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For Grandparents, Parents and Seniors

By Rick Shrader

Giving Thanks in Our Walk

O, *give thanks to the LORD, for He is good!* (Psalm 107:1). November is the month for Thanksgiving. If there is anyone who should be a thankful person it is the believer in God through Jesus Christ. We know that our Heavenly Father is working all things out for our good and for His eternal purposes. It is not that everything that happens is pleasant, but that everything that happens is in His providential care.

Psalm 107 also says (four times), “Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” The problem is that the “children of men” are, for the most part, unbelievers. Their view of the world and thankfulness is based more on chance than on an immanent God. They are like the gambler who is thankful when the dice roll his way (and angry when they do not). Or they are like the athlete who points to the sky when a higher power allows him to win rather than the other guy. “As worldly people go on their way they meet with some things that make them happy, and some about which they complain bitterly. They conceive of life as a matter more or less of chance. Accordingly they welcome those workings of chance which favor their purposes and object to those which do not” (Leon Morris on 1 Thes. 5:18).

The Bible mentions being thankful in its various forms (thank, thankfulness, thanksgiving, etc.) about 140 times in the Bible. I think one of the most challenging is 1 Thes. 5:18, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” I would have to raise my hand at being the first to fail in this verse. How can we do this in the broken world in which we live, where people suffer and where Satan is loose to do his bidding? I think the verse implies two ways in which we can give thanks in everything.

1) You should be a thankful person. It is the will of God for you to give thanks on every occasion. “In everything” is a single expression. We are to be this way at every turn of the road. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Phil 4:6). Jesus said, “Father, I thank You that You have heard Me” (John 11:41). Eight times the apostle Paul began a statement with, “I thank my God” (Rom 1:8 being the first) and sometimes “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord (1 Tim 1:12). It is the believer who can truly thank the Creator of all things for providing all things at all times.

2) You should be thankful for everything. It is the will of God to give thanks for every occasion. This is much harder. “This” is also single. We are to be thankful for each thing that happens. This is God’s will for us as well. But we do not see these circumstances as chance the way the world sees them. God is working all things to a proper and good end and in a broken and sinful world, He has to allow a mess in order to clean up a mess. It is ours to be thankful that we have such a faithful Creator (1 Peter 4:19) Who is organizing our dirty world. Evidently He has trusted that I could withstand the pain in order to help in this endeavor though I prayed differently.

“We need to learn this secret of the happy Christian life—thankfulness. If everything actually conspires to do us good, how can we do otherwise than always rejoice? What if we do not always at once see and feel the good, is there not joy in anticipating the sight? The Christmas tree is already being decorated although the doors are still closed, yet how the little hearts beat with expectant joy!” (R.C.H. Lenski on 1 Thes 5:18).

Thankful Paul

And now I urge you to take heart, for there will be no loss of life among you, but only for the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, saying, 'Do not be afraid, Paul; you must be brought before Caesar; and indeed God has granted you all those who sail with you.' Therefore take heart, men, for I believe God that it will be just as it was told me. However, we must run aground on a certain island . . . And when he had said these things, he took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all" (Acts 27:22-25, 35).

Paul had written earlier that one of his many trials was that three times he had been shipwrecked (2 Cor 11:25). According to the date of the books of Corinthians (early 50s AD) and the travel by ship to Rome (late 50s, early 60s), this would be Paul's fourth ship wreck! Yet, Luke records, "he gave thanks to God." One might say, "Well, now he *had to* because he had previously written that we should." But those who would think this way just don't know the Paul of the Scripture.

A simple computer search shows how often these words appear in the New Testament: "Thanks" (37 times), 24 by Paul. "Thankful" (2 times), both by Paul. "Thankfulness" (1 time), by Paul. "Thanksgiving" (9 times), 8 by Paul. In the Old Testament, "thanks" appears 36 times and 22 of those are in Psalms. Saying Paul was not thoroughly a thankful person is like saying Psalms knows nothing about being thankful. Paul would simply reply, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col 3:17). Or, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place" (2 Cor 2:14).

In Acts 20 Paul was on his way back to Jerusalem for the last time. Having stopped in Ephesus he explained to them, "And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me" (vss. 22-23). If God were to give us these kinds of advance notices of the trials which are just around the next corner, how would we respond? There would probably be a prayer vigil to keep it from happening.

When Paul's party landed in Caesarea they stayed in Philip's home. While there, Agabus the

prophet came from Judea and informed Paul and the others that he would be bound in Jerusalem and given to the Gentiles. Sure enough, "Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem" (vs. 12). Why should we be put ourselves in a position in which we know harm will come? But Paul's answer is instructive, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (vs. 13). Hearing that, to their credit, the believers said, "The will of the Lord be done" (vs. 14).

We find, as the story proceeds, that Agabus was right. In Jerusalem Paul was nearly beaten to death by the Jews who thought erroneously that he had brought a Gentile into the temple area. Yet God saved his life by having the Roman guards rescue him and put him in their own jail. Was Paul discouraged at this string of events? No, a few days later the Lord stood by him and said, "Be of good cheer, Paul; for as you have testified for Me in Jerusalem, so you must also bear witness at Rome" (23:11).

So, aboard the ship on the way to Rome, Paul knew he would make it and was only concerned for the rest of the crew which God would also give him. What Paul could not see at that point was that he would be marooned on the island of Malta for three months and would preach there and see a great revival (27:7-10). Paul's many experiences had taught him that the greatest blessings often come out of the greatest trials. He had taught the believers in Achaia about the believers in Macedonia, "that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality" (2 Cor 8:2).

So we learn in life that, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). God will not allow us to be tried above our ability to withstand (1 Cor. 10:13). We can be thankful in our trials because we know our Lord has a purpose and that He walks with us through them. I know some great people now who are going through cancer, serious operations, family struggles, near poverty. I love Paul's motto on his way to Jerusalem that day,

"But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God" (Acts 20:24).