Eph 5:20 Giving Thanks for All Things

Eph 5:20 *Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*

Most of us could probably come up with a long list of things we for which we are thankful. And that list would probably include most of the good things in life—family, health, property, money, career, community, recreation, the Bible, God, church, etc.

Most of us would *not* include in that list any of the negative, difficult, painful things in life—illness, disease, weakness, failure, crime, abuse, hardship, stress, conflict, etc. We typically do not thank God for such things.

Most of us enjoy many good things in life, but we also endure some difficult things. We are typically thankful for the things we enjoy and do not give thanks for the difficulties of life.

In Eph 5:20 and other passages, God challenges us to do something very difficult—to be thankful *for all things*—in all conditions of life and for all circumstances.

As we approach Thanksgiving, this text should remind us to be thankful at all times and under all conditions of life, good or bad.

Let's look at this passage and consider what it tells us about thanksgiving.

I. The command of thanksgiving—give thanks (εὐχαριστοῦντες – pres act ptc)

A. We should consider the context here. You'll note that the main verb in this section is at vs. 18b – "be filled with the Spirit."

B. As one is filled with the Spirit, yielding himself unto God, he (vs. 19) speaks in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in your heart.

C. .20 "giving thanks." So one of the evidences of being filled with the Spirit is thanksgiving. An attitude of gratitude is a consequence of being filled with the Spirit.

D. But the sense here is more than description. This word picks up the sense of a command from the verb that it modifies. So this has the force of a command—"give thanks." We are under obligation to give thanks; thanksgiving is a Christian duty. If you have the Spirit of God within you, you are obligated to be thankful.

E. Paul notes in Romans that one of the primary ways that unbelievers sin is by failing to give thanks to God.

Romans 1:21 *although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, **nor were thankful**, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

At a minimum, God expects creatures made in his image to be thankful. Lack of gratitude is sin.

One time (Lk 17:11f) Jesus healed a group of men who were afflicted by leprosy. Of the 10 who were healed, only one returned to give thanks. Imagine receiving healing from a deadly disease but failing to express your thanks to the one who healed you.

App: Many people simply are not thankful for the blessings in life that they enjoy. Many think that they are just lucky or that they are the source of all the good things they enjoy.

Christians ought to be thankful people. We should express our gratitude to God and to those who do good things for us. Thanksgiving is a command. And the Thanksgiving holiday is a good reminder that we should be thankful.

II. The time of thanksgiving—always

Eph 5:20 *Giving thanks **always** for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*

Ps 34:1 *I will bless/thank the LORD **at all times**: his praise [shall] continually [be] in my mouth.*

1Th 1:2 *We give thanks to God **always** for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;*

1Th 2:13 *For this cause also thank we God **without ceasing**, …*

App: We understand this concept of "at all times" and "without ceasing" as describing the regular, frequent, common actions of life. We give thanks regularly, daily, virtually every time we pray.

Thanksgiving should be a constant attitude in our lives. We may not be able to express our gratitude every single moment of the day, but we can feel a sense of thanksgiving all the time. And we can all express our gratitude frequently, as a regular part of our lives.

Giving thanks should be a normal, regular, frequent, common experience for us. If it is not, we can easily change that.

III. The scope/extent of thanksgiving

Eph 5:20 *Giving thanks always **for all things** unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*

It's one thing to be thankful always—regularly and frequently.

But Paul calls upon us to go beyond that. The text says, literally "giving thanks always **for/concerning** all things" (εὐχαριστοῦντες πάντοτε ὑπὲρ πάντων).

A. We should be thankful in everything.

Php 4:6 *Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.*

1Th 5:18 *In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.*

B. We should be thankful in all circumstances.

Col 3:17 *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.*

C. This expectation that we would give thanks for/in everything whatever in all circumstances is probably one of the most difficult things about this command. God instructs us to be thankful all the time for all things.

D. This would include the trials of life, the afflictions that we experience.

It is naturally difficult for us to be thankful for the trials of life. I do not typically spend much time thanking God for the painful and frustrating aspects of my life. But this command calls upon us to be thankful for all things, including the hard parts of life.

