

Thanksgiving: A Season and a Life-Long Choice I Thessalonians 5:18

Thanksgiving is the atmosphere that surrounds God's Throne; and Thanksgiving is God's will for all of our days lived on Earth. On this Thanksgiving week, are you thankful?

As we open to I Thessalonians 5:18, most of us are thankful for the good things we enjoy—like a safe and comfortable homes, a job, a bank account, a healthy and mobile body, an active and full life, and so on.

But the test of true thankfulness is our text this evening—1st Thessalonians 5.18 as God's Will for our lives is expressed:

1 Thessalonians 5:18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Now let's go over that list of our usual sources for thanksgiving in life in America this month—

- **A safe and comfortable home**—but what if we had to live in the bad part of town, in an apartment or house that was dirty, unsafe, and cold? Would you still be thankful? That is where **most** Christians in the world today do live!
- **A secure and providing job**—but what if you were unemployed, underemployed, or disabled and never able to work again? Would you still be thankful? That is where **many** Christians in the world are today! Remember 2/3rds of the world lives on less than a dollar per day.
- **An insured savings account and an assured retirement plan**—but what if you were penniless, uninsured, and with no social, financial, or medical safety net? Would we still be thankful? That is where **most** Christians in the world are today!
- **A healthy, strong, and mobile body**—but what if you were weak, sick, infirm, and without a prognosis of return to full health? Would we still be thankful? That is where **many** Christians in the world are today!
- **An active and full life**—but what if you were far from leisure and recreation, distant to action and excitement, shut in, immobile, without a car, a family, a

circle of close friends, and money to get any of the above? Would we still be thankful? That is where **a lot of** Christians in the world are today!

- **A wonderful family and friends**—but what if you were the only believer in your family, or even in your city somewhere in the Middle East? Would we still be thankful? That is where **a lot of** Christians in the world are today!

So are we really thankful? Or are we only thankful for what we consider to be the good times? The way to measure genuine gratitude is to see if this verse fits us. **“In everything”** do we give thanks?

The Apostle Paul was one of the most thankful people we know of in the 1st Century. Yet that was in spite of his circumstances.

- **Paul did not have a safe and comfortable home**—unless you count the local jail as safe, though uncomfortable.
- **He did not have a secure and providing job**—he was dependent upon the gifts of God’s people for much of his ministry life.
- **He did not have an insured savings account and an assured retirement plan**—unless you count treasures laid up in Heaven, and Christ's promise to never leave or forsake.
- **He did not have a healthy, strong, and mobile body**—unless you count the one he was getting when he finally got home to Glory and saw Jesus face to face.
- **He did not have an active and full life**—unless you count ministry as active and struggles as full.

But what Paul did have was a chosen attitude of thanksgiving. Paul had sought to obey the Lord and tune his heart into the attitude of Heaven. What do we see going on in Heaven?

Unceasing Thanksgiving

As soon as the veil of Heaven is opened what do we see happening in Revelation 4:9? Look and listen with me:

*Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and **thanks to Him** who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever.*

As we the Redeemed assemble around God’s Throne we have the awesome privilege to partake in the offering of worship through Thanksgiving in Revelation 7:11-12:

*All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, 12 saying: "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom, **Thanksgiving** and honor and power and might, Be to our God forever and ever. Amen."*

As we the redeemed, continue in God's presence, our unending desire is to offer our thank-filled worship as Revelation 11:16-17 reminds us:

*And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God, 17 saying: "**We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.**"*

So tonight, with the redeemed of all the ages, and as the gathered Church of Jesus in this place, we continue to lift the sacrifice of thank-filled worship to our God and Savior.

Giving thanks is the English translation of a Greek word: **eukharisteeo** used 39x in the New Testament

- It is Christ's word for communion in all three of the Gospels:

*Matthew 26:27 Then He took the cup, and **gave thanks**, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you.*

*Mark 14:23 Then He took the cup, and when He had **given thanks** He gave it to them, and they all drank from it.*

*Luke 22:17, 19 Then He took the cup, and **gave thanks**, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; 19 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me."*

- It is Paul's word for his chosen lifestyle in:

*1 Thessalonians 5:18 **in everything give thanks**; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

- And it is what we shall be doing forever in:

*Revelation 11:17 saying: "**We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.**"*

Does it Work When We Choose to be Thankful?

One of my favorite examples of the grace of God that can make us live in the atmosphere of thanksgiving is in our hymnbook. God unleashed can make us thankful now matter what happens in our circumstances. Turn with me to hymn #556.

The writer of this hymn was Pastor Martin Rinkart, who served a congregation at Eilenberg, Saxony during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Because Eilenberg was a securely walled city, as the war dragged on, it soon overflowed with refugees. As the war dragged on, the entire city began to suffer first from famine, and then from disease.

By 1637 a great pestilence swept through the area, killing over 8,000 including Pastor Rinkart's wife. As she died he was left at age 41, a single parent, and the only minister still in the city. All the others had either died or fled. Pastor Rinkart writes that he conducted the burial services for a total of 4,480 people, sometimes at the rate of 40 to 50 a day!

As he kept life going with his children, he wrote this hymn to remind them that God is good—all the time; and all the time—God is good.

This single dad and pastor simply believed God's Word: God is always good, even if we are tempted to doubt it. Pastor Rinkart tried to teach his children to be thankful in everything just as God's Word said.

Thanksgiving Exposes Genuine Humility

Thanksgiving exposes true humility: The only way to be thankful in all things is in humility, when we know we deserve nothing we are grateful even for the smallest things.

Thanklessness stems from pride. Ingratitude flows from a belief that we deserve better than we have. Pride tries to convince us that either: our job, our health, our spouse, or our possessions are not as good as we deserve.

The mark of an unsaved person is thanklessness to God (Rom. 1:21), but the mark of a Spirit-filled believer is a choice to give thanks in the name of Christ to the glory of God.

In the unclear world of our tomorrows, each of us here will experience various difficulties, persecutions, or disasters. We can prepare anything, by exercising a faith that practices faith in God's promise of Romans 8:28. As it says in the *Living Bible*:

"And we know that all that happens to us is working for our good if we love God, and if we are fitting into His plans."

When we by faith choose to believe God, we can sing like that single-parent, overworked Pastor Rinkart of long ago:

“Now Thank We All Our God”

Now thank we all our God
With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mother's arms,
Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns
With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now,
And shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart (1586-1649)

ONE QUICK APPLICATION

If you haven't already planned for the spiritual side of Thanksgiving tomorrow, why not plan to bring your Bible and read a brief Scripture and pray before your Thursday meal? If you don't have a favorite already here are two:

Psalm 136:1-3 Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the God of gods! For His mercy endures forever. Oh, give thanks to the Lord of lords! For His mercy endures forever.

Habakkuk 3:17-19 (NKJV) Though the fig tree may not blossom, Nor fruit be on the vines; Though the labor of the olive may fail, And the fields yield no food; Though the flock may be cut off from the fold, And there be no herd in the stalls—¹⁸ Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ The LORD God is my strength; He will make my feet like deer's feet, And He will make me walk on my high hills.

