

The Benefit of Thankful Words

Ephesians 5:20
November 20, 2016

For a long time, I didn't realize that I wasn't very good at saying "thank you." Oh, it's not that I wasn't saying it often enough or at the appropriate times. But, apparently, I learned to say "thank you" the wrong way. The problem was in my pronunciation. In fact, I still struggle to remember the correct phonetics for saying "thank you."¹ You see, linguists will tell you that a proper "th" sound is more of a dental than a palatal. All that means is that when you say the word "thanks," your tongue should touch the bottom edge of your top teeth, a dental. But somehow, I developed the habit of touching my tongue to the roof of my mouth, my palate, which makes a word into a palatal.

The effect of this is that it makes it sound like I'm saying "dank you" rather than "thank you." The irony in this is that "danking" someone may actually be more polite than "thanking" them, because when you pronounce a dental, you stick your tongue out a little. Kind of rude right? Just for fun, turn to the person sitting next to you or look in the mirror and say "thank you." Watch and see, you actually stick your tongue out! Well, believe it or not, this does connect with the sermon today. Let's take some time to think about, not so much HOW we say thank you, but rather WHY we say thank you. What is the benefit of thankful words?

Last week's sermon taught about how "being filled with the Spirit" results in 5 different participles. One of those resulting participles is in Ephesians 5:20, "always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." The benefit of always giving thanks is that it demonstrates, in a tangible way, that we are always being filled with the Spirit. It's a daily activity for us to depend on God's Spirit to equip and empower us for thankful living as a Christ-follower.²

"Always" giving thanks also means that we give thanks "on every occasion"³ This means in the good times and the bad; in all circumstances. Let me ask you a question: When is it most difficult to be thankful; in the good times or the bad times? It may be surprising to some of you that I would argue that it's often most difficult to give genuine thanks in the good times. I say this because oftentimes in our lives, when things are going well, it's easy to start taking our blessings for granted. We relax a bit and forget just how blessed we are. We may even begin to feel a bit of entitlement, "yes, I deserve this good life I've worked so hard for." In a life of abundance, we may even begin to forget God. Deuteronomy 8:17-18 urges God's people to remember the Lord even in good times: "You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth..." Therefore, one benefit of always giving thanks is that it helps us keep a proper perspective, even in the good times. It keeps us from forgetting about God when life is going well; when we may seem to have a little less need for Him.

Ephesians 5:20 also teaches us the benefit of giving thanks for everything. Some things can be especially difficult for us to be thankful for. For example, there will be times when our job or schooling just isn't going the way we want it to. There are some weeks or even months when we literally have to drag ourselves out of bed in the morning, force down a few cups of coffee or a few cans of Mountain Dew, and trudge our way back to work or school.



¹ I guess I needed "Hooked on Phonics." But, why don't they just spell it Fonics? ©

² This isn't just something we do for appearances. Rather, it's a genuine result from being filled with the Spirit.

³ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 640). New York: United Bible Societies.

Sometimes our families can see tough times.⁴ We vowed at our wedding “for better or worse.” But right now you may be in one of the seasons of worse.

Occasionally our friendships will ebb and flow. There will be some times when our best buds just aren't there for us when we need them. They'll get distracted by a significant other or caught up in some new hobby or they'll find a new friend to hang out with instead of us for a while. And there are other hurts and disappointments in life as well. In the midst of these sad realities, here's the good news: as Christ-followers who are being filled with God's Spirit, we can find a way to give thanks for EVERYTHING.

Don't wait for life's circumstances to improve before you begin to give thanks. A distinctive of the Christian faith is giving thanks even during times of trouble. Romans 5:3-5 reminds us, "...we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; 4 perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us." Facing the troubles of this life as opportunities for growth shows that our hope is not in the things of this life but in the God who gives us life. Struggle is often part of His refining work in our lives. When we understand, that all of the things we are going through in life are used for God's purposes, it helps us to endure rather than give up. It helps us acknowledge that life is not always supposed to be easy. The Bemidji High School Link Leaders choose a great slogan this year for the back of their t-shirts, "I'm not telling you it's going to be easy, I'm telling you it's going to be worth it." This is also a good motto for the Christian life.

Ephesians 5:20 ends by clarifying the benefit of giving thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. It's very appropriate to give thanks to God on Communion Sunday. Everything for which we could possibly give thanks is a gift from God.⁵ And, apart from Jesus, we wouldn't be in relationship with God. We would have no access to God the Father or to His Spirit. So, giving thanks to God is rooted in Jesus.⁶

One key aspect that we need to recognize from Ephesians 5:20 is that it's not so much teaching us about "BEING thankful" as it's teaching us about "GIVING thanks."⁷ This is an action verb. So the idea here is to express your thanks, to say it out loud!

It is good to feel appreciative but it's even better to verbalize appreciation!^{8 9} There's no benefit to the best of Scrabble words if you don't lay them on the game board! Psalm 107:1-2b says, "Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the LORD tell their story..." The NKJV puts it this way: "Let the redeemed of the LORD say so!" So, why not do that right now? Find someone today with whom you can share a word of thanks to God. Share something with a friend or neighbor that will bless and benefit them today. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 reminds us to, "Rejoice always, pray continually, **give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.**"



This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on November 20, 2016 by Pastor Jerry Johnson.

⁴ See 1 Corinthians 7:28

⁵ James 1:17

⁶ Ultimately, this section of verses in Ephesians 5:18-20 reveals a powerful Trinitarian focus: Being filled with the Holy Spirit (from v. 18) results in giving thanks to God the Father in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ (from v. 20). O'Brien, Peter T., *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Eerdmans, 1999, p. 398.

⁷ εὐχαριστέω = "To express appreciation for benefits or blessings" Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 415). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁸ William Arthur Ward said, "Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it." *Our Daily Bread*, "Unexpressed Gratitude" November 22, 2011, by Cindy Hess Kasper

⁹ Ephesians 4:29 taught us that our words should benefit those who listen.