How can we be thankful for trials and afflictions?

1. We can be thankful if we believe that God has ordained them. Trials are not the result of blind chance and mere circumstances. Every aspect of life is under the providence of God. If God ordains it for us, we can be thankful for it.

2. We can be thankful if we believe that, ultimately, trials are for our good. Cf. Rom 5:3-5; Rom 8:28; 1 Peter 1:7; James 1:2

   We believe, by faith, that God can bring good out of our trials.

3. The fact that God allows our trials and adversities creates a whole other set of issues—why is God allowing these problems? Why does God allow us to suffer? Why do the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer?

4. But the other alternative is even worse—God can't do anything about our suffering or that God is not involved at all. Either he is not capable of preventing them, or he does not care to prevent them, or maybe he does not know about the, or, some would say, God does not exist.

5. We must affirm and believe that God exists and, for his own purposes and for morally adequate reasons, God allows us to suffer in various ways.

   a) We are under the curse of sin. We live in a broken world.

   b) We often make our own problems by our bad choice. Gal 6:7-8—we reap what we've sown.

   c) Sometimes we suffer because of the sins of others.

We must trust God through the trials of life. And knowing that God has allowed this trial, we try to be thankful in it or through it.

Job 2:10 [As Job said to his wife:] *Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity (רָע)?" …*

We should strive to find something to be thankful for in every circumstance of life. If nothing else, we can be thankful that our adversity is not worse than it is.

E. We need to draw a couple of distinctions here.

1. Since we are giving thanks *to God* for these things, that implies that we are *not* required to give thanks for the sinful actions of wicked people. I don't think God expects us to be thankful for sin. It is not appropriate to thank God for sin itself.

   Many people in the world, and some of us, have suffered greatly because of the evil actions of wicked people. God does not expect us to be thankful *for sin itself*. I don't know of any examples of this in the Bible.

2. God can use the sinful actions of wicked people for his own good purposes, so we should be thankful in cases like that—i.e., when sinful actions actually result in good outcomes.

   We find many biblical examples where sin or adversity results in good outcomes. The best example of this is the death of Christ.

   Acts 2:23 *Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;* cf. Acts 4:27-28

   E.g., also Gen 50:20—Joseph's brothers meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.

   So again, we see that good can come out of the sinful activities of wicked people.

   Good can come out of natural tragedy—e.g., Ruth and Naomi.

We recognize that after great tragedy and suffering, the result may still be good—e.g., Job.

Another benefit may be that, when we have painful experiences, we develop the ability to sympathize with those who suffer in the same way. So the pain is beneficial in that it makes us more sympathetic to others who suffer.

But it's not the sin itself that is worthy of our thanks; it's the good outcome for which we are thankful. God can use evil for his own good purposes. We can learn from our painful experiences, and thus we can thank God for them.

3. If we believe Rom 8:28 ("All things work together for good…"), then we realize that what happens to us is all part of God's superintending plan. So we can be thankful for God's providence in our lives no matter what it is.

4. So even in the difficulties of life, we find something for which to give thanks.

   Illus.: Cory ten Boom's sister, Betsie, was thankful for the lice and fleas in the barracks in the concentration camp because it kept the guards away. That's an example of a bad thing—lice/fleas—that had a good outcome—protection from the guards.

   If we try, we can usually find something in our adversities for which to be thankful. If nothing else, we can be thankful that our problems are not worse than they are. E.g., none of us are dealing with a lice infestation in a concentration camp.

5. We are thankful that God can use evil for good purposes. We are thankful that even when people intend their actions for evil, God can use them for good. We can overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21).

Trans: Our general attitude should be that of gratitude for all things—everything and whatever God allows in our lives. That can be a very difficult thing to do. Still, we should desire to find something in all occasions to be grateful.

IV. The object of thanksgiving—God/Father

Eph 5:20 *Giving thanks always for all things* ***unto God and the Father*** *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*

A. Since we are thanking God for these things, we believe that God is in some way involved in these things. God is responsible for them in some way. We thank God for all of these things because God is engaged in them. All of the circumstances of life are part of God's providential will for us.

