

A Proper Perspective On Thanksgiving

Eph 5:19,20; 1 Thess 5:18

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The following proclamation was made by Governor Bradford in 1623, 3 years after the Pilgrims settled at Plymouth;

To all ye Pilgrims,

Inasmuch as the great father has given us this year an abundant harvest of Indian corn, wheat, peas, squashes and garden vegetables, and has made the forests to abound with game and the sea with fish and clams, and inasmuch as He has protected us from the raids of the savages, has spared us from pestilence and disease, has granted us freedom to worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience; now I, your magistrate, do proclaim that all ye Pilgrims, with your wives and ye little ones, do gather at ye meeting house, on ye hill, between the hours of 9 and 12 in the day time, on Thursday November ye 29th of the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and twenty three, and the third year since ye Pilgrims landed on ye Plymouth Rock, there to listen to ye pastor and render thanksgiving to ye Almighty God for all His blessings.

This upcoming Thursday, November 24th is Thanksgiving. One day in which we like those early Pilgrims set aside time in our busy schedules to give thanks to God. Now, there is nothing wrong with that but the Word of God tells us that this should be a continual, daily, attitude.



Eph. 5:19,20 tells Christians to **"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, ALWAYS giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."**

And **1 Thes. 5:16-18** says, **"Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."**

Paul's main subject here is **PRAISE, THANKSGIVING**. Notice the other important words in these passages; **ALWAYS, CONTINUALLY, and IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES**. It sounds as if Paul is talking about a church service here, especially in Eph. **"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart..."** But he isn't. He is talking about a continual attitude for Christians - an attitude of the heart. How we are to be to each other. But how, you may wonder, can we have this attitude continually, especially "in all circumstances?"



I believe the answer lies in our perspective of thanksgiving. We need the proper perspective.

One young lady wrote home from college:

Dear Mom:

Sorry I haven't written sooner. My arm really has been broken. I broke it, and my left leg, when I jumped from the second floor of my dormitory...when we had the fire. We were lucky. A young service station attendant saw the blaze and called the Fire Department. They were there in minutes. I was in the hospital for a few days.

Paul, the service station attendant, came to see me every day. And because it was taking so long to get our dormitory livable again, I moved in with him. He has been so nice. I must admit that I am pregnant. Paul and I plan to get married just as soon as he can get a divorce.

I hope things are fine at home. I'm doing fine, and will write more when I get the chance.

*Love,
Your daughter, Susie*

P.S. None of the above is true. But I did get a "C" in Sociology and flunked Chemistry. I just wanted you to receive this news in its "Proper Perspective!"

To be thankful in all circumstances, we need a proper perspective of our circumstances and of our God. Only then we will be able to give thanks to the Lord always.

Now, I believe there are at least three attitudes that steal away our gratitude. Three things that keep us from being thankful:

1) One is our pride. This is the attitude that says, "Nobody ever gave me anything, I worked hard for everything I have." For years you studied hard and now it is finally paying off. With this kind of attitude, we feel that we have no one to thank but ourselves.

2) Another attitude that keeps us from being thankful is a critical spirit or constant complaining. Instead of being grateful, this person will always find something to complain about.

"A lady known as an incurable grumbler constantly complained about everything. At last her preacher thought he had found something about which she would be happy, for her farm crop was the finest for miles around. When he met her, he said with a beaming smile, 'You must be very happy Mary. Everyone is saying how healthy your potatoes look this year.' 'True they're pretty good, but what am I going to do when I need bad ones to feed the pigs.'"

3) A third attitude that keeps us from being grateful is carelessness. Someone once said that if the stars only came out once a year, we would stay out all night to watch them. But they are there every night and we have grown accustomed to them.

The Israelites grumbled because they had no food so God miraculously sent manna (a crust-like bread) to cover the ground each day except the Sabbath day. Then they started to grumble because it was the same thing every day.

They had a miracle - straight from God every day but were no longer satisfied. Because of **pride, carelessness** or a **critical spirit** we will never be truly thankful for all that God has given us.

Rudyard Kipling was a great writer and poet whose writings we have all enjoyed. Unlike many old writers, Kipling was one of the few who had opportunity to enjoy his success while he lived. He also made a great deal of money at his trade.

One time a newspaper reporter came up to him and said, "Mr. Kipling, I just read that somebody calculated that the money you make from your writings amounts to over a hundred dollars a word; Mr. Kipling raised his eyebrows and said, "Really, I certainly wasn't aware of that."

The reporter cynically reached down into his pocket and pulled out a one hundred dollar bill and gave it to Kipling and said, "Here's a hundred dollar bill, Mr. Kipling. Now, you give me one of your hundred dollar words." Mr. Kipling looked at that hundred dollar bill for a moment, took it and folded it up and put it in his pocket and said, "Thanks."

