



ADULT SUNDAY SCHOOL

November 2022

In All Things Give Thanks

“Nurturing A Spirit of Thanksgiving”

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Main Text: I Thessalonians 5:16 - 18

Devotional Readings: Ps. 65:1, 119:71, Rom. 8:28, Eph. 5:20,

1 Thess 5:16-18

16 Rejoice evermore.

17 Pray without ceasing.

18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. KJV

The Story

There is a story (not from the bible) about a time when Jesus, Peter, James and John were out taking a walk when suddenly Jesus stopped. Jesus told the three disciples to pick up a rock and carry it. James and John picked up a big rock, but Peter picked up a small stone. All three disciples carried their rocks for quite a long time. Suddenly, Jesus said “drop the stones!” When the disciple’s dropped their stones, the stones turned into bread. Now, James and John both had big pieces of bread, but Peter only had a little piece of bread. A few days later, Jesus and these same disciples were out walking again. Suddenly, Jesus told these disciples to “pick up a stone and carry it!” Again, each disciple picked up a stone, but this time Peter picked up the biggest stone he could carry. After a very long walk, Jesus told the disciples to drop the stones. When the disciples dropped the stones this time, nothing happened! Peter was upset and said to Jesus, what happened? Where’s the bread? Jesus responded, “Peter, who

were you carrying the stone for? For me, or for the bread?”

QUESTIONS

1. Was Peter wrong for expecting bread for carrying the big rock?
2. What blessings does God owe us?
3. In this story, was there something greater than bread that Peter could have been thankful for?

The Discussion

For many people, thankfulness is a complicated matter. Difficulties, problems and disappointments provide the perfect excuse for us to show ingratitude towards God. In fact, the bible’s teaching on Thanksgiving in many ways goes against all of our human instincts. A perpetually thankful spirit seldom comes natural for most people. This sincere expression of thanksgiving can only be accomplished by the help and power of God’s grace.

2 Cor 12:9-10

9 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.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. KJV

In these verses, Paul finds reason to “take pleasure” or one could say he is able to express “thankfulness” even during difficult life experiences. How is Paul able to do this? He is enabled by the presence, power and the purpose of God’s grace in his life.

A Little History

It should be noted that even the worshippers of pagan gods practice offerings of thanksgiving to their gods. However, these pagan worshippers were moved to give thanks to their gods in response to experiencing some good fortune. For the Christian, our thanksgiving to God is not a response to gratifying circumstances but it comes from our unwavering faith and thankfulness for God's everlasting and inseparable love for us. Because of this faith, we know that God is "working all things out for our good!" So, even though we "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" - we can be thankful for the fact that we are not walking there alone for "thou art with me! - And there's no need for me to fear any evil.

The Study

In I Thessalonians 5: 16 - 18, the Apostle Paul provides the church with some general instructions for Christian living. For those who ever wondered what the "will of God" is for their life, they can get their answer right here in the three exhortations found in this passage of scripture. They are: rejoicing evermore, pray without ceasing and in everything give thanks.

Rejoice Evermore: A person cannot rejoice "forever" over something that doesn't last "forever." So, it seems reasonable that Paul wasn't talking about us rejoicing evermore over a house, a job or any temporal thing. So then, we can only rejoice "evermore" over those things that are eternal such as: our salvation, God's everlasting love or our eternal home with Jesus Christ. **Read Col 3: 1 - 2.**

Pray Without Ceasing: In a sense, the Christian need never to say "amen" to close their prayers because we are to live our lives in an open-ended prayer. This directive speaks more of our attitude towards prayer rather than the content or length of our prayers. We are to live our lives in such a way that we are ever ready and fit to go before our God in prayer. Our prayers are not to be restricted to time, place, or human protocols but rather be

provoked and governed by our relationship with Jesus Christ and made effective through the assistance of the Holy Spirit. **Read Rom. 8:26**

Questions:

1. How can a Christian rejoice in the Lord even though they may be going through difficulties?
2. One theologian wrote: "it is not in the moving of the lips, but the elevation of the heart to God, that the essence of prayer consists." What does this statement tell us about the nature of an authentic prayer life?

A Little Deeper

In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

It must be noted that the author is not requiring that we give thanks "for everything" but rather we are told that we are to give thanks "in everything." In other words no matter what life leads us "into"- our connection to God's presence is never severed. That's because the nature of God and his love for us never changes because of our circumstances. **Read Mal. 3:6** Because of the eternal inseparable love of God, we may enjoy uninterrupted access to the "joy of the Lord." **Read John 17:13**

Question: Why might a Christian's level of thankfulness be a good indicator of that person's spiritual health and maturity?

A Final Word

The Christian will spend a lifetime learning to trust God completely in all things. Such growth is only made possible by the grace of God as we learn to fully embrace that God is truly working all things out for our good. In the final clause of v. 18, we understand that joy, prayer and thanksgiving is in reality, Christ's will for us, and it is only in union with Him that we can embrace these three wonders of the Christian experience. "He that says 'Amen' to the will of God in his heart, can say 'hallelujah' also." To God be the glory!



The author, Bishop Dr. Rex M. Waddell, Ph.D., is the Chief Bishop of the Church of the Living God (C.W.F.F.) and senior pastor of the Church of the Living God of Fairview Heights, Illinois.