

THE GRACE OF GRATITUDE

(1 Thess 5:18; Psalm 95)

A. When Robinson Crusoe was wrecked on a deserted island, he listed in two columns what he called the evil & the good.

1. In the evil column: he was cast upon a desolate island; in the good column: he was still alive — not drowned, as his ship mates.

2. He was divided from humankind, banished from society, but he was not starving.

3. He had few clothes, but he was in a tropical climate & not many clothes were needed.

4. He had no means of defense, but there were no wild animals such as he had seen on the coast of Africa.

5. He had no one to talk to, but God had placed the ship so near the shore that he could take all that was necessary for his basic needs.

6. So he concluded that there was not any condition so miserable but that one could find something for which to be GRATEFUL.

B. The apostle Paul had such in mind when he wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians.

1. He gave special reference to the spirit of GRATITUDE.

1 Thess 5:18 – *in everything give thanks*; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you – **AND THAT DESPITE...**

1 Thess 1:6-7 – And *you became followers of us & of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction*, with joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became examples to all in M. & A. who believe.

1 Thess 2:14-15 – For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. **For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans**, 15 who killed both the Lord Jesus & their own prophets, & have persecuted us; & they do not please God & are contrary to all men,

2. If ever there was a man who knew a variety of perils, through which he had to live, suffer, & endure, it was Paul the apostle.

[Yet Paul's command applied equally to himself, "In everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus."

But what I want us to notice is that when Paul gave thanks to the Lord, he either could not or would not give thanks for some things.]

I. GRATITUDE: COULD NOT, WOULD NOT

A. Paul COULD not thank God for the possession of material abundance.

1. Because he did not live an affluent lifestyle.
2. In fact, Paul used the term "need [s]" often in his letters, to refer to his own condition.

2 Cor 12:9-10 – And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." ...10 Therefore ***I take pleasure in*** infirmities, in reproaches, in ***needs***, in persecutions, in distresses, ***for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*** (Phil 2:25; 4:12)

B. Paul COULD not thank God for an easy life.

1. For a good portion of his latter years, he had a "thorn in flesh...a messenger of Satan [sent] to buffet [discipline] him" (2 Cor 12:7).
2. He knew the bitterness of hardship: he was stoned at Lystra; forced to leave Thessalonica; jailed at Philippi; considered a fool at Athens; apprehended at Caesarea; taken to Rome as a prisoner & shipwrecked; released then jailed again & put in a dungeon at Rome; & finally martyred.

C. Paul COULD not thank God for excellent speech.

1 Cor 2:1-5 – ***And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God.*** 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ & Him crucified. 3 I was with you in weakness, in fear, & in much trembling. 4 And ***my speech & my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom***, but in demonstration of the Spirit & of power, 5 that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

1. Paul's work was not to impress them with his speaking ability, but to bring them the very Word of God.

D. Paul WOULD not thank God for any superior position he may have had above others.

1. He was not like the Pharisee.

Luke 18:11 – The Pharisee stood & prayed thus with himself, '**God, I thank You that I am not like other men — extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.**

Phil 3:4-8 – ... If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; 6 concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 **But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ.** 8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, & count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

2. Paul is not boasting here, he is explaining that he WOULD not use his former status to any material advantage.

3. And even though he was apostle of Christ, Paul WOULD not thank God that it gave him a superior position above others.

1 Cor 4:9-13 – For **I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last**, as men **condemned to death**; for we have been made **a spectacle** to the world, both to angels & to men. 10 We are **fools** for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are **weak**, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are **dishonored!** 11 To the present hour we both **hunger & thirst**, & we are **poorly clothed, & beaten, & homeless**. 12 And we **labor**, working with our own hands. Being **reviled**, we bless; being **persecuted**, we endure; 13 being **defamed**, we entreat. **We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.**

[There were a few things for which Paul could not or would not be thankful (material wealth, easy life, speaking ability, status) & he was just in doing so.

Now let's get back to the main point of Paul's command, "In everything give thanks."]

II. GRATITUDE: COULD & WOULD

A. Paul said, "This is the will of God for you."

1. In spite of all that may have happened, we are to continue being grateful to God.
2. We are not to let any incident, circumstance or calamity extinguish our spirit of gratitude.
3. It's easy to follow our first inclination when trial comes, & to doubt God's power, wisdom & love for us.
4. But seeking to be grateful for the good things we do have will help us overcome those moments of doubt.

B. **Let's examine** some of the things for which Paul had (and we have) reason to be grateful:

1. Daily food (in the face of a dire emergency, Paul took time to thank the One who provided his food.)

Acts 27:35 – He took bread, & gave thanks to God in the presence of them all: & when he had broken it, he began to eat.

2. Faithful Christians (they were first on his prayer list & often in his book of memories.)

Rom 1:8 – FIRST, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, [WHY!] that **your FAITH** is spoken of throughout the whole world.

Phil 1:3-4 – I thank my God upon every REMEMBRANCE of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy

3. God's comfort in times of anxiety.

2 Cor 2:12-14 – Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, & a door was opened to me by the Lord, 13 **I had no rest in my spirit,** because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.

2 Cor 7:6 – Nevertheless **God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus,**

2:14 – Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, & through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

4. God's deliverance from a weak human nature in the flesh.

Rom 7:21-25 – I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. 22 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. 23 But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, & bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. 24 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 **I thank God — through Jesus Christ our Lord!** So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

5. Kindness in trouble.

Acts 28:15 – And from there, when the brethren heard about us, they came to meet us as far as Appii Forum & Three Inns. **When Paul saw them, he thanked God & took courage.**

6. The indescribable gift (the grace of God offered in J. C., which brought Jew & Gentile together in one body.)

2 Cor 9:14-15 – **Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!**

[Are we thankful for these spiritual blessings in C.J.?)

CLOSING

- So not just around Thanksgiving, but every day we should reflect on the importance of this text (**1 Thess 5:18**).
 - Gratitude or “giving thanks” is a mind driven response to what the Holy Spirit has revealed to be the blessings of God’s people.
 - **Gratitude** helps us over the rugged mountains, down the steep slopes & through the dark valleys of life – *because being thankful is an act of trust in God’s promise & power to see us through.*
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- It makes our heavy loads lighter & our sadness brighter. It turns grief into comfort, mourning into joy, defeat into victory, doubt into assurance, fear into faith, hate into love, darkness into light, death into life.
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- Do you not feel thankful for much? *Try giving thanks “in everything” & watch your grateful attitude grow – and watch your blessings from the Father increase, for He desires to bless His thankful children.*

GOD'S PLAN FOR OUR SALVATION:

Hear the gospel of Jesus Christ; read it in your Bible: Acts 2; 3; 13; Rom 10:17

Believe Jesus to be Lord and Christ, the Son of God and Savior: Acts 2:36; John 3:16; 8:24; 20:30-31; Acts 4:12; Titus 1:4

Repent of your sins: Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; 1 John 3:4

Confess your faith in Jesus Christ: Matt 10:32-33; Acts 8:37; Rom 10:9-10

Be baptized for the forgiveness of your sins: Acts 2:38; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27; Acts 2:38; 1 Pet 3:21

Be obedient to the Lord, He will be your Judge: Titus 2:11-12; Heb 5:9; 2 John 9; Rev 2:10; John 12:48