He's right! The word thanks is certainly a hundred dollar word. In fact, I would say it is more like a million dollar word. **It's one word that is too seldom heard and too rarely spoken and too often forgotten.** If we would all adopt an attitude of thanksgiving into our lives - our lives would be changed. We would savor each day.

If any nation ought to be thankful to God and grateful for His goodness, it ought to be America. If any people in America ought to be thankful to God and grateful for His goodness, it ought to be Christians.

Today I would like to share with you three things we learn about thanksgiving from the Bible.

THANKSGIVING SHOULD BE EXPRESSED

One of the choruses we sing is found in **Ps.100** which says, "**Enter His gates with thanksgiving in your heart.**" David says in **Ps. 107** "**Give thanks to the Lord for He is good.**" We should express our thanks to God and others.

In **Luke 17** we read about ten men who were healed by Jesus of their leprosy. Out of those ten men only one came back to give thanks and Jesus said, "**Where are the other nine?**" He was the only one willing to take time to go back and say "**thank you.**"

Because of that Jesus said to him, **"Rise and go; your faith has made you well."**

Have you ever wondered why Jesus said that? I mean like the others, the man was already healed of his leprosy from the time they went to show themselves to the priest. But when Jesus says to this one man, **"Your faith has made you well,"** He wasn't just talking about a physical healing; he was talking about a spiritual one, a mental one. He was made whole.

We too are made whole by our thanksgiving. Psychologists today tell us that sincere gratitude, thanksgiving, is the healthiest of all human emotions. Hans Selye, who is considered the father of stress studies, has said that gratitude produces more positive emotional energy than any other attitude in life.

And a thankful heart will endear others to us and us to others. For you see thanksgiving is not only good for the giver but also good for the receiver.

God appreciates our thanksgiving. It lifts Him up and it glorifies Him. And thanksgiving endears Him to us. It draws us closer. If we are not grateful, if we do not express our thanksgiving, then it can have the opposite affect. In **Rom. 1:21** Paul says, **"For although they knew God, they neither glorified Him as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened."**

This passage seems to imply that people who are ungrateful to God will soon fall away - their hearts will become hardened. Here, we see pride keeping people from worshipping God and being thankful.

Before we leave this point that thanksgiving should be expressed let me list a few ways that we can say thank you to God. You say thank you to God when you;

- 1) Spend time with Him (not just 1 hr a week)
- 2) When you forgive others
- 3) When you serve in His church
- 4) When you share His Plan of salvation
- 5) When you reach out to hurting people
- 6) When you give God the best of your trust, time and talents
- 7) When you praise Him enthusiastically from the heart

OUR THANKSGIVING SHOULD BE EXPANSIVE

And as our thanksgiving expands, it should include 3 things;

1) The Blessings of Life.

You know, I really love my wife. She is a very special lady. She's truly a blessing to my life. One thing that is really special is that each evening she stands in our kitchen and thanks God for our sink full of dirty dishes.

No, she doesn't do that! Who does? But we should. A sink full of dirty dishes usually means that we have been blessed by God with daily food and water.

Do you realize that two thirds of the world goes to bed hungry every night? Our prayers are often very general. We say, "Thank you God for all your blessings" but what blessings are we really thankful for? Count your blessings...name them one by one...count your blessings see what God has done.

Our Thanksgiving should also include **2) The Burdens of Life.**

This is a tough one. **1 Thes. 5:18** says, "**Give thanks in ALL circumstances.**" **Eph. 5:20** says, "**always giving thanks.**" You may think, surely Paul made a mistake or even that this was easy for him to say. But it wasn't. Paul suffered from some very difficult problem that he called a thorn in the flesh. He also had been run out of town, beaten, whipped, imprisoned, betrayed by friends, naked, cold, hungry shipwrecked, and stoned because of his faith. Yet, Paul never stopped giving thanks.

Paul said several things that really show he had the proper perspective of the burdens of life...

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us..." Rm 8:18

"That is why for Christ's sake, I delight in weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecution, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong..." 2 Cor 12:10

"Now I want you to know brothers that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel..." Phil 1:12

When we, like Paul, have the proper perspective we to can give thanks in all circumstances...(Rhea Thompkins 35 yr old - just finished college - mother of 3 boys 4/15/18 - new job at GTE - develops lupus - husband leaves her - oldest son in jail for dealing drugs - lost wt. couldn't hold her head up or get in and out of bath tub by her self... One time said to me that this was really a blessing -- it had allowed her to spend more time with the Lord - when in hospital may be some one here that God wants me to share with)

In our weakness God can make us strong. When we are struggling God is able to work in our lives. He helps us through times that we could have never faced on our own.

