

Thankful for “Everything”

Ephesians 5:17-21; I Thessalonians. 5: 16-17

In the Spirit of Thanksgiving: The First Thanksgiving

Half the Pilgrims died during their first winter at Plymouth. The onset of spring found them wondering if any of them would survive, but that's when a miracle of God's providence occurred. On a Friday in March, as the men gathered for military training, a cry went up: "Indian coming!" Everyone gathered around the young man. Suddenly he boomed in near-perfect English, "Welcome!" His name was Samoset. Shortly thereafter, Samoset introduced the Pilgrims to another Indian, Squanto, who was a godsend for the settlers.

Squanto taught them how to catch eels, plant corn in the Indian way, and survive in the wilderness by stalking deer, refining maple syrup, using herbs for medicine, and trading beaver pelts. ***Without him, Plymouth Colony might not have survived; and that's why, at the end of the growing season, the Pilgrims and Indians celebrated Thanksgiving.***

The heavenly Father knows our needs before we ask; and at unexpected moments, He sends just the right person or provision to help us. That's why every day is Thanksgiving for Christians.

“Your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.”

Matthew 6:8

“Just when I need Him, Jesus is near . . .

Ready to help me, ready to cheer.”

William Poole

Where is God in our Thanksgiving:

One Thanksgiving season a family was seated around their table, looking at the annual holiday bird. From the oldest to the youngest, they were to express their praise. When they came to the 5-year-old in the family, he began by looking at the turkey and expressing his thanks to the turkey, saying although he had not tasted it he knew it would be good. After that rather novel expression of thanksgiving, he began with a more predictable line of credits, thanking his mother for cooking the turkey and his father for buying the turkey. But then he went beyond that. He joined together a whole hidden multitude of benefactors, linking them with cause and effect.

He said, "I thank you for the checker at the grocery store who checked out the turkey. I thank you for the grocery store people who put it on the shelf. I thank you for the farmer who made it fat. I thank you for the man who made the feed. I thank you for those who brought the turkey to the store."

Using his Columbo-like little mind, he traced the turkey all the way from its origin to his plate. And then at the end he solemnly said "Did I leave anybody out?"

His 2-year-old brother, embarrassed by all those proceedings, said, "God."

Solemnly and without being flustered at all, the 5-year-old said, "I was about to get to him."

Well, isn't that the question about which we ought to think at Thanksgiving time? Are we really going to get to him this Thanksgiving?

[Getting Around to God, Citation: Joel Gregory, "The Unlikely Thanker," Preaching Today, Tape No. 110.]

I. Giving thanks for "everything" (the good and the so-called bad). Is God serious?

Ephesians 5:17-21 (KJV)

¹⁷Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*. ¹⁸And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; ¹⁹Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; ²⁰***Giving thanks always for all things*** unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

Ephesians 5:17-21 (TMsg)

¹⁷Don't live carelessly, unthinkingly. Make sure you understand what the Master wants. ¹⁸Don't drink too much wine. That cheapens your life. Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of him. ¹⁹Sing hymns instead of drinking songs! Sing songs from your heart to Christ. ²⁰***Sing praises over everything***, any excuse for a song to God the Father in the name of our Master, Jesus Christ.

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 (KJV)

¹⁶Rejoice evermore. ¹⁷Pray without ceasing. ¹⁸***In every thing give thanks***: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

I Thessalonians 5:16-18 (TMsg)

¹⁶Be cheerful no matter what; ¹⁷pray all the time; ¹⁸***thank God no matter what happens***. This is the way God wants you who belong to Christ Jesus to live.

A. Now, I find it easy to have a thankful spirit for the food I have to eat, for the lives I have touched, for the freedom that I have in Christ, for His gift to me, for the victory He gives me, for the prayers of others, for the service of other and for being a part of the church.

- But wait a minute, Paul in **Ephesians 5:19** and ***I Thessalonians 5:16*** ***tells me to have an attitude of thankfulness in “all circumstances”.***
- Does he expect me to have an attitude of gratitude in “all my circumstances”?
- The term in **I Thessalonians 5:16** “all circumstances” in the Greek text is *en panta* which does mean ***“in everything, in all circumstances, all things, everything”.***
- Philips paraphrases it, *“Whatever the circumstances may be.”*
- So, yes, he does mean for me to have an *attitude of thankfulness in all situations of my life.*

This story is dedicated to Larry Autry:

It's Thanksgiving Day & the aroma of roast turkey fills Charlie Brown's house. Snoopy, outside, lying on top of his doghouse, smells that aroma and he is thinking, "It's Thanksgiving Day. Everybody eats turkey on Thanksgiving Day." So he lies there, watching the back door, eagerly awaiting his Thanksgiving dinner.

Finally, the door opens & here comes Charlie Brown with a bowl of dog food, and he puts it on the ground. Snoopy gets off his house & stares at the dog food with a forlorn look on his face. And he thinks, *“Just because I'm a dog, I have to eat dog food on Thanksgiving Day.”*

Then the next square shows him looking at the dog food more intently, and he is thinking, ***“It could be worse. I could be the turkey.”***

B. Point out folks present and some of their struggles and ask the question: “Does God expect you to be thankful for that pain, that illness, that death, that bankruptcy, that divorce, that wayward child, etc.?”

