

PAUL, THANKSGIVING, AND THE THESSALONIANS

1 Thess. 1:2; 2:13; 3:9; 5:18

2 Thess. 1:3; 2:13

Intro: Recently, as many of you know, I was at the First Baptist Church in Medford for four days of meetings. They were four wonderful days for me, and for Lucille, who was with me.

I had been asked to speak on WORSHIP -- which I did. My eyes began to be opened, as I prepared, not only to the tremendous importance of worship in the life of the child of God, but also I saw more clearly than ever before how far-reaching worship is -- that it extends into every area of our lives, and into all that concerns our relationship with God.

It was impressed upon me that we cannot really worship God without knowing God. And so worshippers must be people of God whose primary concern is the Lord Himself.

A former Assistant Pastor at Medford^{who} is now Pastor up in Winlock heard what I had done in Medford, and he has asked me to come to Winlock to speak on the same theme. I will be leaving, the Lord willing, right after the Women's Christmas Luncheon to do that -- spending the next four days in Winlock.

I found that the people in Medford were hungry to hear about worship. Their Pastor obviously was deeply interested because he asked me to take this subject. People generally are responsive when you talk about worshipping God. Of all that we are neglecting today, the real worship of God probably has suffered the most!

Tonight I want to speak about this subject, but limiting myself to one small, but extremely important area of it. I want to limit myself mainly to 1 and 2 Thessalonians (a small part of the Bible), and to the subject of thanksgiving. Worship includes thanksgiving and a lot more, but you cannot be thankful to God without worshipping!

In the two Epistles there are 6 references to thanksgiving -- 4 in 1 Thess., and 2 in 2 Thess.

Of these 6, 5 refer to Paul's thanksgiving for them. The other 1 is Paul's exhortation to them to be thankful.

I am dealing tonight basically with one Greek verb, εὐχαριστέω, which Archbishop Trench says is "one manner of prayer . . . which ought never to be absent from any of our devotions . . . namely, the grateful acknowledgment of past mercies, as distinguished from the earnest seeking of future" (mercies). Cf. his

Synonyms, p. 191.

Obviously, this is thanksgiving which is directed to God alone who is responsible for the blessings for which Paul gives thanks.

Let us look at these passages and add the truth we have here to what we already know about worshipping God.

Note in all the passages that Paul's thanksgiving for them, and the thanksgiving which he exhorts them to offer to God, are to be continual. He uses such words as "always" and "night and day," or, "in every thing."

Note also that in at least one passage he speaks of it as a debt which we owe to God. Cf. 2 Thess. 1:3.

But let us notice, first, in dealing with Paul's thanksgiving for them, the specific things that he was thankful for. It may rebuke us. It will certainly teach us.

I. THE REASONS FOR PAUL'S THANKSGIVING.

A. Their service to the Lord (1 Thess. 1:2-4).

Service itself is worship, but the point we need to make tonight from this passage is that, whenever you find the people of God serving the Lord like they were in Thessalonica, we must not forget to thank the Lord because He is the One Who has brought it about.

B. Their reception of the Word of God (1 Thess. 2:13).

You do not find this in every city, or in every church. You certainly find it here at Central Bible. But let us remember that it is not because we are different or better than other churches where the Word is not so received, but this is something that God has done for us. This is something that He has done for you -- if you love the Word of God. Therefore, you must worship Him by offering your thanksgiving. To Him belongs all of the glory.

C. The joy they had brought to the heart of the Apostle and to the heart of his co-workers (1 Thess. 3:9, 10).

Verse 10 makes it clear that they were not all that they could be and should be, but they certainly were not what used to be and might have been!

God had done this, and He was to be thanked! Do we remember to thank God when Christians are a blessing to us?

- D. The way in which they were growing in the Lord (2 Thess. 1:3 ff.).

Note: This is against the background of their present circumstances, which included "persecutions and tribulations" (v. 4).

And what in particular does Paul single out for thanksgiving to God?

Note again: It was their "faith" and their "charity," or love.

This is what God does through suffering -- and we have an obligation to praise Him for what He is accomplishing.

And by the way -- note Paul's prayer for them in vv. 11, 12 -- not for deliverance, but for the glory of Christ!

- E. The full range of their salvation -- from God's choice of them to their salvation and culminating in "the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The whole scope of the Gospel is here. But what is Paul doing? He is thanking God because God is the One Who has brought it all about.

Before we go on to the last point, let me ask you two questions covering the verses which we have already looked at:

- 1) Does your thanksgiving include the people of God?
 - 2) Are you thankful for the things Paul gave thanks for?
- If we do not learn to pray from the Bible, our prayers can be very shallow. Let us ask the Lord to teach to pray like Paul prayed.

We still have one verse. It deals with:

II. PAUL'S EXHORTATION TO THE THESSALONIANS REGARDING THEIR THANKSGIVING (1 Thess. 5:18).

The ratio is good for any child of God to remember -- especially pastors, missionaries, and parents -- 5 for us; 1 for those we teach!

What a strong verse this is!

Be sure that you see two things:

- 1) If you are a child of God, you have no choice in this. Paul says, " . . . this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."
- If you are not thanking God in prayer, you are dis-

- obedient to God, and any disobedience is SIN! We all need to let that soak in!
- But there is another point that will surely cast us on the Lord for His grace:
- 2) Our thanksgiving is to include everything -- "In every thing give thanks . . ."

It is easy for us to be selective in our thanksgiving, and to omit certain things which we do not like. We have no right to do this.

Look at two other verses which are closely related to this one:

- 1) When Paul describes a Spirit-filled Christian in Eph. 5:20, he says nothing about speaking in tongues, but he does say this:
- "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."
- 2) The other verses are in Phil. 4:6, 7:
- "Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God . . ."

How can you give thanks from troubles? I can suggest two reasons:

- 1) Because they draw us to the Lord and away from other things.
- 2) Because of what the Lord is accomplishing through the troubles -- both for Himself and for us!

Concl: These are terrific verses, aren't they -- especially for days like these?

There is more spiritual blessing in these verses that you and I can realize. The cure of a lot of our spiritual problems is right here -- in our need to worship God with our thanksgiving.

How is your prayer life? Have you been praying daily? If so, what place does thanksgiving have in your prayers? Are you thankful for the right things -- according to what we have seen in 1 and 2 Thessalonians?

If you need to make changes, will you ask the Lord for His enabling grace? If you have been discouraged with your life, then thank the Lord for the problems and watch as He turns them into the greatest blessings that you have ever known.