

In Everything Give Thanks

By Paris Reidhead*

Will you turn, please, to Ephesians, Chapter 6, verse, 18. The text that engaged us two Lord's Days ago, two Sundays ago, we considered this as Aspects of Prayer. The text reads:

“Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

We have established that the All Prayer can well and properly be understood with every form of prayer, continuing in prayer with every form of prayer, implying that there are different kinds of prayer. We saw two weeks ago that we begin the Christian life by prayer. We are savingly united to Christ by prayer, the sinner's prayer; God be merciful to me a sinner, and save me for Jesus' sake. It is faith from the heart reaching out to embrace the Lord Jesus and receive Him that saves us, and brings us out of death and into life. And we would call this the first kind of prayer, that which reaches out across two thousand years to the time He died, and was buried, and was raised again, to receive Him.

This is to be but the beginning of our prayer life. It is not the ending at all. We saw that it is essential for us, for our sakes, in coming to God in prayer, to have before us the prayer of affirmation, continually affirming before the Lord; not to teach Him by any means, but for our own sakes. And I might add also, we are dealing with principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this age, as is set forth in the verses just preceding. And it is exceedingly important that we should it have clearly in our minds and constantly before us that we once were the servants of sin, we once were the bond slaves of Satan; but by our renunciation of the god of this world, and our receiving of the Lord Jesus Christ, we have passed from the kingdom of this world into the Kingdom of God's dear Son. Just as a soldier daily will stand before the flag and reaffirm his allegiance, and reaffirm his intention to defend that flag and be available for its protection, so we ought daily to affirm again the fact that when Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, He had us in mind; We were the sinners for whom He died, and that His blood was shed for us, and we repented of our sin.

Now it is not to repeat the work that was done, but it is to establish the platform, the foundation, upon which our whole prayer life rests. And we cannot over estimate or emphasize the value of the prayer of affirmation. Again we saw the prayer of brokenness, and confession, a distinct kind of prayer that ought to have had and probably will someday in the future its own treatment in the full time allowed. Psalm 51, being that Psalm which has been given by the Spirit of God to unveil to us the nature of the prayer of brokenness, and the evidence of a broken heart. How important it is that we should remember that we never outgrow our need for brokenness. How sad it is that sometimes we as Christians, long in the way, feel that because of the distance we have traversed, the length of time we have been in Christ, that there is no place longer for brokenness. But I will venture this that if at some time in the past you grieve the Spirit of God, and did not deal with that, did not meet Him on that issue, that you have not grown since then, that this became a roadblock in your experience, and that the years, whether they have been two, twenty, have found no spiritual progress. There has been no further unveiling of Himself. You may have been faithful. Oh yes. You may have been ever in attendance and continued responsibility, and I am confident that God is grateful for this. In one sense He appreciates that faithfulness on your part; but it has become a roadblock. There has been no further growth. There has been no further development.

It is as though one were travelling from New York to Chicago, and they got off at Erie, Pennsylvania, and the train went on. They did not reach Chicago, and they are still in Erie. And so it would be that if you, back in some point in the past, grieved him, some attitude, some issue, some point, and have not dealt with that, you have not grown since. May have been all around you, on everyone else's hand there has been blessing, but this became an effective roadblock. It has stopped the flow in your life. This is the point of beginning, and revival for you will be that time when you see that, deal with it, take it out, and it is before the Lord. That is why in the past when we have periods when the Spirit of God has led us to emphasize the prayer of brokenness, because it opens the channel for the flow of blessing. We ought to keep constantly a broken spirit. Not that we are introspectively simply flattering ourselves, not that at all, but that when we grieve Him we are sensitive to the fact that we

have grieved Him. You do not need to wait for the next revival meeting. You can know at that moment that you have grieved Him. There will be an inner awareness of distress. And that lack of peace, that distress will cause you to say, Lord, what is it that has grieved Thee, what is it that has touched Thy heart, what attitude have I had, what action have I taken, what word have I said. And as we wait before Him with the Word, the Spirit of God will point out whatever it is in us that grieved Him.

