

Thanksgiving – a Christian Perspective

■ Opening Prayer

Is being thankful important?

Let's see what the word of God says?

If you have your bibles with you this morning, please turn with me to:

Romans 1:21

Common English Bible (CEB)

²¹ Although they knew God, they didn't honor God as God or thank him. Instead, their reasoning became pointless, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Let's look at this scripture a little more closely. See where it says "Although they knew God" what does this imply?

I looked up the word Knew in this context the Strong's concordance. The word is from the Greek "ginosko" meaning to be aware, to feel, to be resolved to.

Who then is the apostle Paul speaking about? All of us...

He is not speaking of only non-Christians who have turned away from God. He is speaking to Christians. This includes me and you.

What else does this scripture say?

It tells us what happens to reasoning when we forget to be Thankful? **Pointless**

It tells us what becomes the state of the hearts of Christians who are not thankful? **Darkened**

So I ask you this morning: are these good states for a Christian to be in? **NO**

I looked at other translations to make sure that the interpretation was consistent. They did not give solace either. No matter how it is translated the message to those who are unthankful is pretty bleak.

Here are some of the other translations

NIV: "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"

ESV: "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"

NASB: "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"

Regardless of the translation, the intent of Paul's message is clear.

The problem is NOT that we don't know that we should be thankful. The problem comes when we ignore what we know.

Charles Spurgeon, a nineteenth century preacher said: "I can say nothing worse of a man than that he is not thankful to those who have been his benefactors; and when you say that he is not thankful to God, you have said about the worst thing you can say of him."

How can we detect if we are not thankful?

- We take God's daily blessings into our lives without ever giving any thought to where they come from.
 - a. Availability of Food
 - b. Freedom of Religion
 - c. Our Health
 - d. Our Children
 - e. Etc.

- We complain about what we don't have
 - a. Boat
 - b. Quad
 - c. New Car
 - d. Nicer house
 - e. Clothes
 - f. The coolest Musical Gear
 - g. The latest Electronic devices (IPad 3, iPhone 5, HD TV etc)

So what... What is God's will for us?

Clearly he wants us to be thankful. How do we get out of the rut of un-thankfulness?

God's word; It tells us:

- In everything give thanks for this is the will of Christ Jesus concerning you
- Pray without ceasing
- Rejoice Always

Turn with me to 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

New International Version (NIV)

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Now I will concede that we all:

- Rejoice
- Pray
- Give Thanks

For the English fanatics among us; it is the modifiers that trip us up...

- Rejoice – ALWAYS
- Pray – CONTINUALLY
- Give Thanks – IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

These are God's expectations of the Christian believer

Nehemiah 8:10 tells us: "The Joy of the Lord is your Strength"

Proverbs 17:22 tells us: "A cheerful heart is good medicine"

Just a quick side bar - Many people believe that the verse Jesus wept (John 11:35) is the shortest verse in the bible and they would be correct if we were reading the English version. In fact, the shortest version of the bible from the Greek is "Rejoice Always" 1 Thessalonians 5:16...

Did you know that good business managers do not simply present problems that arise to their bosses, they propose solutions? I believe that the same rule should apply to preachers. In this case I am using the word of God as my reference for the answers. It contains all the solutions you will ever need.

For those of you in school using the bible is kind of like an open book exam with the answers clearly underlined. It is like having the teacher give you the exam with the answer key on the back of the test.

For the married man among you it's like when your wife says: "Be Honest honey, How do I look in this outfit" and being handed an answer that won't get you into trouble.

Answers for how to fulfill God's three expectations:

So how do we Rejoice Always?

Well... rejoice means to fill up with Joy.

We are called to commit to the Harvest. What is the message that we are bringing to the unsaved? Like the angel in Luke 2:10: Are we spreading the "Good news of great joy that will be for all the people".

If we have lost that Joyful and thankful sound in our message, why would anyone want to listen to what we have to say?

When I assessed this sermon, I was thinking to myself: "Okay where is the message of Joy? How can I convey the necessity of being thankful, how does this sermon sound happy, thankful, excited or convey the good news of Jesus? Truth is truth. Don't forget to emphasize the GOOD NEWS."

We as Christians, me included, have allowed the world to influence our thinking to the point where circumstance or lack of stuff has robbed our joy. Will we allow the enemy to prevent us from fulfilling God's expectation for us to rejoice always?

I began to think about how to be Joyful and it was easy to come up with reasons not to be joyful. Here is what I concluded: If my joy comes from my faith and not my circumstance then, my health, state of my family, finances, the government or the way my friends treat me and so on will not impact my Joy.

If you don't feel that you have the strength to have joy in your situation remember that the JOY of the LORD is your Strength. If it is still not possible examine what you have to be thankful for.

remember Job and his circumstances. Remember how his wife wanted him to curse God and die. His friends accused and condemned him. He lost his children and his health?

I truly believe that the reason that Job could hold on to his faith and his Joy in the Lord was because his faith was not dependent upon his circumstance. If you want joy always - the answer is clear: do not tie up your joy in your situation.

Joy is essential. To rejoice is the command of God.