C. You mean Paul expects me to have an attitude of thankfulness in the circumstance of my mother taking her own life?

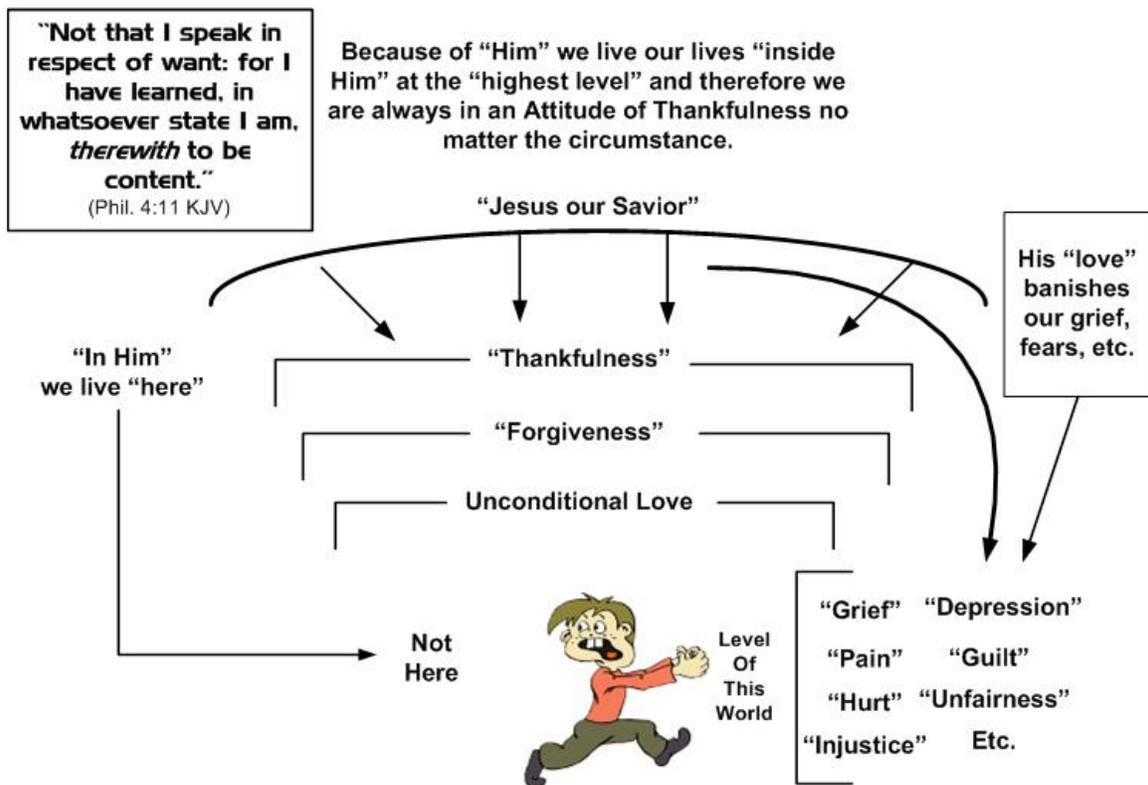
- Of my sister taking her own life?
- Of my having to suffer chronic pain all my life from a botched spinal fusion?

- Of the false charges that the religious right has made towards me?
- Yes, yes, yes, Paul says, “Bob, live in an attitude of gratitude in all your life, the good and the bad.

D. Now notice, Paul did not say to have thankfulness “for” the hurt, pain, injustices, etc. that life throws at us, he said to have thankfulness “in” all these circumstances. How can we do that?

The study of linguistic structures explains how we can do that.

At the level of this world we may experience grief, pain, hurt, injustice, etc. but at a “higher level” we experience the love of the Lord which brings our consciousness to higher levels of thoughts where ***we “...know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Gr)***



E. Level of our Lord → The Love of the Lord brings to our consciousness all our higher levels of thoughts such as we “trust the ‘unconditional love’ of God and this includes trusting Him in our pain as Paul spoke about with his ‘thorn in the flesh’”.

2 Corinthians 12:7-9

“And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

- **At the level of this world → Paul was suffering from some physical pain.**
 - We don't know exactly what it was but that is a good thing. It makes it easier for all of us no matter where our body is afflicted to ***identify with Paul's experience.***
- II. So, when life throws us a curve ball, we immediately turn to our “faith” which launches us out of this world's level of hurt, pain and suffering to our “higher” mind of unconditional love, trust, hope, goodness, thankfulness, etc.**
- Thus, our “higher” mind lifts us up where we can ***“step outside our pain”*** and ***“step into God's presence”*** and then our lives this Thanksgiving and for the rest of our lives will be lived out of an attitude of gratitude.
 - ***That is the level that Paul operated for in prison he could say “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.” (Philippians 4:11)***

William Law, in his *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* writes,

"Would you know who is ***the greatest saint in the world?*** It is not he who prays most or fasts most; it is not he who gives most alms, or is most eminent for temperance, chastity, or justice, but:

- ***It is he who is always thankful to God,***
- ***Who wills everything that God willeth,***
- ***Who received everything as an instance of God's goodness,***
- ***And has a heart always ready to praise God for it."***