That is the point of dealing. How pathetic it is to allow that which could have been dealt with at the moment, to become like a little sliver that gets in under the fingernail, and it begins to fester, and becomes infected, and inflamed, until finally major surgery is necessary. And how easy it is really, in the light of however hard it may be at the moment, how much easier it is to take the place of brokenness, and confession at the point of need. This is the kind of prayer.

And when you come to the Lord in prayer, there ought to be the prayer of affirmation, there ought to be the prayer of brokenness. But I see today that the Spirit of God is pressing me to share with you another kind of prayer. And it is not new; but you can be sure of this that, if there is anything very new that comes over this pulpit, it will not be very true. And so I make no apology for carrying you over ground that you have seen in the past; because I am not at all certain that you have done that which may, however, emphatically been presented in the past. I am certain also that the verse that shall be to us the text for the time is one of the most difficult verses in the Word of God for me to obey. And I must be continually brought back to it. And being woven on the same loom, whether or not the whoof is the same, be sure the warp is the same. The problem in my heart is to some degree the problem in yours. And so I think as you see Ephesians 5:20, you will agree with me that this has been no little source of difficulty, and one that must be clearly set before you.

I have reference to the Prayer of Thanksgiving, the prayer of thanksgiving. Notice how it is linked here to the Spirit filled life. And so lest anyone should think that this is that which only characterized those who may not be able in their own hearts to rest in the fact that they know the fullness of the Spirit, I would say that you need not feel for a moment that after you have come to such a relationship it will be in some respects any easier, because it is following that that He gives us... You notice in verse 18 and 19, He says, "Be filled with the Spirit. Speaking to yourselves in Psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing, making melody in your heart to the Lord," the overflow of the Spirit's presence.

I would like to think that it would become automatic in your life that when you knew the fullness of the Holy Ghost that you would thus without further thought on your part give thanks for all things. I would like to think that. But experience, and observation, and study has made me convinced that it is not so. This is a commandment; this is to be viewed as a commandment of the Holy Ghost. How easy it is for some minds, mine is not one of them, to say, The Lord Jesus kept the law for me so I do not need to keep it. I find that He said, If you love Me keep My commandments. This is not a lawless life, for these are commandments of the Holy Ghost which he will enable us to keep. They flow not out of our own resources, but out of His presence. And I will further proceed to say that walking in the fullness of the Spirit of God is going to make the keeping of this far easier than it would have been otherwise. And so it is true that we are commanded to be filled with the Spirit, and this is the normal Christian life, and the ministry to which God has called all of us demands that we be filled with the Spirit. You cannot say, Well it does not apply to me, because I do not testify to walking in the fullness of the Spirit. For this text is not alone.

In I Thessalonians, 5:18, it has its collateral text which enforces it even more strongly perhaps than the one that I have felt led to present as the text. For there it is in this setting, "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." And to disobey the Lord here is to bring upon our heads all the griefs that disobedience ever brings. It is an extremely difficult text to obey, because it cuts right across the grain of our natural temperament. Our whole cultural climate is one in which we are to suffer wrong or loss, we are charged by the insistence of our neighbors to see to it that the wrong is rectified.

And so the whole spirit, and atmosphere, and climate of the land in which we live, and every land is similar. When our Lord said such things as when someone would take away your coat, give him your cloak; when he would take away your overcoat, give him your suit coat also. Essentially of course the design was a little different, you understand, but the meaning was there. When somebody compels you to go with him a mile, do not just go reluctantly a mile as in the case of the soldiers of Rome that

would seize upon someone and say, Carry my load for a mile. Don't just go the mile. Go two miles with him. When someone smites you on one cheek, don't just wait and count ten hurriedly and then come after him. Turn the other cheek. Give him an opportunity. Well this is the ethics of the Christian life in this sense that the Lord is trying to imply, to us that the important thing is not our possessions, or our time, or our person, that we are not primarily charged with the protection of these as the end of our being, as is the world. We have abandoned our persons to the Lord, we have given our possessions to the Lord, we have surrendered our time to the Lord, and we are the Lord's. And therefore the implication is, You should not make you primary object the protection of your own rights. Remember that God is interested in you, and He will take care of that which is yours.

