in their conversations one afternoon. The way they talk is beginning to rub off on you. And in the heat of the moment, you begin to cuss as you’re joking around. Immediately, your conscience begins to prick you, your face turns red, you know exactly what you’ve done wrong, and so do they. What are you going to do? Play it off like it never happened? Or humble yourself and glorify the name of Christ?

Or what about during one of your favourite hobbies? While you’re playing volleyball, or hockey, or golf, or even baseball. In the heat of the moment, maybe it’s someone really starting to get on your nerves, or you’re losing to a team you should not be losing to; what do people see come out of you?

And so, I say it again. **It matters not so much that people see you sin (for it is in our nature to sin), but what matters more is what they see you do after you’ve sinned.**

Do they see you acknowledge and confess your sin? Do they see you grieve over your sin? Do they see you repent of your sin? Do they see you forsake your sin as you hang out with them, or play sport together? Do they see you make things right with God and others? Do they see a reconciliation with Jesus Christ and others? These are characteristics of a true Christian.

Or, when people see you sin, do they see you trying to justify yourself right after? “It’s not my fault; they made me do it.” All you hear from them are excuses instead of repentance. They’re too proud to admit their sin in front of their friends. Do they see you just play it off like it never happened? Instead of confessing your sin, do they see you comparing your sin to others? “See, what I did is not so bad.” Do they, like the self-righteous Pharisees, think they don’t need to seek repentance because they’re pretty good? Not realizing how far short it falls, they think their self-righteousness is good enough. Though they may not say that verbally, they say that in the way that they react to their sin. These are “Sunday morning Christians,” the unconverted church attenders.

Say you unintentionally offended your brother here in church. And somehow you find out: either someone else tells you, “I think he was offended by what you did,” or he comes up to you and says he was offended by what you did. And you immediately seek restoration. You ask for his forgiveness, and you try to make things right. And sure enough, all is restored in a moment. **This might surprise you, but in one sense, there’s nothing extraordinary about seeking restoration and repentance inside the church. In fact, that’s normal.**

But say that happened while you're playing sports (or something like that). The tension between you two is building up, probably with your own teammate. After another mess-up (keep in mind that whatever is inside of you will inevitably come out of you), you flip out at this person. You say something offensive. Immediately, your conscience is pricked by your sinful behaviour; what are you going to do? It is an entirely different thing for you to seek restoration and repentance right then and there—in public. **It matters not so much that people see you sin (as a professing Christian), but what matters more is what they see you do after you've sinned.**

Brothers and sisters, in most cases, your faithfulness is not tested in Church, but in everyday life, the moment-by-moment circumstances in each day. Your faith is not tested in the land of peace, but in the valley of the shadow of death. Faithfulness is tested in the hard times.

👍 [Jeremiah 12:5](#) in the NASB says, “‘If you have run with footmen and they have tired you out, then how can you compete with horses? If you fall down in a land of peace, how will you do in the thicket of the Jordan?...’” Meaning, that if you constantly give in to sin when you're not facing various trials or persecution (could be for pleasure), then that thing you call “faith,” will never be enough to endure when you actually face a trial. And so, you have no problem giving in to sin the moment it rears its ugly head (whatever it may be). [This is the state of a pitifully weak Christian.]??

Seriously, **what**, and **who** do people see when they look at you? Don't look to the person next to you. Look to yourself, Henry. Examine yourself, Henry! Yes, we're sinners. But we do not use that as a license to justify sin. When people look at you, do they see a sinner who struggles with life in a fallen world, but always runs back to Christ for refuge? Again, **what, and who do people see when they hear of, and see you?** Sure, [1 Samuel 16:7](#) says “... the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” But don't forget, what's in your heart will be displayed by your actions!

👍 [1 John 3:8–10](#) “Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.”

Lovingkindness

👍 [Ephesians 1:15](#) “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,”

To love Jesus Christ is to love His people, and to love His people is to love Him.

How do you show love for the saint? By serving Christ. How do you show love for Christ? By serving the saints.