I never thought I would say this but I have learned to be thankful in the difficult circumstances my family has faced. Now, notice, I didn't say I was thankful for them, but that I was thankful in this difficult time.

You see, I don't believe Paul is saying that we have to be thankful for our problems but rather - IN THEM." And being thankful; in them allows God to use them for His greater good.

The Philipian Jailer was ready to take his life because an earthquake freed his prisoners but what saved him was the attitude of Peter and Silas during their difficult imprisonment. They were singing and praising God even though they were in chains. But, they knew God and that he would help them through. Because of their joy the jailer and his entire household became Christians.

Understand that others can come to Christ because of your example especially in the midst of difficult times.

Our thanksgiving should include

3) The benefits of life as well.

When the Israelites focused on what they didn't have, they failed to see ALL that they DID have. We are constantly adding to our prayer list but more than anything we should be adding to our praise list.

Geoff Moore sings a song in which, at the beginning of a new day, he says,

Well, I wonder what today will see.

Will I find my dreams OR stare in the face of tragedy?

Whatever may come, whatever may be, of this I am SURE,

I'm forgiven and free and I will live like I believe -

It's good to be alive...

It's good to be alive, to feel the wind in my face, see the blue in the sky.

It's days like this, I realize what a gift it is - It's good to be alive.

Oh, we have all had some difficult times. Maybe even times that we have despaired even of life itself. But, if we really look at all the benefits of life, I think we will find that it's good to be alive. To feel the wind in our face, to see the sunrise, to fall in love, to see our new born child for the first time, to feel our child or parent or even a friend hug us and tell us we are special.

An experiment was done in New York's Central Park where an advertising firm dressed a man up as a blind man and gave him a cup to collect money. One day they put a sign around his neck that read, "I'm Blind." On that day he collected about \$4.00. The next day they dressed him the same way, placed him in the same place but changed the sign to read, "It's Spring and I'm Blind." That day he collected nearly \$40.00. That day, those people realized how blessed they were by the beautiful flowers, birds, the sunrise and sunset.

And as Christians there are other benefits of life. We can be sure that we are forgiven and free. Oh, It's good to be alive!

Not only should our Thanksgiving be expressed and expanded but also we learn that,

OUR THANKSGIVING IS EXPECTED.

Paul says we are to **"give thanks in all circumstances BECAUSE this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."** This is God's will for us. And He knows if we will do it, that our lives will be changed.

1) This is the mark of a Growing Christian.

For example, a baby is ungrateful. You can take a little baby when it has colic and walk the floor with them for hours and when you put that baby down - they don't say, "Thank You." More than likely, they will just yell a little louder. A child has to be taught

to be thankful. It just doesn't come naturally. Sometimes you have to almost force them to say thank you.

When we realize how blessed we are by others and by God and express that - we are growing.

2) Our thanksgiving is also the mark of a Giving Christian.

When we realize how much God has done for us and how much he continues to do, we should be more than happy to give something back to him. This comes through our time and also our financial giving. Someone has said that for Thanksgiving to be real Thanksgiving, There must be "Thanks" and there must be "Giving."

In the last year, our church has been truly blessed by God. We have seen people come forward and be baptized into Christ, we have seen many families place their membership in our various sister churches that we have established in Africa, Pakistan, Romainia, Cuba and Latin America, we have seen their operating debt go away and the giving go up....

Just as our congregation has grown, so have our needs. And just as God has blessed us - so should we bless His work by our giving. **James 1:17** says, "**Every good gift and every perfect gift (do you have any good gifts in your life?) is from above, and comes down from the father of lights.**"

When we go to a restaurant, we are more than happy to give a good waitress a 15% tip, but for some reason, many have a problem with giving God 10% of all the good gifts He has given us. We need to ask ourselves if we are truly thankful. **Remember God loves a cheerful giver.....**

Thanksgiving is a mark of a growing Christian, a giving Christian and 3) A Glowing Christian.

If you are thankful to God then you will be glowing. You will not be constantly critical and pessimistic but eternally Thankful. Though the difficult times are just that - they will not break you.

Paul says in **II Cor. 4:8**, "**We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed but not in despair; persecuted but not abandoned; struck down but not destroyed...For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen.**"

Henry Frost served for many years as a missionary to China. In his journal he wrote of a very difficult time in his life. He says, "I had received sad news from home, and deep shadows had covered my soul. I prayed BUT the darkness did not vanish. I summoned myself to endure, BUT the darkness only deepened. Then I went to an inland station and saw on the wall of the mission home these words: 'TRY THANKSGIVING.' I did, and in a moment every shadow was gone, not to return.

Yes the Psalmist was right, **'It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.'**

Have you been going through some difficult times? Have you prayed but they're still there? Have you told yourself to keep on going and it would some day disappear - but it got deeper? **Then why not try THANKSGIVING?**