And so the ethic of the Lord here, as He has presented it, would establish for us the very foundation upon which we can obey this text.

Now if you still hold that your possessions are essentially yours and not His, if you have not understood or heard Him say, that if any man doth not forsake all that he hath he cannot be My disciple, putting His root right on that third objection to coming into His feast that was, I am sorry, I can't come to your feast, --remember the excuse--because I have bought a piece of ground as an investment, and I have to go and measure my ground and see that I have got enough ground, and the protection of my ground is going to keep me from Your will.

Now our Lord said back in Luke 14 that if any many doth not forsake all that he hath— in other words, My Lordship must transcend all personal possessions. And again, if anyone does not hate his father, and his mother, and his brother and his sister, and his own life, he cannot be My disciple. And our Lord said, My Lordship must transcend all human relationships. And finally He said, "If any man does not take up his cross and come follow Me, he cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:27) And the cross, one's occupancy of a cross, of course eliminates all choice of time and activity and career. It is all over the moment that one has been nailed to a cross. And so, our Lord has established these as the premises upon which the Christian life is based. This is the foundation upon which it rests. He is Lord of all.

Now I say, if you have had any question here, you are going to have some problems with the text. If you have not abandoned to Him the sovereignty of your time, you are going to resent it terribly when anyone says, Do this, will you. You are going to withdraw from it, because that is my time, and I do not want anybody intruding on my time. But if it His time, it is quite different.

Again, someone says, Those are my possessions, But if they are His possessions, it is different. Again, don't insult me; don't hurt me, because this is my person. But if it is His person it is different. Then you see, when you have abandoned to Him the right to time, and the right to possession, and the right to your person, and the right to all your relationships, and you believe that He is worthy of such an abandonment... Now if He is not worthy, then there is no use talking. The only one who is worthy, of abandoning to Him in a glad outpouring of love, and of our time, and our possessions, and our person, and a right to relationships is God, and Jesus Christ is God. Therefore, He said to all who came to Him, Being God, I demand this of you, being God, I ask this of you, being God I am worthy of this. So if you meet Him as God, then you believe that as God He is going to be interested in what is His, and His Word says that He has put His sovereignty, His omnipotence, all that He is to the end of seeing that since you are His, everything that touches you shall be to the end of making you like Christ. Therefore, when someone comes and touches your time, it is not your time, it is His; and touches your person, it isn't your person, it is His; and he touches your relationship, it isn't you relationship, is it His; he touches your possessions, they are not your possessions, they are His. And they couldn't touch you which are His unless He which is yours allowed it. And that is why He can come to you and enforce this text, saying, Giving thanks always for all things.

But I say, It is very difficult. Why? Because you see, I live so close to my person, and I live in such proximity to these relationships. And I so involved with these things called possessions that it is extremely difficult for me to constantly live in the light of the fact that they are not mine, but they are His. This is where the problem comes. Because it is one thing for me in the moment of commitment to say, Lord, of my time Lord of my body, Lord of my relationships, Lord of my talents, Lord of my money. Yes, that is right, and that has to be. But you know, it is a very difficult thing three weeks from then when somebody

comes and puts their finger on that which had been yours for such a long time and three weeks ago had been committed to Him; it is just so very difficult for me at least to remember that it is not mine at all, that it is. And that after all if He allowed it to be touched and it is His, why should I interfere with what is His. Why can't I have confidence enough that He is God worthy to have received it, He is God big enough to protect it. And if He wants it touched why should I interfere. You see, this is where the difficulty arises. I am living so close to it.

