

Spc155 – Eternal Thankfulness – Ephesians 5:20

Pastor Dave Shepardson

Being a Christ follower is an *eternal lifestyle*. It is a lifestyle *focused on and consumed with* ETERNITY. It's a "Just passing through this world" lifestyle. Our religious culture has tried to make following Jesus something that will improve your earthly life. But the Christ-following of the Bible is the *most* eternally focused lifestyle a person can live *including* when it comes to *being thankful*. If you are a Christian today, you *know* that thankfulness to God should be a regular part of the Christian life and most of us have expressed the things we are thankful for on Thanksgiving Day or maybe at other times.

But there's a part of our "*customary*" *thankfulness* that might actually fall short of "*eternal*" *thankfulness*. Often our approach to thankfulness is primarily in response to *good circumstances* and *material blessings* God has given us. And don't get me wrong, we *should* be thankful for "***Every good and perfect gift, that comes down from God***" (Jas 1:17)

But I'd like to talk today about a thankfulness that is far more powerful. We'll call it an *eternal thankfulness*. Eternal thankfulness is *not* connected to ANY *good circumstance* or *material blessing*. Eternal thankfulness is the outcome of a relationship with God that surpasses all circumstances – *good or bad*. Eternal thankfulness goes *beyond* ALL circumstances to *who God IS* in our lives.

Let's pray. *Lord, show us a new level of thankfulness. God, don't let us be thankful like the world is thankful. Don't let us have joy like the world has happiness. Don't let our thankfulness be dictated, determined by our circumstances or what we consider blessings, Lord. But, God, show us our eternal thankfulness is because of who you are and who you are in our lives. We pray that we would grasp that one thing, today, that we are eternally thankful people when we have you as our sole source and purpose in life. Reveal it to us supernaturally, by the power of your Spirit and through your Word, and in your name, Jesus, amen.*

A.W. Tozer - in The Pursuit of God: "*The man who has God as his treasure has all things in one, and he has it purely, legitimately, and forever.*"

God *himself* is our eternal treasure and
God *himself* is the eternal reason for our thankfulness.

This eternal thankfulness to God continually flows out of the writers of the New Testament. Paul exhorts us in every book he writes to live a life of eternal thankfulness that is *not tied to any worldly circumstance*.

One of the best verses of this truth is Ephesians 5:20. The context of Ephesians 5 (at this point) is letting your life be controlled by the Holy Spirit, and verse 20 is part of the fruit (the evidence) of you being filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18 says (paraphrase) ***“Be continually being filled with the Holy Spirit”***

And then the following verses describe what it looks like when you are *“continually being filled”* with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18(b)–20 (ESV)

18 . . . be filled with the Spirit,

19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,

20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

What a great picture of ETERNAL THANKFULNESS!!

(1) *addressing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,*

(2) *singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,*

(3) *giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

That is the eternal thankfulness that Jesus Christ died to give us and that the Holy Spirit pours into our lives.

- *addressing and encouraging one another in God’s Word,*
- *singing to the Lord in your heart,*
- *giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,*

and that last evidence is the one we’re focused on today. Guys, we can know that our relationship with the Lord is reaching a new level and that we are being filled with the Holy Spirit when we are able to give thanks to God *all-ways* and for *every-thing*.

And just one more thing in Ephesians 5:20. The Greek word “FOR” in giving thanks always and FOR everything – this word translated “FOR” can also be translated *over*, *beyond* and even *in place of*.

Because ETERNAL THANKFULNESS

is Thankful - **OVER** our **Circumstances**

It is Thankful - **BEYOND** our **Circumstances** – and

It is Thankful - **IN PLACE OF** our **Circumstances**

This is transforming thankfulness when we begin to grow past being thankful *only for* the good circumstances and material blessing and instead begin to live a life of eternal thankfulness – *not tied to our circumstance*.

So *how* do we do that? *How* do we begin to grow past being thankful *only for good circumstances and material blessings...* and begin to give thanks – *ALL-ways and for EVERY-thing*.

I think the first step is developing a *full and complete trust* in the eternal *love* and eternal *care* God has for us which includes a full and complete surrender to God’s *plan* and God’s *direction* for our lives.

I think most Christians hit a roadblock in their journey to eternal thankfulness *right there*. Because this is a *wrestling of wills* – *our will versus God’s will*. And until our own will is broken and we are fully surrendered to God’s will we will NOT be able to *fully trust God* or *be fully surrendered to his plan and direction* in our lives.

So, first, eternal thankfulness begins with *complete* trust in God’s love and care for us and *complete* surrender to God’s plan and direction for us.

I don’t mean not for “what you’ve done in regards to the cross.” The cross is everything. I mean, “Lord, I’m not going to serve you because you do what I want.” That’s not serving. That’s saying, “Lord, if you become my servant, I’ll trust you.” God’s not going to bend to your will. NO matter how many television shows you watch that say otherwise, God is not going to bend to your will.

