

TEXT SERMONS

Title: "THE THEOLOGY OF THANKSGIVING"

Texts: Ephesians 5:20

*".... **always** giving thanks to God the Father **for everything** in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."*

And

1 Thess. 5:18

*"Give thanks **in all circumstances**, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."*

There are three statements in these verses to which I call your attention. We are to give thanks "*always*" for "*everything*" and "*in all circumstances*." Those statements are easy to verbalize but difficult to realize; easy to preach, difficult to practice. Therefore, in order to practice the giving of thanks, as these verses teach, we need to get God's perspective on life.

Before we look at the above verses studiously, I will give you this proposition: We will never be truly thankful children of our Heavenly Father until we gain an understanding of the theology of Thanksgiving. "Theology" is the study of the doctrine of God. The theology behind our thanksgiving can be seen in a very familiar passage of scripture. It is Romans chapter 8. Here we read:

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified." (Romans 8:28-30)

In this section of scripture there are three essential attributes of God that we must embrace if we are to be truly thankful *always*, for *everything* and *in all circumstances*:

- *We must know and rest in the truth of the **goodness** of God if we are to constantly be thankful.* God always has what is good for us in mind: "*we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*"
- *We must know and rejoice in the truth of the **providence** of God if we are to continuously be thankful.* "Providence" is God's all pervading oversight and plan for His creation and His children. "*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son.*"
- *We must know and rely upon the truth of the **sovereignty** of God if we are to consistently be thankful.* A "sovereign" is One who possesses the quality of superiority and therefore has sovereign authority, rule and power. "*....whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*"

I repeat my proposition: We will never be truly thankful children of our Heavenly Father unless and until we gain a proper understanding of God – of God's *goodness*, *providence*

and *sovereignty*. These attributes form the basis for a genuinely thankful attitude.

- To be thankful *always*, we need to know that God is good, always;
- To be thankful for *everything* we need to know that God, in His providence, plans everything if we are walking in His will;
- To be thankful *in all circumstances* we need to know that God, in His sovereignty, is working "*all things together for good.*"

This is what I mean by the theology of the giving of thanks. Now let us look at thanksgiving through the lenses of this theology.

The words "*always*", "*in everything*" and "*in all circumstances*" teach us three contexts in which we should be thankful:

WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL "ALWAYS," FOR GOD IS ALWAYS GOOD.

Eph 5:20 "*always giving thanks to God the Father...*"

We have all had some good times. It is easy to give thanks in good times. However, all of us have or have had some difficult times as well. In those times it is not as easy to be thankful, but if we reflect upon all of life we can thank God for better days in the past and for the prospect of better days in the future.

Being thankful at all times means:

- In favorable and unfavorable times;
- In advantageous and disadvantageous times;
- In sunshine and in shadow times we should be thankful because we know God is good!

Francie Swartz, in the book *Chicken Soup for the Soul at Work*, tells about a man named Jerry who was always in a good mood and always had something positive to say. And when asked how he was doing he would always say, "If I was any better I'd be twins." Jerry was a restaurant manager who everybody loved to work for because he was so positive. And Francie said, "I don't get it Jerry, you can't possibly be upbeat all the time how do you do it?" And Jerry replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself Jerry you have two choices today: you can either choose to be in a bad mood or choose to be in a good one. And I choose to be in good mood." "Oh it's not that easy," I protested, Swartz writes. "Yes it is," Jerry responded, "life is all about choices." Well several years ago, Jerry's restaurant was robbed. The thieves panicked and shot him and he was rushed to the emergency room. He spent eighteen hours on the operating table and several weeks in intensive care but he survived.

And later she asked him how he did it. He said, "When I was lying on the floor I remembered I had two choices, I could choose to live or I could choose to die. I chose to live. The paramedics were encouraging, but when they wheeled me into the emergency room and I saw the looks on the faces of the doctors and nurses I got really scared. Because in their eyes I read he's a dead man and I knew I needed to take action." And there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me and she asked, 'Are you allergic to anything?'

'Yes,' I replied. And the doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. 'BULLETS,' I answered. And over their laughter I yelled 'I'm choosing to live, operate on me as I am alive not dead.' And Jerry lived thanks to the skill of the doctors, to his attitude, and to the grace of God. And Francie Swartz says, "I saw Jerry six months after the accident and asked him how he was doing and he replied, "If I was any better, I'd be twins." And much of life is determined not by circumstances but by personal choice. It matters how you choose to live.

