

THE WILL OF GOD

Lesson 12

People complain. They complain about their jobs, bosses, teachers, politicians, taxes, traffic, sports teams, whether it's too hot or too cold, too wet or too dry. The list is too long to complete because it seems like we can find something negative about any circumstance of life. Complaining is the result of dissatisfaction and a lack of appreciation for someone or something. This dissatisfaction is rooted in the misguided notion that contentment is only possible if circumstances and other people were different. God's word teaches believers in Christ that contentment is possible regardless of circumstances or the behavior of others. This contentment and appreciation for what God in His goodness has allowed in our lives expresses itself in gratitude, or better yet thankfulness. Pastor David Spurbeck makes this comment about giving thanks to God, "Thanksgiving communication...is a response to the good grace of God that has been expressed in His provision of something to the believer or others. It is a mental and emotional activity in response to the working of God." This "attitude of gratitude" in all things is foreign to the unbeliever and the carnal Christian. Scripture demonstrates that thanksgiving is something that God desires for every believer but it is only possible for those that are spiritual.

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

Paul's statement to the Thessalonians regarding God's desirous will is difficult to swallow for people so used to complaining. It is obvious from experience that giving thanks in all things is no easy task. It requires a mindset, or a perspective, that only comes when we see things from God's perspective. Thankfulness in all things results from a Spirit-filled life.

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God" - Eph. 5:18-20

Speaking to oneself in psalms and hymns, making melody, giving thanks, and submitting are all participles connected to the verb "be filled". The verb "be filled" carries the idea to allow the Spirit to fill you with what you are lacking. The Spirit will fill us with this "attitude of gratitude" if we allow Him to work in us.

I. Unthankfulness abounds

A. As a result of man's fallen nature, the lost are inherently unthankful

1. Rom. 1:21 - man's lack of respect and honor for God resulted in unthankfulness
2. Jude 16 - false teachers demonstrate an unthankful spirit

B. Believers can also have an unthankful attitude - 2 Ti. 3:2

II. Believer's words should express gratitude instead of foolishness and crude joking - Eph. 5:4

III. Examples of thankfulness to God

A. For His character - Heb. 13:15; Col. 4:2

B. For His salvation - 2 Thess. 2:13

C. For His grace - 1 Cor. 1:14; 2 Cor. 9:15

D. For providing spiritual victory - 1 Cor. 15:57; 2 Cor. 2:14

E. For liberty - Rom. 14:6

F. For other believers - 1 Thess. 1:2

1. Testimony and growth - Rom. 1:8; Rom. 16:4; 2 Thess. 1:13

2. Spiritual receptivity - 1 Thess. 2:13

G. For marriage and food - 1 Ti. 4:3

H. For everything - Col. 3:17; Eph. 5:20

1. The gospel preached of contention - Phil. 1:16-18

2. Weaknesses, infirmities, reproaches - 2 Cor. 12:6

THE WILL OF GOD

Lesson 12

3. Sharing in Christ's sufferings - 1 Pe. 4:13

Interestingly, there is a stark contrast between what the New Testament writers express thanks for and what is commonly mentioned in modern church services. The overwhelming majority of references to the giving of thanks in the epistles focuses on spiritual matters while church prayer meetings tend to emphasize temporal and physical needs like health, jobs, transportation, etc. This does not diminish the importance of gratitude as a part of God's desirous will in these matters but it does demonstrate how often we focus on what we can "see" and experience.

As mentioned previously, an "attitude of gratitude" in all things is not our natural disposition. The scriptures show how this mindset is only possible when the believer is spiritual, or allowing the Spirit to fill them with God's attitudes. This mindset does not come overnight for anyone, even the apostle Paul who stated to the Philippians that he had to learn to be content regardless of his circumstances.

"Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need." - Phil. 4:11-12

What do you find yourself struggling to be thankful for?