Will your message to others be one of Joy? Or will you be what I call a Lemon Christian. Oh come on, you know who I mean. The Christian you meet who looks like they have a bad odor under their nose,

who has taken it as their lives ambition to always be serious, where smiling is a sin and laughter is an abomination unto the almighty God.

Who will the unsaved be attracted to, A Lemon Christian or a Friendly unbeliever?

Another Mandate is to pray without ceasing.

How do I pray without ceasing? (That's impossible)

I often hear people discussing this scripture in 1 Thessalonians 5. Many times I have heard the comment that it is impossible. The opinion that it is impossible presumes a very narrow view on what prayer is?

We need to devote ourselves to converse with God, but we also have a great commission to create Disciples of Christ. How can we do all of the things we need to do and still get on our knees and pray all the time? While not intending to minimize the importance of diligent prayer in our lives, faith without works is dead.

To successfully pray without ceasing we need to broaden our view of prayer. If we come to the realization that our lives are to be offered up as a living prayer to the Lord, then we begin to grasp Gods intent for us. Our God is not about religion. Jesus is the God of Love and he is about relationship.

If we are walking with the Lord, there should be no change of state, no preparation of spirit, no ritual to engage in prayer, you will already be with him, so talk with him.

We do need to dedicate time to pray and intercede earnestly before the Lord. If we are to pray without ceasing we also must make our lives a prayer to the Lord each day as we live it. We consciously, deliberately, repeatedly and persistently include God in every facet of our lives.

Think of it like a Cell phone. Do you want to wait for a dial tone, punch in phone number to call God, wait for him to answer, have a conversation and then hang up or do you want to have an open line to him all the time. Do you want to make a connection to God on an as needed basis or do you simply want to talk to your heavenly father. One is praying without ceasing the other is not...

How can I be thankful in every circumstance?

It is easy to be thankful when you get that raise, your kids get on the honor role, your spouse just bought you that new quad, your spouse just said: hey honey why not go out and buy a new wardrobe, your friends are glad to have you over, your doctor says your test results for cancer are negative and so on.

What about if your spouse says: "I am leaving you for Clark" or "I am leaving you for Talia". What about if the doctor says: "I am sorry but your cancer is back". How about if your daughter tells you she is pregnant but doesn't know the father. What about when your son decides to leave home to pursue the

gay lifestyle with his HIV positive companion. What about if your retirement fund just tanked and your pension is now worth half of what it was?

Not so easy now...

So how can we be thankful in every circumstance?

We need to remember that God's love for us never changes. The word of God tells us that he will never leave us nor forsake us.

Deuteronomy 31:6

New International Version (NIV)

⁶Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

Hebrews 13:5

New International Version (NIV)

⁵Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,

"Never will I leave you;
never will I forsake you."

Matthew 5:44-45

New International Version (NIV)

⁴⁴But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Journey with me if you will...

When I was on a plane flying to Boston from Vancouver the Lord revealed to me that even though it was raining in (big surprise) Vancouver and in Boston, that it was my perspective on his eternal love that mattered. Rain falls on the just and the unjust alike. When I was looking up from the ground everything looked gray and bleak. When I was on the plane however, I was up above the clouds and no matter what was happening on the ground the sun was shining, the only difference was the perspective from where I was at. Regardless of what the rain does the sun is still shining.

God's love doesn't end when the rain comes. We just need to be in the right place in our relationship to see it.

I have Learned, that I cannot determine what Gods plan is in every circumstance in my life. If my life is a painting, then I am in it. I cannot see what his plan is for the canvas of my life. I can only see what is within my limited vision. I eventually had to realize that his vision is much greater. More importantly, he is the painter and I need to trust him.

By taking a step of faith and giving thanks when we don't feel like it, we are proclaiming that God's wisdom is greater than ours and are willing to surrender to his plan for our lives, even when we don't see it.

The word of God says in:

Romans 8:28

New International Version (NIV)

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

If you are looking for how to be thankful in every circumstance try to change perspective and remember:

- God is Sovereign – Psalms 46:10
- God causes all things to work together for good – Romans 8:28
- God has triumphed over sin and death through his son Jesus – 1 Corinthians 15:57
- When we are weak he is strong – 2 Corinthians 12:9
- Weeping only endures for a night, but joy comes in the morning – Psalms 30:5
- God is faithful to finish his work in us – Philippians 1:6
- Our hardships equip us to minister to others – 2 Corinthians 1:3-4

This morning we have heard what happens when we don't fulfill Gods expectation for us from the Gospels. Remember them:

- Rejoice – ALWAYS
- Pray – CONTINUALLY
- Give Thanks – IN ALL CIRCUMSTANCES

Then we heard of how to ensure that in our Christian walk we not only understand these expectations but are equipped with the understanding of how to see them fulfilled in our lives.

Ask yourselves this morning:

- Do you want to have the Joy in your life that a Christian should have?
- Have you examined your perspective?
- Do you really trust God in every circumstance?
- Are you prepared to be thankful this Thanksgiving day?

Closing Prayer - Heavenly father, I ask this morning that in each of us you will create an attitude of thankfulness not only for what we have or what you do for us but simply because you are you. – Amen