**Always Give Thanks to God for Everything**

October 13, 2013

Ephesians 5:1-21

Key Verse 5:20 “Always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Happy Thanksgiving! In today’s passage, St. Paul said that we should give thanks to God for everything. Being thankful isn’t always easy to do, because there are a lot of things I’m just not thankful for. So, how can I be thankful for everything, if I don’t feel thankful for everything? A mother asked her 4 yr. old son to say grace at the dinner table. The family all bowed their heads and folded their hands and they waited. And they waited. After a few moments of silence, the mom looked over at the boy. The boy looked first at her and then at his father, then back to her again. And finally, he said, “But if I thank God for the broccoli, won’t he know I’m lying?” In order to give thanks to God, we need: First, be imitators of God. Second, live a holy life. Third, be filled with the Spirit.

What is Paul’s first admonition in this chapter? Look at verse 1. “Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.” Paul admonishes us to imitate God. Why should we imitate God? It is because we were created in his image to be like him. It is because he is our Heavenly Father who loves us and who saved us when we were dead in our sin and transgressions. We have been born again by his grace and now we want to imitate the one who loves us the most.

By nature we all imitate someone whether we realize it or not. Some people say, “I don’t imitate anyone. I am my own person.” But this is not true. Others while growing up see something that they don’t like about their father and say, “I’m not going to be like him!” But later when we get older, we find ourselves acting just like our father. I don’t know when earrings became so popular among men. I suspect that they became popular after celebrities like Michael Jordan began to wear. Many young people imitate them mindlessly, because by imitating, they have illusion that they are rich and famous.

How can we imitate God? God is invisible. We don’t see him, so how can we imitate him? This seems so hard! We can when we spend time to read the Bible and study about Jesus with a humble heart. The words “as dearly loved children” in verse 1 show us how we can imitate God. “Dearly loved children” is our standing before God when we are born again through faith in Jesus Christ. God the Father loves us so much, even more than our parents. It is clear that when we accept his love for us, then we want to imitate him. This is how we know that we have accepted God’s love: we want to imitate him. If we haven’t accepted his love we won’t think about wanting to imitate him. This is why when we accept Jesus in our hearts our desires change and we want to be like him. We can have such lofty standards for ourselves as God does for us. When we read the Bible and the things that Jesus said, we sometimes say, “Wow, I wish I could say such things to people and move their hearts like Jesus. If I could only say the things Jesus said to the Samaritan woman.” A lot of us want to be good shepherds. Why? Because Jesus was a good shepherd. We desire these things and more when we accept that we are the dearly loved children of God.

In verse 2 Paul gives specific mention of how we can imitate God our Heavenly Father. Look at verse 2. “…and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” Paul tells us to live a life of love. What kind of love is this? As we know, there are three types of love. There is eros, which is physical love. There is phileo, which is love between brothers and then there is agape love, which is unconditional love. The love Paul is talking about here is the agape love. He uses Jesus Christ as the example. How did Jesus set the example of agape love? He came and laid down his life for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. The words in verse 2, “gave…offering” and “sacrifice” are strong words that reveal the great love of Jesus for us. These are action words. Jesus’ love was not just words or good intentions. It was action. There is a saying that words are cheap. Without action, there is no show of love. Live a life of love, Paul tells us, just as Christ did. How did Christ love?

For example, Jesus loved Judas Iscariot to the end. How did he love him to the end? Even though he knew that Judas was going to betray him, Jesus still loved him and at the Last Supper looked Judas straight in the eye and offered Judas the bread. Jesus was saying that he was going to die for Judas even though Judas had such evil intentions. Can you love someone who you know will betray you? Can you look them straight in the eye with sincerity and forgive them? Humanly it is impossible. This is because our love is superficial and conditional. I had many Bible studies since 1988. Many students came and enjoyed the Bible studies or fellowship, but never committed their lives. It looked like I was wasting my time and energy. After this was repeated over and over again, it was hard to give my heart to Bible study to those who do not show promise in Bible study. Though we receive many rejections and disappointments, we show love to them like Jesus by being persistent and earnest to keep looking and searching for the lost and inviting them. This is because Christ’s love is to save souls.

