

# Spirit-filled Gratitude

Ephesians 5:20

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## **Introduction:**

In our study of Paul's letter to the Ephesians,

- we have been looking at what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

There are a lot of strange notions about the filling of the Spirit,

- some even take, along with pagan theology, that the Spirit cause you to exhibit strange behaviour...
- But according to Scripture, the Spirit is the one who gives us a sound mind and restores us from rebellion to obedient love for the Lord.
  - He is the one who, through the use of the scriptures,
    - opens our eyes to see our sin before a holy God...
    - shows us the sufficiency of Jesus Christ to save us...
    - And then enables us to embrace Christ for salvation and to live the new life that He calls us to live.
- In the portion of scripture we have been studying,
  - Paul explains the filling of the Spirit by three participles— i-n-g phrases that explain some of the things we will do when we are filled with the Spirit.
  - Look with me again at the structure of this passage...
    - In verse 18, you have the command to be filled with the Holy Spirit.
      - Then in verse 19, you are told that this will involve speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart.
        - That is the first participial phrase...
        - It speaks of singing the songs that God has given us with our hearts as the instruments that accompany our words.
      - Then in verse 20, we have the second participial phrase...
        - it tells us that when we are filled with the Spirit, it involves “giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in name of our Lord Jesus Christ...”
        - This is the aspect of spirit-filling that we will look at today.
    - Verse 21 is the third participle that explains the filling of the Spirit...

- It says “submitting to one another in the fear of God.”
- We will look at this next week.

As we look at verse 20 in its context,

- You can see that it is closely related to verse 19.
- Some understand the command to give thanks to be another aspect of our singing in the assembly...
  - It certainly is that, but I think Paul is emphasising that giving thanks to God is something we will do continually when we are filled with the Spirit.
    - You can see how he tells us that this is something we are to do “always” and “for everything.”
  - What more, in the parallel passage in Colossians, he clearly makes it a separate duty from the call to sing praise in the assembly...
    - In Col 3:17, just after have told us to sing, he adds...
      - Col 3:17: And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.
    - “Whatever you do in word or deed” certainly includes public worship,
      - but it obviously extends into all of life.
  - And that is how I am going look at Ephesians 5:20 as I expound it to you this morning...

This morning, I have three things from our text that I want to expound upon that characterise Spirit-filled thanksgiving...

- First, that when you are filled with the Spirit, your thanks will be directed to God.
- Secondly, that when you are filled with the Spirit, you will give thanks always—all the time.
- And thirdly, that when you are filled with the Spirit, you will give thanks for everything.

Okay then, let me begin with the first point:

### **I. When you are filled with the Spirit, your thanks will be directed to God.**

- This, of course, should be quite obvious to us, but it is not obvious to everyone.
- A. Have you ever noticed that there are lot of people who do not know where to direct their thanks?
1. It’s true.

- a. They sometimes speak of things they are thankful for...
  - They will say things like:
    - “I’m thankful that I didn’t go home on Bayers Road yesterday—there was a big wreck there...”
    - or
    - “I’m so thankful—I finally got a new job and I love it.”

TRANS> You see that these folks are truly grateful for what they have been given.

- b. But if you ask them to whom they are thankful,
  - they will often tell you that they don’t know or that they are not sure.
  - They don’t know where their mercies come from...

2. This is a very sad thing.

- a. There is a merciful God who is pouring out all sorts of good things on them and they do not know Him...
  - They do not have the pleasure of consciously receiving from His hand as a merciful creator whose mercies are over all His works...
  - For them, it is just a very cold, impersonal world.
- b. Of course, they will sometimes find substitutes to offer their thanks to...
  - They will express their gratitude to other people,
    - or even to false gods and idols,
      - gods they have made up in their own heads or demons...
    - but they do not know the true God from whom all blessings flow...
      - The Father of glory from whom every good and perfect gift comes.

TRANS> But this is not only a sad thing...

3. It is also a wicked thing that they do not thank God.

- Their ignorance is a culpable ignorance...
- The reason they don’t know where their blessings come from is because they have hardened their hearts
  - and because they live among a people who have rebelliously hardened their hearts.
- If it were not for hearts that are desperately wicked,

- they would know that all good gifts come from God...
- The Lord charges them with becoming vain in their imaginations and with having their foolish hearts darkened,
  - all because they did not want to retain the knowledge of God...
  - They have come to believe lies, all the while thinking they are quite wise.
- When Paul spoke to idol worshipping Greeks in Acts 14,
  - He pointed out how God had shown Himself clearly to them in giving them rain from heaven, fruitful seasons, and in filling their hearts with food and gladness...
  - And then He urged them to repent for not acknowledging God—
    - for worshipping idols instead of giving thanks to the true God.
    - They were culpable for their ingratitude.