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If you are serving the saints, you are serving Christ. If you are loving the saints, you are loving Christ. Jesus said in 🙌 [Matthew 25:31–46](#) “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. [Now listen up] For I was **hungry** and you gave me food, I was **thirsty**, and you gave me drink, I was a **stranger**, and you welcomed me, I was **naked**, and you clothed me, I was **sick**, and you visited me, I was in **prison**, and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘**Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.**’ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty, and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘**Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.**’ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

I think it’s safe to say that Jesus here only mentions the minuscule things you can do for your brother or sister in Christ. Sacrificially serving in mentoring, discipleship, counselling, and pastoring your brothers and sisters are the weightier matters, I think. But Jesus says that even doing the smallest of these to your brothers and sisters in Christ—you did it to Him, and you will not lose your reward. 🙌 [Mark 9:41](#) says, “For truly, I say to you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will by no means lose his reward.” Likewise, if you do not even the smallest of these to your brothers and sisters, whom you see on a weekly basis, just how exactly do you think you are serving Christ? The answer is simple: you’re not!

Do you love Christ? You say, yes, of course! Well, the proof of that is that you are actively serving and caring for your brothers and sisters in Christ in your local congregation (whatever the needs may be). How you love and care for your family in Christ is how you love and care for Jesus Christ Himself.

Let me ask you again: are you characterized by serving your brothers and sisters in the Lord any opportunity you get? You say, well, I speak with this particular individual every Lord’s Day. Let me just point out that the text does not say “your love toward **some** of the saints,” but it says, “your love toward **all** the saints.” You do not get to pick and choose whom you will love and serve. You do not get to pick and choose who will be your brothers and sisters in the Lord—that’s God’s doing. Well, maybe you don’t have the chance to serve some of them because as soon as the first service is over they run for the door like they’re being shot after.

If that’s you today, then you need to search your heart and see where your priorities lie. Because if your attitude is that you don’t want to get held up by a brother or sister who’s genuinely

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concerned for your well-being, can you honestly say that you love the Lord with all your heart? I think not! Because to love and serve His people is to love and serve Him. If you do not even love your brother whom you have seen, how can you say you love the Lord whom you have not seen? Now, for some people, it is completely understandable if they have to leave early (it may be due to health reasons), but for most of you it's not.

👍 [1 John 3:14–18](#) “We know that we have passed out of death into life, **because we love the brothers**. Whoever does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and **we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers**. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, **let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.**”

👍 [John 13:34–35](#) “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**”

👍 [1 John 4:8](#) “Anyone **who does not love does not know God**, because God is love.” 👍 [1 John 4:20–21](#) “If anyone says, “**I love God,**” and **hates his brother, he is a liar**; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

Does loving kindness mark your life? Do you show love for your brothers and sisters by serving them any time you are able to do so? I think we all need to be challenged by this. But I pray that this challenge will lead to change. **Because challenge without change only hardens.**

So, **to love Jesus Christ is to love His people**, and **to love His people is to love Him**. How do you show love for the saint? By serving Christ. How do you show **love for Christ**? By **serving the saints**.

Thankfulness

So, we've seen that you cannot be a genuine Christian without **faithfulness** and **lovingkindness**, which may seem rather obvious, but it's not so obvious when it comes to some of the theology of the day in which we live. But anyhow, I think the same can be said about **thankfulness** or **gratitude**. Because one of the characteristics of every true Christian is that they are thankful, at least to some degree. Every true Christian is thankful for at least some things. For example: A true Christian will always be thankful for God's provision of salvation—for Christ/Grace, they are thankful that death has been defeated, they are thankful that sin no longer dominates life, they are thankful for the Church/God's people, to name a few.

👍 [Ephesians 1:15-16\(a\)](#). “For this reason, **because** I have heard **of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints,**” (16a) I do not cease to give **thanks** for you...”

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“For this reason,” (that’s going back to the doctrines mentioned in verse 3–14) because I have heard **of** X and Y (so, faith in the Lord Jesus and love toward the saints—these are the objects **of** the proposition **of**—“I have heard of”). So, “For this reason, **because** I have heard **of** your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints (now he’s giving the reason for the “because”), I do not cease to give **thanks** for you...” Paul gives thanks for them in his prayers. Prayer will be discussed in verses 16b–19 in our next time together, Lord willing.