At all times we should be thankful that we are alive, have our faculties, livelihood and some degree of health and friends. And if misfortune becomes our lot we should yet be thankful for the verse says, "*always*" give thanks. God does not cease to be good when we have bad days. So let us remember that the good God is always working so that "*all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.*"

Secondly,

WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL, FOR "EVERYTHING" IS UNDER GOD'S PROVIDENCE.

Eph. 5:20 "*always giving thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Giving thanks for *everything* includes both the positives things and the negative things of life. May I suggest some of the "every things" for which to thank God?

- For a sink full of dirty dishes. A sink full of dirty dishes means that God blessed us with daily food. Do you realize that two thirds of the world goes to bed hungry every night?
- For a leaky faucet. A leaky faucet means that we have running water and that we don't have to "run for water"!
- For a flat tire. A flat tire means that you have an auto and have the freedom to travel around at will.
- Weeds. Weeds mean that you have a piece of property that you can improve and/or enjoy.
- Blisters on your feet. Blisters mean that you have shoes. So Many in the world are barefooted and have sore and/or injured feet all the time.

I am trying to show that the negative side of life can bring into focus the positive blessings of life we take for granted. The principle is seen in the saying, "*we never miss the water until the well runs dry.*"

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?*" Nine men quickly forgot what it was like to have leprosy.

Life is a tapestry. Tapestries are woven from the back side. The threads look tangled, the pattern not pretty. However, when viewed from the front side it looks like a masterpiece. God specializes in masterpieces!

This is captured in B. M. Franklin's poem, "The Weaver":

THE WEAVER

My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me,
I cannot choose the colors He worketh steadily.

Of times He weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride
forget He sees the upper but I the under side.

Not till the loom is silent and the shuttles cease to fly,
shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful in the Weaver's skillful hand,
as threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.

- B. M. Franklin 1882-1965

Our prayers are often very general. We say, "Thank you God for all your blessings." But let us be specific and be thankful for everything! The song "Count Your Many blessings" says, "name them one by one" - enumerate them. In everything and for everything give thanks for God is providentially in control and is weaving something beautiful out of the dark threads in our lives as well as the golden and silver threads!

WE SHOULD BE THANKFUL "IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES," FOR GOD IS SOVEREIGN.

1 Thess. 5:18 "*Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*"

You may think that Paul overstated the matter of giving of thanks in this verse, but he did not. He practiced what he preached – 35 times in his writings he uses the words "thank", "thanks", "thanked."

Paul suffered from some very difficult problem that he called a thorn in the flesh. He also had been run out of town, beaten, imprisoned, betrayed by friends, naked, cold, hungry shipwrecked, and stoned because of his faith. Yet, Paul never stopped giving thanks.

He said several things that really show he had the proper theological perspective about the giving of thanks. In Romans 8:18 he said, "*I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us...*"

In II Cor. 4:8 he said, "*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.*"

In II Cor. 12:10 he wrote, "*...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...*"

To the Philippians he wrote, *"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 can give thanks in all circumstances. I don't believe Paul is saying that we have to be thankful for our problems but rather in the midst of them see the sovereign hand of God at work and thank God that He can use them for His greater good.

A good illustration of the sovereignty of God in action is seen in Paul and Silas in the Philippian jail. They were singing and praising God in the middle of the night, even though they were in chains. They knew God must have a higher purpose in mind than they could at that time see. God Sovereignly used the jailing of his servants and an earth-quake to eventuate in the salvation of an entire family!

Paul says we are to *"give thanks in all circumstances because this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* If the circumstance we are in is the result of doing the will of God He will see us through and our lives will be changed for the better and will bless others.

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 wrote, "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 came across I Thess. 5:18 which says, "Give thanks in all circumstances." I did, and in a moment every shadow was gone, not to return."

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?

CONCLUSION

We are instructed to be thankful *"always"*, *"in everything"* and *"in all circumstances."* But how can we have this attitude of gratitude *"always"*, *"in everything"* and *"in all circumstances"*?

The answer is:

- If we believe that God is good always, we can be always thankful if we choose to be;
- If we believe in the providential care of God in everything, we can be thankful for everything that comes our way, positive or negative, knowing that God has a plan for our lives that will be for His glory and our good.
- If we believe that God is sovereign and that He ordains all the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we can be thankful in all of life's circumstances.

There is no such thing as luck, karma, chance, fate or coincidence. God is in control and if we are temporarily uncomfortable it is because God is getting us ready for that place where we will be permanently comfortable – so let us thank Him! This is the theology of thanksgiving!

The attitude of gratitude will make all of life a beatitude!

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