TRANS> Understand that God does not receive thanksgiving that is directed to idols or to false gods—

- Idols are not channels to the true God...
- Thanksgiving offered to idols is an insult to the true God and will bring down His wrath upon those who do not repent...
  - In fact,
    - for your expressions of gratitude to reach God, they must be offered to Him in Jesus' name

B. True thanksgiving must be directed to God in Jesus' name.

1. The Spirit must change your heart before you can even come to the true God.

- You see, you have a deceitful heart that is full of rebellion until the Holy Spirit changes your heart...
  - Your corruption is so great that you are both unable and unwilling to acknowledge the true God.
  - You refuse to face Him as He is because you know that you have sinned against Him—
    - and until God changes you, you don't want to deal with it.
    - You don't want to face the true God...
    - You will make up your own version of God (or latch on the versions of others)
      - but you will not come to the true God

TRANS> According to the teaching of Scripture,

2. You can only come to the true God through Jesus' name...
  - That's why in our text, Paul says that the one who is filled with the Spirit gives thanks to God the Father *in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*.
  - But what does it mean to come in Jesus name?
    - a. Is this just a matter of attaching the words, "in Jesus name" on the end of all your prayers?
      - No, this is talking about your whole approach to God...
        - It speaks about how you look at Him and how you relate to Him.
      - If you approach God, and you do not approach Him through Jesus Christ,
        - Then you are not approaching the true God but an idol...
        - You cannot approach the true God apart from Jesus Christ.
    - b. Let me explain what I mean...
      - You see, the truth is that you are a sinner—
        - You are part of the human race, and the human race has dreadfully offended God...
          - We are fallen under His wrath and curse...
        - Granted, a lot of people don't realise this...
          - We are not horrified by what we have done until God's Spirit opens our eyes because we are so used to it...
            - But that does not change the fact that our sin is so offensive to God that He consigns every one of us to a crisis eternity...
      - And He tells us that the only way we can escape this dreadful judgement is by trusting in Jesus Christ...
        - In order for any one to be pardoned, the Son of God, had to come and bear God's curse in our place...
        - In love, He came as the remedy for our situation—there is no other.
          - This is something else that God's Spirit must open your eyes to see and to understand...
            - You must see that there is no other way to approach God but through Jesus...
            - You must see it so that you actually come in desperation to Jesus to seek forgiveness through faith in Him.
        - And once you have done that,

- you will forever approach God in Jesus' name...
- You will be one who knows that apart from Jesus, you could never gain favourable acceptance from God...
  - only condemnation.
- But you see, if you are someone who supposes that you can just come to God and thank Him without having been reconciled to Jesus Christ,
  - You are desperately and sinfully ignorant of God.
  - If you think God is a god who can receive you apart from Christ,
    - you are not coming to the true God at all...
    - You are coming to an idol that is very different from God.
    - You are offering your thanksgiving to an idol instead of to the true God who is the giver of all.
- 3. But you see, after the Spirit has once opened your eyes and led you to Christ,
  - You can't fathom coming to God in any other way.
  - In all of your dealings with God, there is this ever present reality that you are only accepted with Him because of Jesus Christ.
    - Whether you are making petitions in prayer or giving thanks,
      - you are before God in Jesus' name.
      - You come not to an idol, but to the only true God who is the Father of Jesus Christ.

TRANS> So that is the first characteristic of spirit-filled thanksgiving—

- You direct your thanks to the true God in Jesus name.
- Secondly,

## **II. When you are filled with the Spirit, you will give thanks all the time (continually).**

A. You will give thanks all the time because when you have the fullness of the Spirit, you have the root of thanksgiving in you—

1. By the root of thanksgiving, I refer to this underlying, foundational, gratitude that every spirit filled Christian has for his salvation...
  - When you are filled with the Spirit, He enables you to see the value of your salvation—
    - the richness of God's grace toward you in saving you...
  - a. He causes you to be filled with appreciation for forgiveness...

- That the Son of God Himself has come and suffered the pains of Hell in your place...
  - Those who are filled with the Spirit are mindful of that...
  - They see how helpless they were and how great a sacrifice Christ made to come here and to die.
  - Those filled with the Spirit never trivialise this, but are ever grateful.
  
- b. The Spirit also causes you to be filled with appreciation for what God is doing in your life now...
  - Appreciation that the Son of God Himself is at work in you right now,
    - working in your heart to make you more and more like Jesus...
    - designing the circumstances of your life to work in you and to shape you into His glorious image...
      - to make you holy and beautiful...
  
- c. And He enables you to see (with appreciation) what God has promised to do in Christ...
  - That He is going to reveal His glory to you...
    - That He is going to acknowledge you on the day of judgement as His child and openly reward you...
    - That He is going to give you an everlasting inheritance with Him in heaven where there are pleasures forevermore...
    - That He is going to raise you from the dead and give you an immortal body...
    - That He is going to perfect you in holiness, body and soul, so that you can live in perfect love with other redeemed persons before your Father.

