

Do You Want to Know God's Will?

In Everything Give Thanks

1 Thessalonians 5:18; Luke 17:15-16

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One sin that we as Christians may not often consider that we commit throughout the day is that of an unthankful heart and life. For we do not have to speak out bitterly against God in order to be unthankful, all we need to do is to forget to express our praise and thanks to our God for His many tender mercies toward us and our family throughout the day. We may never forget to give God thanks for our food when we sit to eat, but for us to be thankful in terms of all that we have freely received from the Lord, it is our duty and our privilege to be expressing a heart of thanksgiving to the Lord daily in all circumstances. In fact, this is clearly revealed as God's will: "In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

Let us consider the following two main points in regard to a thankful heart: (1) A Thankful Heart Is the Will of God (1 Thessalonians 5:18); and (2) A Thankful Heart Is an Evidence of Faith in the Lord (Luke 17:15-16).

I. A Thankful Heart is the Will of God (1 Thessalonians 5:18).

A. The Apostle Paul had received a report from Timothy (his dear son in the faith) that the Christians in Thessalonica were standing fast and firm in the face of fierce persecution, and Paul sends this letter to the Thessalonian Church to express his thankful heart to God for them that they were persevering in the onslaught of the enemy's attacks against them. As these new converts are facing persecution for their faith in Christ, Paul concludes his letter with this exhortation that we find in 1 Thessalonians 5:18.

1. Literally, Paul commands (not suggests): "In everything give thanks continually" (present tense). This is not something a Christian occasional does, but is what characterizes a Christian (not a "super Christian" but a Christian). We have no excuse for not continually giving thanks to our glorious Savior who loved us, elected us in Christ, redeemed us from the curse, and gave us life to believe Him and live to His praise now and for all eternity.

2. Note also that there is a reason given for this command: "for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you". Many Christians want to know the will of God for their lives ("What would the Lord have me to do or not to do in this or that situation?"). Here is the unquestionable will of God for you. Many want to know the will of God, but how many want to do the will of God (without making excuses as to why they cannot do it). Why should the Lord reveal to us His will in a questionable matter when we are not even doing His will in an unquestionable matter (like this)? When it is your earnest desire to do the revealed will of God (whatever it is that He commands in His Word), He will give you more light and direction in other areas of His will.

3. But you say, "How can I be thankful in all things: in sickness, in the abuse I have suffered, in broken relationships, in persecution, in lack of work, and in struggles with besetting sins? It is possible to give thanks in everything because you do not do so in your own strength, but in the strength of Christ (Philippians 4:13). To say you cannot be thankful in all things is to call God a liar. Let's not make excuses, but rather acknowledge our sin, our need, and flee to Christ.

B. To whom is thanks offered?

1. Giving thanks is not offered to chance ("I was just lucky"). There is no such thing as luck. How dishonoring to God it is to attribute His goodness to luck.

2. It is not simply to be thankful in the abstract without identifying to whom one is thankful (“I’m so thankful”). It is to humbly offer to the one true living God of the Bible our sincere, cheerful gratitude for benefits received from His gracious hand, and bestowed for no merit in us (“I thank God through Jesus Christ” Romans 7:25). That is why a National Day of Thanksgiving that does not designate the Triune God of the Bible as the One who is praised is an abomination.

C. Note that the command is “IN everything give thanks”, not “FOR everything give thanks”.

1. Certainly, you are not to be thankful for sin, for sin’s sake; or for tyranny, for tyranny’s sake; or for abuse, for abuse’s sake; or for persecution, for persecution’s sake; or for illness, for illness’s sake; or for death, for death’s sake.

2. The command is rather that you are to give thanks continually “IN everything.” In everything that you face in this life, you are to give thanks because the sovereign and good hand of God is at work bringing to pass His most wise and hold plan for your life as a Christian. I do not know what you are facing and how awful is your pain and heartache, but God knows; and He has ordained it for His glory and your good (Romans 8:28). If the suffering of Christ was ordained by God and used to bring about your salvation, you must learn to trust Him that He has ordained your suffering for His glory and your good (2 Corinthians 12:9). Do not listen to the devil, “There is no reason. It’s meaningless.”

3. To give thanks “in everything” means that you are to thank God, not only in the big things of life, but also in the small things; not only in extraordinary things in life, but also in the ordinary things (even in the water you drink and in the breath you take). It means you are to thank God, not only for mercies presently received, but for past mercies as well, and even for the everlasting joy that is reserved for you in heaven. It means you are to thank God, not merely in blessings you receive, but also in blessings others receive. It means you are to thank God, not merely in times of gain, but also in times of loss (Job 1:21).