You know, some people can see things quite well if it is quite close to them; and other things are more easily seen if they are further away. Some folks say, My eyes are all right, but my arms just are not long enough. I just can't reach far enough. Nothing has happened to my eyes though. So it is that we discover that we cannot see far enough. We cannot see past the moment to realize that after all this time, this body, these possessions; these talents are not things that are intrinsically mine any more. They are His.

Now when does someone become resentful? When do you become resentful? Isn't it when they touch something that belongs to you? Then there is a reaction to this. You should not touch mine. Perhaps it is your reputation; you have earned it. And somebody comes and assaults you. They reflect upon it. They become critical. And you resent that. You shouldn't touch my reputation. You shouldn't touch my name. You shouldn't touch my honor. But doesn't this reaction of resentment, this reaction attempt to vindicate and prove, doesn't this represent that we have lost sight of the fact that we are not our own. We are bought with a price. Doesn't this represent the fact that we have gotten too nearsighted, and we have forgotten that back there at that point of crisis, we said, Lord, my reputation is in Your hands; Lord, my possessions are in Your hands; Lord, my body is in Your hands; Lord, my life is in Your hands; everything is Yours. Now someone comes and touches it and we defend it as though it were ours. We have a quit claim deed.

I sold the house down in Orlando before I came from Florida here. I don't know what they have done to it, but I am frank to tell you I couldn't be less concerned; because I don't own it any more. I remember a few months before it was sold someone was renting it. There were times when I said, Oh, I wonder what they are doing to that house. But when that deed was signed, I lost all sense of emotional concern. Oh, that we could come to the place where the deed to the Lord is so completely signed and transferred that emotional concern over the I, me, my, and mine, has been relieved.

Now let us apply this in prayer. How is this going to become a spiritual therapy to protect you? I believe that if, in the affirmation that you have in your prayer life, you can affirm over and over again, Lord, I do not own my time; I have given it to You. I do not own my talent; I have given it to You. I do not own my body; I have given it to You. I do not own these relationships; I have given them to You. I do not own these possessions; they are yours. If in that affirmation of our recognition of the extent of His Lordship we are honest, we are going to continually insulate ourselves against the emotional effect of some intrusion upon some of our former rights. That is one way. Oh, that this should be constantly before you and affirmed by you. He is Lord of all. He is Lord of my body. He is Lord of my relationships. He is Lord of my time and talent. He is Lord of my possessions. This ought to be the affirmation of our hearts constantly before us.

Then in order that our hearts should be further insulated, in prayer there ought to be the prayer of thanksgiving; which means that whenever there comes to our mind something that might have been at one time our own private ownership of ourselves and things the occasion for resentment that now we are going to reinforce what we affirm by thanking the Lord. Thank you, Father, for this. That you for that. If you want to leave this house with a balm of Gilead in your heart that will protect you and insulate you in all the days of the week to come, then even while I speak in these few closing moments you let your mind go to the source of the last bitterness, and the last grief, and the last heartache, and the last uncertainty, and say, Thank You, Father. Even while I speak, if you reach back into that little infected crypt of your memory and take out that thing that has been the source of such irritation and such grief, and say, Thank you, Father; Thank You for letting this happen; Thank You, Father, for letting that happen; Thank You for this; Thank you for that. It all crowded me to You. Thank you, Father.

If you will do that, you are going to leave this house so inwardly released that it is going to be as though your system filled with poison, breaking out with boils, has just been sweetly and completely drained of all infection and the relief that comes from fever subsiding and health returning will return to your spirit, and you are insulated, you are protected.

