

FBC POWELL, 11-20-16 AM
"A Neglected Command"
1 Thessalonians 5:18
Non-Series Message

Ephesians 5:20 "always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."

Philippians 4:6 "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God."

Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV) "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and **overflowing with thankfulness**."

Col 3:15-17 "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and **be thankful**. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing **with thankfulness** in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** through Him to God the Father."

Colossians 4:2 "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with **an attitude of thanksgiving**."

Hebrews 13:15 "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of **lips that give thanks to His name**."

Romans 1:21 "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or **give thanks**, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."

I. The Reach of This Command Is All-Inclusive

"Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before; second, although they took my [wallet], they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."
—Matthew Henry

Ephesians 5:20a "giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father."

II. The Root of This Command is the Sovereignty, Wisdom, and Goodness of God

Romans 8:28-29 "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren."

III. The Refusal to Obey This Command Carries Some Serious Consequences

Numbers 11:1 (NIV) “Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them His anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp.”

“Gratitude leaves no room for sin, because it comes out of humility, the opposite of sin. And for sin to flourish, it must be dripping with pride.”
—John Piper

Luke 15:25-32 “Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’ But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’ And he said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found.’”

“The older brother was as unhappy in his self-righteousness as the younger brother had been in his immorality. But because the prodigal repented and welcomed his father’s grace, he was now forgiven, restored, and happy. Yet the older brother, offended by grace and poisoned by ingratitude, remained unhappy.”
—Randy Alcorn

IV. The Results of Obeying This Command Are Life Changing

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (paraphrase) “In the middle of every circumstance, give thanks by faith because we know that our sovereign loving Father has allowed or caused this circumstance to bring about His glory and our joyful conformity to the likeness of Christ. This thanksgiving is always the will of God in Christ Jesus for every one of His children.”

“Undeniable guilt, plus undeserved grace, should equal unbridled gratitude.”

—Nancy Leigh DeMoss

First Baptist Church Powell 11 20 2016 AM

A Neglected Command

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Non-Series Message

The last chapter of 1 Thessalonians contains seven commands that are among the most important in Scripture. Sadly, these important commands are also among the most neglected in Scripture.

In this message, we are going to focus on just one of these neglected commands: 1 Thessalonians 5:18: “in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Other translations (ESV and NIV) begin the verse with “give thanks in all circumstances...”

In our country we set aside a special day to focus on thanksgiving. Wikipedia gives this history of Thanksgiving Day in the United States: “Thanksgiving, or Thanksgiving Day, is a public holiday celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November in the United States. It originated as a harvest festival. Thanksgiving has been celebrated nationally on and off since 1789, after a proclamation by George Washington.”

For most Americans, Thanksgiving is a special time when families come together and “pig out” without feeling as guilty as when we “pig out” on other days. Often, even non-praying families will ask someone to say a prayer of thanks or read a poem before the big meal. The command in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 is much broader than that. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 is not a one day in 365 suggestion. It is a command of God for a lifestyle of giving thanks in every circumstance every day of every year. We are going to see that this is way more than a command to utter a little “thank you Lord” when our prayer is answered. In fact, when we really see what this command involves, we are going to see that it applies even when our world seems to have fallen apart.

This command to give thanks in all kinds of circumstances is not an isolated one. Here are a few of the other commands to give thanks.

Ephesians 5:20: “always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”

Philippians 4:6: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

Colossians 2:6-7 (NIV): “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.”

Colossians 3:15-17: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.”

Colossians 4:2: “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”

Hebrews 13:15: “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.”

In Romans 1 we see the importance of giving thanks from the negative side. Paul is detailing the downward spiral of mankind into sexual perversion and ultimately in verse 28, we see God giving sinners over to “a depraved mind.” Where did this downward spiral start? Romans 1:21: “For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened.”

I hope you are beginning to see that we are dealing with some heavy stuff when we speak of “in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” Giving thanks is not “finding the silver lining in every cloud” or singing “Keep on the Sunny Side.” This is a heavy command!

I. The Reach of This Command Is All Inclusive

Probably, the most popular Bible commentary of all time is the Matthew Henry Commentary. Matthew Henry (1662-1714) was a Puritan preacher. Once he was robbed and made the following statement. “Let me be thankful first because I was never robbed before; second, although they took my [wallet], they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.”

Matthew Henry obeyed the command that we are looking at in this message. Even in being robbed, he gave thanks to God. Notice in our text that there are no exceptions to this command. It is not “in most

things, give thanks” or “in the good or pleasant things, give thanks.” It is “in everything give thanks.” This is not the response of natural man! This is a command that can be obeyed only by a believer who is filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, in Ephesians 5:20 we are given the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 5:20a: “giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.”

