

Thankfulness - Part 1

by Derek Prince

Being thankful is a direct command of scripture, originating in the will, and necessary to make other forms of prayer effective and to release God's miracle working power.

Duration: 28:44

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:16

Topics: "Christian Obedience", "Thankfulness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of giving thanks in our conduct as believers. He references John Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection, which he summarized in three verses from 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and give thanks in everything. The preacher highlights that behaving thankfully is not about our feelings, but about obeying God. He also points out that God often requires us to give thanks before receiving something, and that failing to give thanks can hinder us from being in God's will.

Transcript

This is tape number 4070. Derek Prince speaks on the subject, Building Christian Character. This message is entitled, Thankfulness.

I'm going to speak about something that there's a great deal said about in the scripture, the theme of thankfulness. All I'm going to do really is present a whole series of scriptures and point out their implications and how they affect us. First of all, I want to say that to be thankful is a direct command of scripture.

And if we are not thankful, we are disobeying scripture. Whatever we may feel like, doesn't make any difference. We're disobedient.

I want to say too, that thankfulness, like most of the important things in the Christian life, originates in the will and not in the feelings. You do not have to wait to feel thankful, to be thankful. Those of us that have brought up children, at least in Europe, we always trained our children never to receive anything from an adult without saying thank you.

In fact, in Britain, if you were to give a child a biscuit or a cookie, when you reached out your hand, you would expect the child to say thank you before it actually received the cookie. This was not a question of

whether the child felt thankful, it was simply a question of the right way to behave. And what I'm talking to you about this morning is not primarily your feelings, but your conduct.

How do you behave? And if you don't behave thankfully, you're disobeying God. First scripture I want to read is in Colossians 3, verses 15 through 17. I feel prompted to point out to you that God often deals with us in the way that I described dealing with that child.

God often requires us to say thank you for something before we've actually received it. And sometimes if you wait to receive it to say thank you, you won't get it. Colossians 3, 15 through 17.

Let the peace of God rule in your hearts to the which also you are called. The word rule in Greek is arbitrate, or act as umpire. That's a very important form of guidance.

Are you doing the right thing? You're not quite sure, ask yourself, do I have peace in my heart about it? If I do, it's one important indication that I am doing the right thing. Let the peace of God arbitrate, or act as umpire in your heart. When you start to do something, and you don't have peace, you better check.

You're probably going to do something wrong. Let the peace of God rule in your hearts to the which also you are called in one body, and be ye thankful. That's a direct command.

If you're not thankful, you're disobeying. And let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.

That covers all our words and all our actions. There are two things, we have to do them in the name of the Lord Jesus, and we have to give thanks while we're doing them. That applies to scrubbing the kitchen counter, cleaning out the bath, starting your car, writing a letter, whatever you do, do it in the name of Jesus, and as you do it, give thanks.

It's a pretty good criterion of whether a thing is right or wrong. If there's anything you're planning to do that you cannot honestly do in the name of the Lord Jesus, and giving thanks while you do it, you'd better not do it. That cuts away a whole lot of do-nots and do's and don'ts.

It gives you a basic principle to guide all your words and all your actions. And notice, thanksgiving should be part of every word and every act. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do it in the name of Jesus, giving thanks.

If you leave out the giving thanks, you're disobedient. Turn to 1 Thessalonians 5. Some very short but sweet verses. Beginning at verse 16, reading through verse 19.

John Wesley was criticized in his day, like other preachers have been criticized in their day, for preaching what he called Christian perfection. People charged him with setting an impossible ideal. In his journals, he once wrote that what he understood by Christian perfection was very simple and very practical, could be summed up in three verses.

And he gave these three verses. 1 Thessalonians 5, 16, 17 and 18. Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks.

And he said in effect, if you do that, there's nothing wrong with you. And I would agree. If you can do those three things, you don't have any problems.

Rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks. And then with regard to the last thing, in everything give thanks. Paul adds, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

What is the will of God? To give thanks in everything. So if you're not giving thanks, you're not in the will of God. Now that's a very profound fact.

I found in dealing with people like missionaries, that a person could be in his right calling, in his right job, doing everything that God asked of him, except one thing, giving thanks. And such a person would keep saying, I'm not in the will of God. There's something wrong.