Next, there is one *bedrock, foundational belief* that we must hold on to in *every circumstance* in our lives. There is the *massive truth* about God that makes it possible for us to *give thanks ALL-ways and for EVERY-thing...* (and here it is)

If you are a Child of God today, if you have been adopted into the family of God through faith in Jesus Christ, if you love God today – then God is at work for your good and for his glory ALL-ways and in EVERY-thing.

That means God is *at work* – for your good – *behind what you see*.

BEHIND the TEMPORAL,
BEHIND the PHYSICAL
BEHIND the CIRCUMSTANTIAL

the ETERNAL God *is at work* for *your eternal good*. You can't see it. You can't know it. You can't grasp it and you could never understand it – *but it's true!* There's an eternal God at work for your good behind what you see and think and feel and you can be thankful that he is.

And so *eternal thankfulness* looks past the temporary situation into the eternal work of God and it looks past the present circumstance and trusts God completely with the future – into eternity.

Guys, because of *who* God *IS* in our lives we can have an unshakable faith... that God is at work – for our good – and for his glory in *every circumstance* and *every situation* in our lives. You have a loving and caring God who can be fully trusted and surrendered to who's at work for your good at all times.

The famous verse that boils this down is Romans 8:28.

In the NLT Romans 8:28 says,

Romans 8:28 (NLT)

28 And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

This verse does not say *everything is GOOD*.

This verse does not say *God makes everything GOOD*.

It says God “CAUSES everything” to work together for our ultimate GOOD.

God causes *the GOOD* to be used for *our good*.

God causes *the BAD* to be used for *our good*.

It doesn't mean the BAD becomes GOOD. It means that GOD is *bigger* than the *bad* and God is *at work* in the *bad* and he causes even the *bad* to work together *for our good*.

THAT is who our God IS and the more you build that *bedrock of faith*, the more you will develop *eternal thankfulness* in your life.

Eternal thankfulness looks *past the immediate* to the *eternal* and *eternal thankfulness* is always *trusting* that God is at work, *for our good and for his glory* (in all things).

Next, *how* does this end of Ephesians 5:20 tell us that we can do this by faith?

Unfortunately, we've turned this phrase into some kind of a magic saying at the end of a prayer and again, we misunderstand it so deeply.

Ephesians 5:20 giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

How can we do it? How can we give thanks in ALL ways and in EVERY thing to God the Father? We can do it in the name of Jesus Christ.

"In the Name of" - MEANS *According to WHO Jesus Christ IS*. (According to the full nature and character of Jesus Christ).

We give thanks to God always and in everything *according to WHO Jesus Christ IS in our lives*. Not because of our current circumstances – good or bad. Paul learned and taught us to stop looking at our current circumstances. We can give thanks to God in the character and nature of Jesus Christ because of *who Jesus Christ IS* in our lives.

WE give thanks ALL-ways and for EVERY-thing to God According to WHO Jesus Christ IS – In our Lives

And that perspective will radically change a Christian's life.

You've got to know 200,000 Christians persecuted, ran out of Northern Iraq in the last few years. Churches burned. Women and children raped and murdered. And the leaders of those persecuted churches are still thankful to Jesus Christ. Wow. If you drop a Westerner in that culture, he'll turn on God in a second. But these Christ-followers know that God is good. The enemy is bad. God is good. Wow.

Next, in order to have eternal thankfulness we must ... *fix our eyes*.

We must always have our eyes *firmly fixed* on God's eternal plan and firmly *not fixed* on our temporary circumstances. I've told you before, you go where you set your eyes. Where you set your mind – your eyes direct your mind – where you set your mind is where you go.

We must have our eyes firmly fixed on eternity. Really, honestly, how fixed are we? Compared to how fixed on our temporal circumstances we are? Does eternity consume us or do our present circumstances consume us?

Look at what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:17.

2 Corinthians 4:17 (NLT)

17 For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!

From an eternal perspective our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they are producing for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever. From an eternal perspective our present troubles are small, they're minute. They won't last long. Yet they are *producing* for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and is eternal.

The word PRODUCING means to *cultivate* or to *prepare*. It's not just that we have to put up with these small and temporary troubles. It's that they are actually *producing* for us, *cultivating* for us, and *preparing* for us *an eternal glory that God has planned for us*.

Our eternal glory is not coming *in spite* of our difficulties. Our eternal glory is actually *being produced by* our difficulties.

The eternal work God is doing in your life he is not doing *in spite* of your *difficulties*. God is actually *using* your difficulties to produce the eternal glory he has *planned for you* and truly believing that will bring *true eternal thankfulness*.

Next, eternal thankfulness is a matter of *what you see*.

The next verse, 2 Corinthians 4:18 says,

2 Corinthians 4:18 (NLT)

18 So we don't look at the troubles we can see now; rather, we fix our gaze on things that cannot be seen. For the things we see now will soon be gone, but the things we cannot see will last forever.