Look at verse 3, “But among you there must not even be a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people.” Holiness is a character of God. Holy means to set apart or separate from the world and not to live like the crowd. We imitate God by trying to live a holy life. It is quite obvious that these acts mentioned in verses 3-4 are not holy, but unholy. Look at verse 4. “Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.” Here in verse 4 is another important way we can live a life of love. It is by the words we speak. The words we speak are very important in the church and in the Christian community. Words can either build up people or hurt people. Some people give no thought as what they say, even in public. Careless words can be like an arrow that haphazardly leaves the archer and flies away out of control. They can be very dangerous. Obscenities mentioned here are dirty words like curse words. Many people, even those who call themselves Christians often take the Lord’s name in vain and use Jesus’ name in a curse word. People habitually engage in coarse joking thinking it funny and entertaining to their audience. They think it funny to cut others down and make sarcastic comments. Other people talk on and on about so many foolish things but in reality say nothing helpful or encouraging. All these things mentioned in verse 4 are inconsistent with a life of love. Why? Because they come from a selfish and self-centered heart. If we love someone and we love people, we will use our words wisely and prayerfully. We will try to build others up and encourage them to come to know the love of God deeply. Instead of talking these things mentioned in verse 4 which are out of place, what things should come out of our mouths?

Luke 6:45 says, “The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks.” Our speech is an indicator about what’s going on inside our hearts. Examine your speech; it may be trying to alert you to a heart problem. Verse 4 mentions, thanksgiving. Imitators of God are those who have many things to thank God for. They have many thanksgiving topics. When people hear us giving thanks to God for all he is doing in our lives, it can build them up and encourage them to see that God is working. A thankful heart is a beautiful and gracious heart. So, here’s a good test. Do you feel excited and energized about God? Is your heart filled with thanksgiving? Do you feel an attitude of praise and worship welling up inside you? Or do you always complain or speak sarcastic words?

Look at verses 8-9. “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of the light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth).” Before we know Jesus, we are in darkness. Darkness is defined as the absence of light. Jesus is the light of the world. Without Jesus, we have no meaning of life, no clear purpose or direction. We are living in the shadow of death. But that was the past. Now we who believe are living in the light and are the light in the Lord.

How can we live as children of light? Look at verse 10. “And find out what pleases the Lord.” Before, while we lived in darkness, we only thought about how to please ourselves. Everything revolved around us. The only people in our lives were me, me and me. Now that we are the children of the light our desires should be clear. It is, “what can I do to please God”? What can I do to make God happy? It is true that children want to please their parents. How much more then should we try to please God our Father and find out what pleases God. How did Jesus please God? It was by his obedience to God’s will for him. Before Jesus was to start his work as the Savior on earth, he was baptized by John the Baptist. As he was being baptized, God spoke from heaven and said, “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.” (Mk.1:11) God was pleased with Jesus because he was willing to die on the cross for the sins of the whole world. Those who live disobedient lives cannot please God. But those who live lives of obedience to God can please God and can build up and encourage other believers in the love of God.

Look at verse 14. “Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ’s light will shine on you.” Paul rebukes the Ephesians in love, the love of Christ. He wants them to wake up from living complacent lives and have a sense of urgency to serve the Lord. May God help us to wake up and rise so Christ may send his healing light into our hearts. Some people are dead in their hearts. Even though they know a lot about the Bible and can recite many Bible verses, they have no strength in their hearts. How can we wake up from our sleep?

Look at verse 18. “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with Spirit.” Here the apostle Paul is comparing “getting drunk with wine” with “being filled with the Spirit.” They are similar in that in both cases, a person is under a power outside himself, and he is very passionate. On the Day of Pentecost, the passion produced by the Spirit was mistaken for that produced by new wine (Acts 2:13). But they are different. In the case of drunkenness, there is loss of self-control. But the fruit of the Spirit is self-control.

Here “being filled with the Spirit” is different from the baptism and indwelling of the Spirit. When we believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit comes and dwells in us. It means that we should yield ourselves completely to his control. This involves the surrender of our will, our body, our time, and our talents. We should let the Holy Spirit control our thoughts and actions. How do you become filled with the Holy Spirit? John 6:63 says, “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are Spirit and they are life.” Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” These verses show that when we study the Bible with a decision to obey the word of God, we will be filled with the Spirit. The Spirit will give life and wake us up from our sleep.

Where the Spirit reigns, there is gratitude to God and deep sense of appreciation. Not only for the pleasant things, but for all things. Anyone can be thankful for sunshine, but it takes the power of the Spirit to be thankful for the storms of life. Then you begin to experience real peace and joy and your heart is filled with songs and overflowing thanks mentioned in verses 19-20.