It wasn't their position, it wasn't their calling, it wasn't their job. It was just the fact, that they were not giving thanks. Remember, the moment you cease to give thanks, you're no longer in the will of God.

There may be nothing else wrong with the situation. But you can't be in the will of God, when you're not giving thanks. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

And then it says, quench not the Spirit. What's the application? Very clear, once you stop giving thanks, you're quenching the Holy Spirit. He's not having the free flow in your life, that he desires to have.

All right, secondly, and very closely related to that, giving thanks, or being thankful, is an expression of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Turn to Ephesians 5, verse 18. And I want to read to verse 21.

Be not drunk with wine, when is excess. It is so regrettable, that many times religious people will major on the negative. And they stop there.

Well, it's wrong to be drunk with wine. I fully agree, it's wrong to be drunk with wine. But that isn't the real point of that verse.

The real point follows in the positive. But, be filled with the Holy Spirit. Now, I was a logician before I became a preacher.

Logic compels me to acknowledge, that if it's wrong to be drunk with wine, it's equally wrong to obey, disobey the second half of the verse. It's wrong, not to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And that's what Paul was really aiming at.

He just threw in, the be not drunk with wine, as an example. What's the expression of being filled with the Holy Spirit? There are three things that follow. Verse 19, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns, spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

The first expression of being filled with the Holy Spirit, is a life of continuous praise. Verse 20, giving thanks always for all things, unto God and the Father, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The second expression of being filled with the Holy Spirit, is being continually thankful, for all things.

That'll test your faith. Now, I don't believe we have to be thankful for sin, or wickedness, or ungodliness. But in every situation, there is something to give thanks for.

And you're expected to do it. I remember years and years ago, when we first came back from Jerusalem, and we were living in somebody else's home, in a part of England. A Christian couple, and my first wife had led this brother into the baptism.

And we came down for breakfast, and he was just ready to go out to his job. And his wife was anything but a good cook. And in front of him, were two cold burnt pieces of toast.

And he looked at it for a moment and said, giving thanks for all things. And I'm sure he went to work in victory that morning. Then the third expression of being filled with the Holy Spirit, is submitting yourselves one to another.

It's a submissive attitude toward other people. Let's just state those three expressions. A life of continuous praise, continuing thankfulness, and a submissive attitude.

My personal conviction is, that a person who does not have those three marks of conduct. Is not filled with the Holy Spirit. Such a person may have been filled with the Holy Spirit.

But you know one thing, it's easy to leak. And if you are not praising the Lord, and not giving thanks, and not in submissive attitude. You are not at that time, filled with the Holy Spirit.

The third fact, I want to make a state about thankfulness. Is that it's necessary to make other forms of prayer effective. There are various other forms of prayer, which are not effective.

Unless they are accompanied by thanksgiving. Turn to Philippians chapter 4 verse 6. Be careful for nothing, that means be anxious about nothing. But in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving.

Let your requests be made known unto God. I don't know why, but John Wesley is in my mind this morning. He commented on those words, everything by prayer.

He said, I believe God does everything by prayer, and nothing without it. But you see, everything by prayer. Make your requests known unto God.

What else? With thanksgiving. Leave out the thanksgiving and your requests, don't carry weight with God. He insists that your requests be accompanied by thanksgiving.

And a very simple one in Colossians 4 verse 2. Continue in prayer and watch in the same, with thanksgiving. Don't leave out the thanksgiving. I will tell you one psychological truth about thanksgiving.

If you always start when you pray. By thanking God for all the things he's already done. Then you have an attitude of faith when you come to make your next petition.

But if you just start out with bare petitions. You probably don't have any faith to go with them. Ruth and I, since before we were married.

Have been in the habit of taking approximately one day a week for prayer and fasting. It varies, it's not a legal matter. And we have made the practice of writing out our important prayer requests.

And I want to commend that to you. Because when you have to write it out. It forces you to think, what am I really asking God to do? And many times that will adjust what you ask for.

However, we make it a principle never to start with petitions. In every theme that we deal with, we begin with thanksgiving. We always list thanksgivings first.

