

Special Focus Session

November 24, 2019

LIVING IN GRATITUDE

1 Thessalonians 5:12-22

In a recent chapel message at the Baptist College of Florida, professor Mark Rathel said that we have it all wrong. “We spend nearly every day of the year whining and complaining, and just one day being all thankful,” he mused. “It ought to be the other way around; we should set aside just one day for complaining and let every other day be filled with thanksgiving.” Indeed, in Paul’s view, not even one day should be spent in the mulligrubs! Rather, every day should be filled with joy and thanksgiving.

As we look toward the Thanksgiving holiday, let’s be reminded of three ways to maintain an attitude of gratitude.

Honor for the leaders (vv. 12-13). Back in 1994, Dr. James Dobson’s *Focus on the Family* began publicly promoting October as Pastor Appreciation Month, a time of year for congregations to demonstrate outwardly and intentionally their appreciation for their pastors and staff. While Dr. Dobson may have put it on the calendar, the apostle Paul advocated in his day special honor and recognition for those who lead well local bodies of believers (see 1 Tim. 5:17). As a pastor, I am always humbled by my church’s outpouring of love and affection, regardless of the time of year. The word “recognize” (v. 12) means *to highly value; to esteem*. Here, three reasons are mentioned to honor church leaders. First, they “labor among you.” Pastoring churches is a joy...but it is also work! Few jobs require the kind of talent, commitment, and compassion demonstrated by worthy pastors. Second, they “lead you in the Lord.” Church attendance is required by God, but voluntary by nature. Good pastors are able to lead their people without manipulation or coercion by careful instruction in the things of God. Third, they “admonish you.” The word means more than instruct. It implies counsel toward good, and warning against danger. These workers among the church are to be honored and loved for their part in ministry. Interestingly, Paul adds the quip to “Be at peace among yourselves” (v. 13). Take it from Paul (and from your pastor): the work of shepherding is so much easier when the sheep are at peace among themselves!

This Thanksgiving, express your gratitude to God (and to your pastor) for the good work of ministry going on in your church.

Encouragement for the weaker (vv. 14-15). While some commentators want this passage to address the elders themselves, there is no indication of that from the text. The encouragement is for all members of the body to minister to one another. The general theme is protecting and strengthening the weaker members. The “irresponsible” (v. 14) is better translated *unruly*, or *disorderly*. In the military, it refers to *those who fall out of line*. They should be warned to straighten up! The discouraged and weak are to be encouraged and strengthened; and all is to be accomplished with patience. *Personal* discipline is highlighted in verse 15 in terms of reacting to attack, but *corporate* discipline is maintained by members continually looking out for the good of everyone.

This Thanksgiving, express your gratitude for the entire body of believers in your church; the contribution each makes, and the contribution you personally make for the good of the body.

Gratitude in everything (vv. 16-22). The rapid-fire list of “do’s” and “don’ts” completing this letter makes me wonder if Paul was in a hurry to finish it up and get it in the mail! But the statements form a bullet-point summary of both the chapter and the letter as a whole. The first three are positive and active reactions to the instructions he has presented. The final four are generally things to avoid. Sandwiched in the middle is the central truth: “Give thanks in everything, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

This Thanksgiving, express your gratitude for all that God sends your way; both those things that help you as well as those things that challenge you... “for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”