

Well, happy Thanksgiving. I hope you had a great one. I certainly did. Well, it's good for us to think about the idea of thanksgiving, because it is a genuinely Christian reality. What I mean is that to give thanks means that there is actually someone to give thanks to. And we believe that.

Gratitude, genuine gratitude is the heart attitude of someone who is dominated by God. Thanksgiving is the expression of gratitude with our lips. So thanksgiving is a little different than gratitude, right?

Gratitude is something we have. Thanksgiving is something we do - it's an action. Honestly, we can kind of fool ourselves about whether or not we have gratitude. But it's harder to fool ourselves about whether or not we actually give thanks. If I said, "Are you thankful", it is likely you would say, "Yes". But if I ask the question, "Do you often give God thanks?" the answer may not come so quickly. But our text says we are to give thanks "always and for everything". 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, "*Give thanks in all circumstances...*" The psalms are brimming with exhortations to "give thanks". And so is the rest of the bible. In fact, Romans 1:21-23 bible grounds human sinfulness in ingratitude, in a refusal to give thanks, when Paul says,

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise they became fools.

So thanksgiving is a wonderful and weighty thing. Gratitude is the heart attitude of someone who is dominated by God, and thanksgiving is the expression of gratitude with our lips. We say, "thank you God". And again, verse 20 says, "always and for everything". I want to challenge you today that you can be the kind of person that gives thanks always and for everything. Otherwise, we wouldn't have this verse. And I want to encourage you and inspire to you that this is the only way to actually live - to be so in love with and dominated by the God who loves us and has saved us. We are all born as ingrates. But we are all new creations in Christ - remade for his glory, and made to overflow with thanksgiving.

Here is what we see in our text. **Thanksgiving springs from a heart full of the Spirit. Thanksgiving is directed to God the Father. And thanksgiving is given through and because of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Thanksgiving springs from a heart full of the Holy Spirit

¹⁸ *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit...* ²⁰ *giving thanks always and for everything.*

Thanksgiving springs from the Spirit-filled heart. My wife found this water spring in Minnesota you can drive your vehicle right up to and fill as many bottles with this pure, spring water. Because I love her to pieces, I don't mind (too much) driving up there a couple times a year to fill up several 5 gallon bottles of water. Well, a spring like that results from the aquifer being filled to the point where it overflows to the surface of land. And this spring I drive to is constantly flowing with water - sometimes slightly stronger than other times - but always flowing. Thanksgiving comes from the heart full of the inexhaustible life of the Holy Spirit.

Thanksgiving cannot help but come out of the Spirit-filled Christian. To be filled with the Spirit and not give thanks is unthinkable! It is impossible. I love the line from the Nicene Creed (4th century) about the Holy Spirit which says, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life." It begs the question, are we full of the Spirit?

Thanksgiving is directed to God the Father

²⁰ giving thanks, always and for everything to God the Father...

Thanksgiving is to be offered to God. A song written probably 20 years ago has a line that says, "*Many men drink the rain and turn to thank the clouds.*" How strange to give thanks to inanimate objects like clouds or "mother nature". No, thanksgiving is to be given to God, specifically God the Father.

It's important to understand why God-ward thanksgiving is so important. Giving thanks magnifies the giver, whoever or whatever you think that is. It magnifies grandma for the Christmas gift, your husband for his kindness, the clouds (if you think they are ultimately responsible for the rain), or God. Giving thanks to God magnifies the Him. Psalm 69:30 says,

I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving

Magnification works in two ways - making something really small look bigger (microscope) or making something that really is enormous, but far away look closer to its actual size (telescope). Our thanksgiving to God works like that of a telescope, magnifying our glorious God and Father for who he really is.

Thanksgiving is through Jesus, because of Jesus, and centers on the Lord Jesus Christ

²⁰ *giving thanks... in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*

Not that we only thank God for Jesus. But every good thing we receive from God, and every bad thing that God turns for our good comes through Jesus and is because of Jesus. There are a million things we thank God for, but Jesus is the center and hub of all our thanksgiving.

Every blessing we have or get in the future comes to us through Jesus Christ and his work on the cross on our behalf. Listen to Ephesians 1:3:

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us **in Christ**, with every spiritual blessing...*

In Christ. Every blessing comes to the Christian because of Christ and in Christ. And none of them come to him outside of Christ. And so our thanksgiving is through Him and centers on Him.

And so give thanks always and for everything from a heart full of the Spirit, to the Father, through Jesus. I want to press on this phrase “always and for everything just a bit. **“Always and for everything”**”? How is this possible? I think there is a natural impulse to recoil that this. Always? For everything? This seems a little overboard. Why should we take this seriously? Let me give you a few reasons:

1) Always give thanks because every good thing comes from God (James 1:16-17)

I just spent 9 days in Mozambique and came back with a new appreciation for things like paved roads, police officers, a sewer system, waste management, our hospitals. Every good gift comes from God - the seemingly ordinary: thanksgiving dinner, a job, your husband's kindness, your wife's love, indoor plumbing, modern medical advances and dentists. To the extraordinary: a miraculous healing, an impossible situation that God turns in our favor, or our eternal salvation through Christ. It is all from God the Father. And he is owed our thanksgiving for them. And so cultivate an attitude of thanksgiving. Come to God, not dominated by what you don't have. What you feel he hasn't done for you. But dominated by the real blessings God has given to you.

2) Always give thanks because we know that God's love will never fail...

The greatest thing in the universe is the massive, nuclear powered love of God for the undeserving, like us. And we can be confident that his love will not wear out or fail. Lamentations 3:22-23 . His love is loyal and steadfast.

3) Always give thanks because we know that all things work together for our good

You can give thanks in the hardest of times, not because you know exactly what is going on or why. But because you know that God is working it for your good (READ Romans 8:28). We know. All things. Not some things. All things. And so we can say, "God, I don't understand this. But I thank you that this, even this you will take and work for my good! I thank you for the good that will come through this that wouldn't have come except through this.

4) Always give thanks because the gospel is the good news that we never get what we deserve (justice) and always get what we don't deserve (grace).

Let me explain. If you are a Christian, in every good and real blessing from God, it is an undeserved gift. It's all grace. And in all your sorrows and pain, we can be assured, you are not getting what you truly deserve. Because if you got what you truly deserved, it would be divine judgment and hell forever. Psalm 103:11-12:

He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities.

Psalm 130 says God does not keep a record of my sins. And so the Christian should always be able to say, "I am doing much better than I deserve." And that is such a glorious way to go through life - so aware of the grace and mercy of God through Jesus Christ.

Be Filled With the Spirit

Well, there is only one direct command in this passage, and it is a command. Everything else flows from it. Be filled with the Spirit. We must be filled with the Spirit.