D. What is it in your life that hinders and prevents a thankful heart throughout the day?

1. **Unbelief and doubt.** Do you believe the Lord’s mercies are new every morning and every day (Lamentations 3:22-23)? Do you believe the Lord is working out that which is good for you in what you are presently facing (Genesis 50:20)? What do you have to be thankful for if you do not remember the sin, slavery, and condemnation Jesus has delivered you from?

2. **Worldliness.** Being consumed with the things of this life will blind you to the mercies of God all around you. You will be too busy to see them and to be thankful for them.

3. **A critical spirit.** Being consumed with the sins of others, with the failures of others, with the unfulfilled expectations of others to meet your needs, so that your focus is more upon others than upon your own need of Christ, your own sins, and your own sanctification.

4. **Discontentment.** Looking for joy in that which cannot satisfy will only lead to an unthankful heart of murmuring against the Lord for what you do not have. Who or what is your life (Philippians 1:21). Only when you make Jesus your life and reason for living throughout the day will you have a thankful heart. Even in the delays of life, be thankful. God is at work. He doesn’t work according to your schedule or mine.

5. **Fear.** Fear of people and circumstances will quickly put out the flame of thanksgiving. Worry and anxiety will swallow up a thankful heart. Fear is focused upon self. Thanksgiving is focused upon Christ.

6. **Forgetfulness** (Psalm 103:1-6).

E. What will promote a thankful heart? A thankful heart is truly the work of the Holy Spirit—it is not a mere outward form of godliness. A thankful heart to the Lord in all circumstances is indeed the power of God working within your heart. Mere external acts of obedience may mask our unthankful hearts, but a thankful heart cannot be masked and hidden—it will be expressed.

1. **Trust** in the loving, sovereign, most wise God, who can do you no wrong. Is he trustworthy? If you have trusted Him for the greatest need you have (forgiveness and eternal life), you can trust Him for every need that you have. You can rest in His promises which are all “Yea” and “Amen” in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 1:20).

2. **Pray and commune** with Christ daily. If your heart is not set upon the Lord, you will not be thankful to the Lord.

3. **Practice being thankful**—do the will of God; don’t just talk about it. If there were very small particles of iron mixed in a dish of sand, you could run your fingers through the sand, and not find them with your naked eye. But if you took a magnet and ran it through the sand, all of the many particles of iron invisible to the eye would be drawn to the magnet. The unthankful heart (like your fingers in the sand) finds no mercies of God for which to praise Him; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day (like the magnet) and you will find throughout the day many mercies and blessings for which to praise the Lord.

II. **A Thankful Heart Is an Evidence of Faith in the Lord (Luke 17:15-16).**

A. It is a mark of the wicked that they have no thankful heart to God for His mercies (Romans 1:21). It is a sign of apostasy in the last days that men "shall be unthankful" (2 Timothy 3:2). On the other hand, it is the mark of the saints on earth and in heaven that they are full of thanksgiving to the Lord (Colossians 2:6-7; Revelation 7:11-12).

B. Here the Lord teaches that a thankful heart to God is an evidence of saving faith in your life. Ten lepers cried out to be healed. Ten lepers were healed. But only one returned to give thanks to the Lord Jesus, and evidenced his faith in doing so.

1. The Samaritan’s thanksgiving was not rehearsed or vain repetition (“Praise the Lord” can become profane speech when it is used without a genuine expression of thanks to the Lord). A begrudging thanksgiving is no sincere thanksgiving at all (“Well if I have to do it, I will”). There is nothing that will encourage others to joyful service like a sincere word of thanksgiving for their help. It will lighten the load like few things will when one knows that his labors are sincerely appreciated.

2. The Samaritan’s thanksgiving was not a silent or hidden thanksgiving, but rather a vocal and expressive in giving thanks to Christ, and so should our thanksgiving be. The nine lepers opened wide their mouth to plead for Christ’s mercy, but when the Lord Jesus healed them, they became strangely speechless. Earnest thanksgiving to God and others can no more be buried in the soul of a believer than Christ could remain buried in the grave. It will arise even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death.

3. The Samaritan’s thanksgiving was not of a broad, general kind that was directed more in a shot-gun style at life in general (“Oh, I’m so thankful for the food we can enjoy, because many people in poor countries have so little”). The Samaritan fell before the feet of Christ and poured out his praise to the Lord. Learn to itemize the mercies of God to you, so that even when you are passing through severe trials and painful afflictions, you never run out of things for which to be thankful.

4. Never forget you were once unclean (spiritual lepers) before God, cut off from a living union and communion with Christ. There is certainly no need to relive the filth and corruption of your past life (or mine) so as to sensationalize your testimony before man. But at the same time there is an ever present need to remember what God has rescued you from and blessed you with (like Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:9-10). Let even each painful memory of your past turn your attention to the mercy of Christ who has rescued you, rather than to a heart of bitterness. We don’t live in the past, but we do remember the past, so that we never forget the tender mercies of the Lord. “In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”

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