Let’s get a little technical with this small verse. The Greek preposition that is translated “in” in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 means “within.” It has reference to place. It refers to a sphere of action. In other words, it means that in the midst of every circumstance we are to give thanks. Don’t pass lightly over that! Wherever you are and whatever you are going through, give thanks to God. You may think, “But I don’t feel thankful.” That is really irrelevant! This is an imperative, a command. Notice however that the command is not that we are to be thankful *for* some sinful act or some hurtful treatment by another. The commandment is that we give thanks *in* any situation knowing that God loves us and has a purpose for every circumstance He causes or allows.

About three weeks ago, I was coming back to the church from visiting a member at Park West Hospital. I was sitting in my truck at a red light at Sherrill Road and Cedar Bluff Road when all at once a noise that sounded like an explosion took place and my truck lurched forward. At first, I couldn’t even figure out what happened. Then, I realized that I had been “rear-ended.” While I am not thankful for that accident, I am and was thankful in it. I forgot how much hassle you have to go through with a wreck – even when it wasn’t your fault. In the spirit of Matthew Henry’s response, here are some things I am thankful for. I am thankful that no one was hurt; I am thankful that my truck is still *drivable*; I am thankful that the lady who hit me had insurance (though it is a real hassle to get them to pay); I am thankful that I had the opportunity to comfort the distraught lady; and finally, I am thankful that it was my 2008 Chevy truck that she hit and not me hitting her new sporty Lexus. However, if I had been the “hitter” and not the “hit-ee,” I am still commanded to be thankful in that situation. I hope you see the difference between “in” and “for.”

II. The Root of This Command is the Sovereignty, Wisdom, and Goodness of God

When we give thanks in everything, we are acknowledging and affirming that God is sovereign over everything. Nothing happens apart from His causing or allowing, and what He causes or allows is rooted in His wisdom and goodness. Because God is sovereign, good, and wise, we can give Him thanks in whatever situation we face, no matter how painful and difficult to understand it may be. Another passage that affirms and gives a great foundation for this command in 1 Thessalonians 5:18 is Romans 8:28-29: “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren.”

Sometimes we are able to see and understand the wisdom and goodness of God in what He causes or allows, but sometimes we never get it all figured out. The command in 1 Thessalonians is really a command to walk in faith that God is good, wise, and sovereign even when we can’t see any good, and all that we feel is pain. It is one thing to give Him thanks when the tests come back negative, when you get the promotion or the scholarship or the award, when we celebrate a 50th wedding anniversary, or when the one you have been praying for and witnessing to for years receives Christ and is transformed. However, by faith we are to give thanks and praise Him that He does all things well and that He is causing some incredibly painful thing to work together for our good when the test is positive, the promotion fell through, the scholarship was offered to someone else, our spouse tells us they are filing for divorce, or when and when the one we have prayed for so many years remains hardened to the Gospel message.

Are you willing, in the painful circumstance you are in, to pray a prayer something like this: “Father, I believe that You allowed this even if it involved someone’s sin and You didn’t cause it. I choose to thank You in this circumstance that you are using it to conform me to the likeness of Christ and to thus bring glory to your name.”

Corrie Ten Boom in her book, *The Hiding Place*, tells about an experience in the Nazi prison camp where she and her sister Betsy were incarcerated for hiding Jews from the Nazis. After a time in one prison camp, they were transferred to another prison. Upon entering their new barracks, they found them to be flea infested. As Betsy and Corrie were reading 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Betsy suggested that they stop and thank God for what He was doing in allowing them to be in a flea infested barracks. Corrie refused to thank God, but at Betsy's persistence she gave in and thanked God for what He was doing through the fleas. During the months at that camp, they were surprised at how openly they could hold prayer meetings and Bible studies without guard interference. It wasn't until months later that they learned that the guards refused to come in because of the fleas and for several months the word of God flowed freely even in a Nazi prison camp.