It's about eternal thankfulness. We don't fix our eyes on our circumstances, on what we can see, instead we fix our gaze on what we can't see. We fix our gaze on *who God IS* and *what God's doing* that is eternal and how God is using these temporary problems to produce for us the glory that will last eternally.

What *controls* your life?

The things you CAN SEE – *in this vapor of a life?* Or

The things that CANNOT BE SEEN – *in eternity?*

As Jesus Christ becomes *bigger and bigger* in our lives, we learn to say *I don't believe because I see, I see because I believe.*

Eternal thankfulness is a matter of *what we see* and if we will determine to fix our gaze on the eternal things – *where God is at work* then we will be able to say with Paul in Romans 8:18,

Romans 8:18 (ESV)

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

That is eternal thankfulness.

Eternal thankfulness is the perspective every believer is exhorted to have. In fact, eternal thankfulness is one of the great signs of a heart that is truly connected to Jesus Christ.

It's the mark of a Christ-Follower who understand their real-life and their real blessings come through a Person, not through a circumstance. That they are thankful for a Person, not a circumstance. That they're thankful for Jesus.

Consider these verses.

Colossians 3:3 (NLT)

... your real life is hidden with Christ in God.

2 Corinthians 1:20 (ESV)

For all the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus] . . .

Colossians 2:3 (NLT)

3 In [Christ] lie hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

When a Christian finally begins to realize that Jesus Christ *himself* – *is their treasure* then we will finally begin to understand (and experience) *eternal thankfulness.*

And, so finally, here is what I believe to be the key question that determines whether we will ever live a life of eternal thankfulness ... or not.

Here's the question:

Are you living for yourself?

Or are you living for Jesus Christ?

Because if you are living for *yourself* and you still think *God's role* is to make *you* happy then you will never experience true eternal thankfulness, because eternity is just *not about you or about this life*.

Here's the thing we have to know. We were made eternal creatures. We were born again to an eternal life, and eternity is not about us. It's about Jesus. And as soon as we get the right person on the throne and say Jesus, *you are the eternal one*, I serve you, we end up thankful.

Probably the most influential document that came out of the reformation of the 16th Century is called the Westminster Catechism in which the grand theology of the Protestant Reformation is summarized in 107 questions.

Question #1 - Put at the TOP for obvious PRIORITY Reasons, is:

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever

Lord what circumstances do I need to be able to glorify you and enjoy you forever? Wait a minute, I can do that right now. I can glorify you right now. I can begin to enjoy a deeper relationship with you right now. Actually Lord, as it turns out, I don't need anything. I just need *you*. And I'm thankful for *you*. Right?

A Christ-Follower's life is not a self-focused life – it is a God focused life. It is not a life of *demanding from God*. It's a life of *giving glory to God and enjoying him forever*. And you can choose to begin to do that today, whatever you find yourself doing.

Colossians 3:17 says,

Colossians 3:17 (ESV)

17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Where-ever you find yourself today, you can begin to glorify God and enjoy him forever. And as you do, I promise you that you will begin to grow in your eternal thankfulness **All-Ways - and In Every-Thing** (as Ephesians 5:20 says).

The *Christ-following life* is a life of thankfulness that goes beyond the *good circumstances* and goes beyond the *material blessings*. We aren't driven by the temporal things of this world. We are driven by heaven, we're driven to heaven, and our thankfulness is because of *who God IS* in our lives.

It's a LIFE of

Giving Thanks ALWAYS to God

and *Giving Thanks "ABOVE and BEYOND" Everything to God*

and *Giving Thanks IN THE NAME OF our Lord Jesus Christ*

Please hear me when I say, if you have fully surrendered your life to Jesus Christ then God is with you. He is at work *in* your circumstances and *for your ultimate good*. And he is worthy of your eternal thankfulness *at all times*.

Let's pray. *Lord Jesus, we're sorry to tie you to temporal, fleeting, soon to vaporize circumstances. We're sorry. May we be standing left alone with you. And may Lord, as we are, may we know that we have reason to be thankful. We have reason to celebrate, Lord. You, Jesus, you turn our mourning into dancing. You give us an eternal purpose in the midst of present circumstances. It's because of who you are in our lives that we can glorify you and enjoy you forever.*

I would just say, if you've never done that, if you've never gone all in, if you've never surrendered your life to Jesus Christ, do it. Do it now. Move from this temporal, soon to be gone life into an eternal life with Jesus Christ. Use the most famous prayer that is actually in the Bible. It's Peter's prayer when he was sinking – "*Lord save me!*" And you can cry that out today right where you are at – "*Lord, save me. Save me in the midst of where I'm at. Save me in my trials, in my struggles, in the darkness I've brought into my own life. Lord, save me! Save me, Lord. Forgive me of my sins and come into my life. Be my Savior and be my Lord. And draw me into a closer walk with you, Jesus, that I would be eternally thankful. It is in the full character and nature of who you are, Jesus, it's in your mighty and holy name we pray, amen.*"