Then we go to the petitions. Sometimes our thanksgivings get so long, we don't have room for the petitions. But it's a tremendously helpful discipline.

I want to recommend it to you. I would suggest to you, never pray without giving thanks first. Always start with thanksgiving.

And then there's another form of prayer, which is intercession. Praying for people. And again, I believe intercession should always be united with thanksgiving.

For the person you're praying for. Now this is something we're going to have to really deal with ourselves about. How many of you read that little book, Praying Hyde? Well, it used to cost 65 cents.

And it's worth 65 dollars, if it'll do in your life what it's done in the lives of many people. I'm sure it's available somewhere. Hyde was a missionary who went out to India, probably at the beginning of this century.

And he had an experience with the Lord. He was baptized in the Holy Spirit on the ship on the way out. And he went out there with all sorts of plans for language study and this and that.

But the Lord set him apart to a ministry of prayer. And he became, I would say, renowned for his prayer. At first his fellow missionaries criticized him because they felt he wasn't doing enough.

But when they began to see the answers to his prayers. Then they began to count on his prayers. And he relates, I believe, in this little book.

Early in his experience of prayer life. There was an Indian gospel worker. Who was a rather cold, self-seeking man.

And had very little fruit in his life. And so Hyde determined he'd pray for this man. He began by praying like this.

Lord, there's brother so and so. You know how. And he was going to say how cold he is.

But the Holy Spirit checked him. Said don't accuse God's people to God. It's not your job.

So he checked himself. And he began to think of anything good. That he could think of in the life of that man.

And thank God for the good. Then pray for the man. Within a few months that man was on fire for the Lord.

His life became extremely fruitful. But the lesson is that Hyde had no right of access. To that man's life with his prayers.

Until he started by thanking God for the man. Remember when you pray about God's people. You're praying about God's workmanship.

And you have no right to criticize God's workmanship to God. Furthermore you're doing the devil's job for him. Because he is the accuser of the brethren.

And he really doesn't need your help. Now I want to take quickly some examples. Of the intercessory prayers of Paul.

And I want to show you that almost invariably. When Paul prayed for people. He began by giving thanks.

I'm going to go quickly through a number of his epistles. Let's start with Romans chapter 1 verses 8 and 9. I don't want to dwell on these. But I think just repetition is impressive in its own way.

Romans 1 8 and 9. First I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all. That your faith is spoken of throughout the world. For God is my witness.

Whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel and his son. That without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers. What did he do first? Thank or pray? First I give thanks.

Turn to Ephesians chapter 1 verses 15 and 16. Wherefore I also after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus. And love unto all the saints.

Cease not to give thanks for you. Making mention of you in my prayers. Which came first? Giving thanks.

Philippians 1 3 and 4. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you. Always in every prayer of mine for you all. Making request with joy.

Which came first? Praying or thanking? Colossians 1 verse 3. We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Praying always for you. Give thanks.

Praying. 1 Thessalonians 1 verse 2. We give thanks to God always for you. For you all.

Making mention of you in our prayers. First give thanks. Then make mention of you in our prayers.

And then for an individual. 2 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 3. I thank God whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience. That without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.

Always thank then pray. Rather interesting contrast is found in Romans 11. I don't know whether you've ever noticed this.

Paul is talking about God's dealings with Israel. And he refers to Elijah. And he's speaking about the remnant that was in the days of Elijah.

But he says something about Elijah. That once when I read it really ripped my attention. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew.

Watch ye not what the scripture saith of Elijah. How he maketh intercession to God against Israel. And then he catalogues all their sins.

They've digged down thine altars. They've slain thy prophet. And you know when Elijah did that.

He was in a low spiritual condition. He was running away from Jezebel. I'm not.

I wouldn't dare to criticize a man of God like Elijah. But I believe it's an indication. That he was not in an attitude of faith at the time.

And God really challenged me. And he said I never want you to make intercession against my people. That's not your job.

And I suggest that it's a mistake many of us make. Often with good motives we pray for a wayward or backslidden child. And we catalogue all that child's errors and faults.