III. The Refusal to Obey This Command Carries Some Serious Consequences

If we are unwilling to "give thanks in everything," the only alternatives are to complain, become angry, bitter, discouraged, frustrated, or feel sorry for ourselves. None of those are good options! When we refuse to obey the command to give thanks in everything, we are basically telling God that He doesn't know what He is doing! This explains why God so harshly dealt with complaining in the Old Testament. We read in Numbers 11:1 (NIV): "Now the people complained about their hardships in the hearing of the Lord, and when he heard them His anger was aroused. Then fire from the Lord burned among them and consumed some of the outskirts of the camp." In Israel's wilderness wanderings, complaining was their number one entertainment. They complained about food, water, Moses leadership, and about giants and walled cities in the land of Canaan. God was grieved, they had no joy, and the result was that all of them twenty years and older (with the exception of Joshua and Caleb) died and were buried in the wilderness, never seeing the land of milk and honey that God had already given them.

I read this quote that blessed me. "Gratitude leaves no room for sin, because it comes out of humility, the opposite of sin. And for sin to flourish, it must be dripping with pride." [John Piper, quoted in Randy Alcorn, *Happiness*, page 364]

Last week we looked at the parable of the Prodigal Son. We didn't have time to examine the older brother in that parable. When the prodigal son came home, it was to a time of celebration by the father, but there was no celebrating on the part of the older brother. We read in Luke 15:25-32:

Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, "Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound." But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, "Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him." And he said to him, "Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found."

What an example of someone who refuses to give thanks in everything! He is full of complaints and has no thanksgiving for his brother's repentance and sharing in his father's joy. When we cannot give thanks for the Father's causing or allowing, we manifest sinful pride and arrogance in believing that we really know better than God what should be done.

Randy Alcorn gives a good summary of the older brother's problem. "The older brother was as unhappy in his self-righteousness as the younger brother had been in his immorality. But because the prodigal repented and welcomed his father's grace, he was now forgiven, restored, and happy. Yet the older brother, offended by grace and poisoned by ingratitude, remained unhappy." [Randy Alcorn, *Happiness*, page 364]

The most miserable, unhappy people in the world are those who have become (often secretly) bitter toward God and refuse to give Him thanks in times of trial and pain and disappointment. To refuse to “in everything give thanks” is to say “good-bye” to genuine joy and intimate communion with God.

IV. The Results of Obeying This Command Are Life Changing

Let’s look at an extended paraphrase of 1 Thessalonians 5:18: “In the middle of every circumstance, give thanks by faith because we know that our sovereign loving Father has allowed or caused this circumstance to bring about His glory and our joyful conformity to the likeness of Christ. This thanksgiving is always the will of God in Christ Jesus for every one of His children.”

I believe that obedience to this command to give thanks is one of the greatest displays of faith God’s children can experience. Our giving of thanks is a testimony that we totally trust God and His sovereign plan to accomplish His purposes in and through us. It is our confessing that even though He has caused us pain, it is for our good and His glory.

Allow me to share a personal testimony here. I remember many years ago when I was going through a “gut wrenching” trial related to a serious personnel problem. To call this trial “agonizing” is not exaggerated at all. I had cried out to the Lord to give me wisdom; I had pleaded with Him to deal with it in a way that would allow me to do what was right and yet not cause serious dissension in the church. To be just painfully blunt, I wasn’t real happy with how the Lord was handling the situation. One evening I just went walking through my neighborhood praying diligently and giving the lord all the reasons that I thought He should handle this horrible situation that would be best for all involved. Yet it seemed that Heaven was silent. I remember this verse (1 Thessalonians 5:18) popping into my mind. I realized that I had offered God lots of counsel; I had whined to Him about how bad I had it and how unjust some of the accusations against me were. I had never given Him thanks. I remember just where I was on that walk when I confessed the sin of complaining, and then I thanked Him for what He was doing in me and in His church and in this very difficult time. My heaviness was lifted instantly. Soon after my response to the crisis was clear and out of thanking Him, my head cleared, the anger vanished and the fog around the will of God lifted and I knew what had to be done.

Oh the peace, the joy, the lifting of a heavy burden when we obey, “in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

Conclusion

Have you ever come to realize that God owes you nothing good? Several years ago, we had an evangelist named Bill Stafford, and I will never forget what he said in one of the services. He said (a paraphrase), “Every morning I look in the mirror and say, ‘Bill Stafford, you deserve to go to hell.’” He went on to say, “after that statement of truth, I go through the whole day filled with gratitude that God’s grace has saved me.” I would add that in that realization of God’s grace and mercy when it is accompanied by the realization that He is sovereign, wise, and good, there will be no complaining, grumbling, or selfishly demanding our own way.

Someone put it this simple way. “Undeniable guilt, plus undeserved grace, should equal unbridled gratitude.” [Nancy Leigh DeMoss, quoted in Randy Alcorn, *Happiness*, page 364]

NASB (New American Standard Bible)

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