If you are faithful in Christ Jesus, and you love Him by serving your brothers and sisters in Christ, then you will be a thankful person. But if you are failing in these areas (faithfulness and lovingkindness), then you will struggle with being thankful.

Fundamentally, what is thankfulness? What does it look like for a Christian to be thankful? I’ll tell you what it’s NOT: It is not looking to the past and realizing all the goodness that God has graciously bestowed upon you, all the wonderful things that God has done for you, and in response to that, you try to be obedient or do something that you think brings God joy, you try to show your thankfulness by giving back to God you want to repay Him somehow. Maybe by tithing or by serving His people. The attitude that says, “God has done so much good for me, what can I do in return to show my thanks for Him?” Is wrong! That is not true thankfulness to God.

According to 👍 [1 Corinthians 15:10](#) (“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, **though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me.**” 👍 [Galatians 2:20](#) “I have been crucified with Christ. **It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.** And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” We can never pay God back for what He has done for us. Because every move, every act, every thought, everything you do is done by the strength that God supplies.

So, if you look back on your life to that immense trial that God brought you through, and say, “Lord, in gratitude for that, I will do this or that for you,” it is not true thankfulness because the strength that you do this or that with is also a gift from God! You can never, never pay Him back for anything! Rather, you do this or that because He continues to supply you with the grace needed for it. You remain a debtor to grace forever.

As John Piper says, “Every good deed you do, you do by grace, and thus incur another debt!” 👍 [Psalm 116:12–13](#) “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me? (How can I pay God back for all His goodness to me? The answer:) I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord.”

So, true thankfulness shapes how we live our Christian life. Rather than working to pay God back because He’s done so much good for us, thankfulness is an acknowledgement of favour received that you could not earn by your own merits. It is praise and worship to God for doing what you could never do on your own—so don’t try to repay Him somehow, because you can’t. Thankfulness an acknowledgement of the received, unearned grace of God, and the response is a joyful appreciation to God for giving you what you could not earn or deserve.

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To some degree, I think that every true believer will be thankful to God in this way. Paul was deeply characterized by thankfulness to God for not only his salvation, but also the saints. He specifically mentions his thankfulness toward the Saints in every letter he wrote, except for Galatians and Titus. Though his thankfulness for the Galatians is implied in chapter 4, and his thankfulness for Titus is implied in 2 Corinthians. It is abundantly clear that Paul was a man marked by true thankfulness to God for all the Saints.

👍 [1 Thessalonians 5:18](#) “give **thanks** in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.”

👍 [Ephesians 5:20](#) “giving **thanks** always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,”

👍 [Philippians 4:6](#) “do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with **thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God.” (Whatever the outcome).

👍 [Colossians 3:15](#) “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And **be thankful.**” 👍 [Colossians 4:2](#) “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with **thanksgiving.**”

Are you thankful for your brothers and sisters in the Lord? Are you thankful for your brother or sister sitting in the row next to you? If you say you are, have you specifically prayed for this individual? To lift up their soul to God for their spiritual well-being?

There’s a statement by Dr. Howard Hendricks (I believe) that says something like, “**Before you talk to people about God, you need to talk to God about people.**” Meaning that, if you are not first praying to God for their spiritual well-being (could be their salvation, a trial they’re facing, or recovery of some illness, etc.), if you are not first praying for them, then do not talk to them about all the good that you wish for them! If you actually love this person, they will be mentioned in your prayers to God, as Paul mentions the Ephesians in his prayers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen the basic, fundamental hallmarks of a true Christian. And **the question is this: Does this define you?** Can you honestly say that you are defined by faithfulness,

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lovingkindness, and thankfulness? I think we all need to be constantly examining ourselves to see where we stand and why we do what we do. When you look at your own life, do you see someone who is only spiritual on social media? Do you see a genuine love for His people and therefore a genuine love for Christ? When you look at your own life, what and who do you see? Because the goal of a Christian is to show forth the image of Jesus Christ and thereby live for His glory alone.

Don't be that person who's only a Christian on social media (because there's no such thing), but cultivate a relationship with Jesus Christ and thereby with His people. Don't be that gardener who always talks about how great his garden is but never puts any work into it. Be constantly pulling out the weeds of sin, be constantly watering and caring for your garden, not merely in word but in deed and in truth.

Let's pray.