And we build up an atmosphere in the spiritual realm. That makes it almost impossible to break through in prayer to that child. And creates a barrier between the child and ourselves.

And that's not the only case. It may be a brother in the Lord who's offended you. So every time you pray.

The first thing you tell the Lord about is that wrong act. That brother did against you. You creating a barrier between God and you.

Between the brother and you. Leave God to deal with the wrong act. It's not your business to intercede against any child of God.

All right the next thing I want to say about Thanksgiving. Is it is a key to release God's miracle working power. Give you just a couple of examples.

In Jonah chapter 2. You want a miracle. You've prayed maybe days, weeks, years. Try giving thanks.

It worked for Jonah. You read chapter 2. It's a prayer that Jonah prayed in the belly of the fish. He did a lot of praying.

I imagine you and I would have felt prompted to pray in that situation too. But in verse 9 he changed. He said but I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving.

Now that's definitely a sacrifice to give God thanks when you're in the belly of a fish. But it paid off. What does the next verse say? The Lord spake to the fish.

And it vomited out Jonah. I suppose God was saying to himself. That thankless fellow Jonah.

He's not getting out of that fish until he mends his conduct. When I hear him give thanks I'll talk to the fish. And you know there are many of you in the same situation.

You get out of the fish. When God hears you say thank you. God cares for the manners of his children.

You know that? A lot more than some of us care for our children's manners. All right now an example from the New Testament. Of the power of giving thanks.

To release a miracle. John chapter 6. This is the record of the feeding of the 5,000 men. Plus women and children.

With five loaves and two fishes. The only miracle of Jesus. Apart from those associated with his death and resurrection.

That is recorded in all four Gospels. Interestingly. And you remember Jesus said.

Make the men sit down. He took the loaves. And then in verse 11 it says.

Jesus took the loaves. And when he had given thanks. He distributed to the disciples.

The disciples to those who were sat down. How did the miracle come? Did Jesus pray a long prayer? Did he agonize? Did he quote scripture? No. He just gave thanks.

And the writer of the Gospel. Wants us to note that point. Because he goes back to it.

If you go on to verse 23. And I won't go into the context. It says.

How be it they came other boats from Tiberias. Nigh unto the place where they did eat bread. After that the Lord had given thanks.

So the writer of the Gospel. Was very impressed with the fact. And he wanted us to note the fact.

That all it took to release that fantastic miracle. Was to give thanks. I can imagine a person like myself.

Being super spiritual. Flexing my spiritual muscles. And going into prayer.

Blessing that bread. Praying over it. Laying hands on it.

You know. Rebuking the calories. All the Lord did was give thanks.

Did I tell you about the story about Larry Christensen? This is just by the way. It's got nothing to do with. With what I'm talking about.

But it really appeals to me. Because it was such a quick answer. Larry was just about to eat.

Something like Danish pastry. Or something like that. And he said jokingly.

Calories I rebuke you. And somebody said. That sort comes out only with prayer and fasting.

Let's turn on John's Gospel. To one other example. In chapter 11.

Jesus is outside. The tomb of Lazarus. Who's been there four days day.

Verse 41. In the middle of the verse. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said.

Father I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And that's all he did. Then he turned to Lazarus.

Said come out. No long agonizing prayer. Just simple giving thanks.

And I suppose perhaps. That could be the greatest miracle. In the earthly ministry of Jesus.

The raising from the tomb of a man. Who'd been four days day. What released the miracle? Giving thanks.

Then I want to say that. Giving thanks is the simplest. Possible expression of faith.

James chapter 2 verse 26. It's not really necessary to turn there. James says.

Faith without works is dead. Faith without the appropriate. Corresponding actions is dead.

And a dead faith produces. No living result. Now this is extremely important.

When praying for the sick. In my own experience. I've discovered.
Particularly with people. Who have arthritis or who are deaf. They're so used to their condition.
That even if God heals them. They'll go on being sick. I can thank God.
I've prayed for scores of people. With arthritis. And I've seen them heal.
But in most cases. I've learned from experience. I have to make them act out their faith.
Your knee joint is alright. Well get up and bend it. Do something.
Or you can walk. Let's see you walk. Please stop your machine at this point.
And turn the tape over.

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