B. If God is *not* involved, then why thank him? If everything is happening by blind chance and random luck, why thank God if he had nothing to do with it?

Some people believe that God has nothing to do with the wicked actions of evil people or with tragic events. They blame all of that on Satan or on bad luck or chance. But that's not true. E.g., story of Job—Satan could do only what God allowed him to do.

We believe that whatever happens to us passes through the hands of God in one way or another.

C. We believe that God is involved in everything happening in creation.

1. God may be involved *directly*—we call that a *miracle*—a direct imposition of God's miraculous power. Such a direct imposition of God's power is fairly rare, but they do happen.

2. God is involved *indirectly*—we call that *providence*—God superintends or governs all things while not directly intervening miraculously. This is the normal way that God governs the universe—providentially, through secondary causes, through the natural laws of cause and effect.

3. The Bible affirms repeatedly that God is sovereign over all things, so that means that all events come under his supervision.

D. Only because God is involved in everything that happens do we have a reason to thank God.

E. So whether God intervenes directly or indirectly, we thank God. Thanking God is acknowledging that God is sovereign. He is providentially in control of all things.

Remember what Job said when tragedy struck him and his family –

Job 1:21 … *the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*

Job recognized that the thing happening in his life were not random or chance events. He acknowledged that God was the ultimate cause of these things. God allowed them to happen.

Likewise, no matter what is going on in our lives, we should affirm that God is involved. No matter what is happening, God is worthy of thanks. We must trust that God has reasons for these things and that God intends them for our good. So we thank God in all things.

Illus.: If you read that notes that Jenny Markle has sent to us, you'll find many expressions of thanks to God even in the midst of great suffering.

V. The basis of thanksgiving—the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

Eph 5:20 *Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father* ***in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ***

A. The only reason we can have a right relationship with God is because of what Jesus has done for us. We have the privilege of making our requests to God because of our faith in Christ.

B. When we pray, we address God, in the name of Jesus, and by the power of the HSp.

1. The "name" of Jesus stands for his entire person and authority. To pray "in Jesus' name" means that we are asking for things that would be consistent with Jesus' character and will.

1 John 5:14–15 *... if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. 15 And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.*

We do not pray for things that would contradict Jesus' will or name.

People often justify their sinful behavior by saying that they prayed about it and believe that it's God's will. It's not God's will if it violates Jesus' name—his character and authority.

All the blessings we enjoy as Christians come to us through Jesus' "name," i.e., his person and will. We should ask only for things that are consistent with Jesus' great name.

2. Further, we approach God through the merits of Jesus, not by virtue of our own goodness or work. We have the right to come to God in prayer only because of our union with Christ and his intercession on our behalf.

   Hebrews 7:25 *Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.*

3. Jesus' name stands for his authority or will; this is the basis for our bold approach to God in prayer.

All of the blessings of God come to us through the person and work of Jesus Christ, and that's why we pray and give thanks in Jesus' name.

BTW, if you do not know Christ as your Savior, you do not have these rights and privileges. John 14:6; Acts 4:12

It's easy to be thankful for *some* things at *some* times in *some* cases. Anyone can do that. Whenever something good happens to us, it's easy to be thankful. We *should* be thankful for all the good things we enjoy.

And we all have many good things for which to be thankful. All of us can list many ways in which God has blessed us. It's easy to be thankful for some of the things in our lives some of the time.

But Paul does not command us here to be thankful for *some* things at *some* times and in *some* cases. He tells us to give thanks *always for all things*. That is not easy, especially when you are experiencing painful, difficult, frustrating things in life.

The only way we can be thankful for some of the more difficult things in life is to recognize that God is sovereign over the details of our lives. If God has allowed or arranged for these life experiences, then there is a good reason for them. Perhaps God intends them, ultimately, for our own good or for the good of others. Perhaps God is working all things together for our good through our trials.

We don't know how God is orchestrating all of these life experience for his glory and for our good, but we trust that he is. And since he is, we can be thankful always for all things because we trust in God through Jesus Christ.