Giving thanks always for all things. This is a prayer. It is done in prayer. It is done by taking the things to which we are most sensitive. God knows the place in which we are most sensitive, and so He allows us to have more irritation there so that we will be constantly pressed to Him to overcome the sensitivity. Did you know that? If you have some particular thing by which you are most frequently irritated. I know. Missionaries tell me, There is just one thing that I hope I don't have when I get to the Mission Field. I hope I don't have a missionary that does... I don't say anything anymore. I know what they are going to have when they get to the mission field. I know. I know the Lord loves them too much to let them get by with this, you see. So they write back and say, You remember what I said when I got to the Mission field I hope I wouldn't have? Well I have. Pray for me. The Lord loves them. O yes. The same is true with you here. Someone says, You know one thing I'll never do. I'll never. Ah hah... I'm not the sum of all wisdom yet, but I'll tell you this. I know what is going to happen.

I know what is going to happen. I'm the little fellow you know that went around saying, Well one thing I'll never do. I'll never go back into the pastorate again, and if I ever should go back one place I'll never go and that is to a big city like New York. I said that ten years ago.

Oh, I am so glad that God loves you and me so much that He isn't going to let us get by with anything. And just about the time you think you know the thing you cannot stand, be prepared to expect God to deal with it. That is the point on which He is going to put the pressure.

Now you know what I think we should do? We should just anticipate the Lord. Since I know that now, I do not have to go through the process anymore to the same degree. When I discover in my heart something that has become to that point that I could even think of it in that way, that is the place, in which, I anticipate the Lord. There is a process, you know, but you can bypass certain steps in it if you are wise. If you insist the Lord will take you through the whole course. But I do not advise it. Why cannot we be wise and recognize that God's purpose is to make us like Christ. And therefore in the things which are most irritating and most distressing meet Him on these issues. As soon as we discover and begin to say, Why, Lord, this very part of me that would think and feel this way is the part that was taken with the Lord Jesus to the Cross. In this I am taking your victory now. Thank you for having shown me. Then when something comes... You know you get along quite well. There seems to be no problem. Then someone bumps you. If five minutes before you had said, Do you know you are sensitive about this? You would have denied it. But as you go home nursing that wounded spot, all of a sudden you discovered you were far more sensitive than you thought you were. Why can't you, instead of resenting the person that put the finger on the sore spot, why can't you say, Thank You, Father, for showing me to the place of need, showing me my heart. Giving thanks always for all things.

Don't you see? God loves you. And He loves you too much to let you or me go on the way we are. He is going to deal with this. Now this is a gracious thing on His part. And so He says, Giving thanks always for all things. We make sure that nothing is our own, all is His; we have made absolutely sure that the one desire of our hearts is to be like Christ. And we have also recognized that everything that touches us is to the end of making us like Christ, so that the constant attitude of our heart is, Giving thanks always for all things. That's a flat tire on the way home this morning. Yes it is. That's the light is going off in the house. That is someone calling up at the time when dinner was to be served, saying, We are awfully sorry but we cannot come. It is all of these things compounded. It is the Word of God trying to bring to your life in the totality of the rule of Christ, do you come to the place that it isn't your car, and it isn't your house. All is His. You are His. And His Word is, "Giving thanks always for all things." (Eph. 5:20)

Oh, keep this up. Keep this level of your prayer life full. Will you? It will protect you so much. And can you say today, Thank you, Lord Jesus, for saving my soul. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for making me whole. Thank you, Lord, for giving to me Thy great salvation so full and free. If you can, then you can thank Him for everything else.

Shall we bow our hearts together in prayer. Now, Father, we are asking Thee to teach us what it is to pray with all prayer, with every sort and kind of prayer, and we are asking now that this people being hearers of the Word and doers will go, having even in these last moments brought all to say, Thank You. It takes bitterness away, it takes fear and dread away, it takes the uncertainty of tomorrow away, releases us into a joyous walk with Thee. O Father, let Thy dear people before Thee now obey

the Word, the Word of the Spirit of God to our hearts this morning, recognizing we are not our own, all is Thine, and Thou canst do with Thine Own as seems good in Thy sight. Seal Thy Word to our hearts. For Jesus Sake. Amen.

Let us stand for the Benediction. Now unto Him who is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before the Presence of His Glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Savior, be glory and honor, dominion and praise, now and forever. Amen.

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