TRANS> Now I must ask you, each one, do you this appreciation, this gratitude, for your salvation?

- If you have this root, it changes the way you approach God all the time...
  - It changes the way you look at all the mercies He daily loads upon you...
  - What I mean is, you see them as mercies!
    - You see them as mercies instead of things that you deserve...
    - You have this root of thankfulness for salvation that permeates the way you look at everything...
      - It makes you realise that you are a debtor who has received far more than you deserve.

- And this root of gratitude is not only always present in those who are filled with the Spirit...
2. It is ever growing, ever increasing, ever becoming stronger.
    - a. Brothers and sisters, a growing sense of thankfulness to God is a sure evidence that you are living a Spirit-filled life—that God is working in you...
      - that you have an ever deepening appreciation for God’s salvation...
      - that you grasp the love of God in Christ more and more...
      - that as Paul prayed,
        - you are enabled more and more to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge.
    - b. When you are filled with the Spirit, there is less and less whining, less and less complaining—
      - It is all squeezed out by this ever deepening gratitude...
  3. But how does the Spirit deepen your gratitude...
    - a. Well I spoke about that a couple of weeks ago...
      - The Spirit actually renews your heart, He actually changes you from what you are into a grateful person—
        - a person who understands how gracious God has been to you in Christ.
        - He takes away your heart of stone and gives you a heart of flesh...
          - It is His work...
    - b. And the Spirit uses the word, the sacraments, and prayer to do this...
      - You hear the word preached—you hear the gospel preached—you hear about the greatness of what Christ has done—
        - and the Spirit drives home the message so that you understand it better... so that you believe it...
      - And you come to the Lord’s table and you remember how your Lord was crucified and given for you... for the remission of our sins...
        - and the Spirit deepens your appreciation for this...
      - And you pray—as you go along, and ask God to show you His glory and to change you...
        - and the Spirit answers that prayer...



TRANS> When the Spirit is working in you—when you are filled with Him—there will be this growth into a deeper and deeper gratitude.

- It begins at the foundational level and it reaches into your whole life.
- B. You can always tell that you are **not** filled with the Spirit when you become dissatisfied with God...
1. You start to grumble and complain the way Israel did in the wilderness...
    - To murmur and to wonder what is so great about serving the Lord...
      - a terrible attitude!
    - You start to look back at Egypt and to imagine that it might have been better for you if you had never become a Christian...
  2. And your dissatisfaction with God and with what He has given you is expressed in all sorts of different ways...
    - a. You start to envy those who are outside of Christ and seem to have it so easy...
      - Instead wanting to enrich them as one who has been so greatly enriched by God,
        - You want what they have!
        - You have entirely lost sight of the riches of God's salvation...
          - You have lost the root of gratitude...
    - b. You begin to covet— you wish you just had a little more income or a little more opportunity or a little more success...
      - Instead of giving freely, you start withholding—
        - Instead of looking for ways to serve and do good, you look for ways to get what belongs to your neighbour—
          - you start to lie and cheat and quarrel...
    - c. You become cantankerous and very hard to please—
      - You become unhappy with your spouse...he or she is not good enough for you!
      - You growl at your children...even for their childishness...
      - You show bitterness toward your parents...
      - You lose it when your computer acts up or when your car won't start...or when you get caught in a traffic jam...
    - d. You become addicted to things...

- to alcohol or drugs—
    - you use them to escape from your discontent—to try to grab hold of an escape...
  - Instead of receiving food as a gift of God and giving thanks for it...
    - You look at it for gratification—for fulfillment...
    - And then instead of enjoying it, you start to crave it...
      - you can't get enough of it...
  - Or you start to look for satisfaction in pornography...
    - or in novels—
      - all as an escape.
  - You may even become addicted to good things—like work...
    - being a miserable dissatisfied person without the root of gratitude, you to fill up your emptiness with your work...
      - instead of doing your work as an expression of gratitude to God.
  - Addictions are always rooted in self-pity and discontent!
- e. Sometimes the desire to escape becomes so great that you even resort to
- murder—either of yourself or of another...
    - suicide is, of course, the ultimate expression of dissatisfaction—
      - It is dissatisfaction with God and with what He has given you in life...
  - A lesser form of suicide is self-mutilation...
    - This is why many mangle their bodies and pierce themselves with many piercings...
      - or disfigure their faces...
      - or brand themselves and cut themselves...
      - or do bazaar things with their hair.

TRANS> There are all different ways to express your dissatisfaction with God and with what He has given you...

3. When you do these things,

- You are obviously not grasping what you have been given by God through Jesus Christ...

- You are not living a life of gratitude...of thanksgiving
- And I will tell you what you need to do...
  - You need to take a fresh look at your salvation...
  - You need to spend time in the word and prayer and ask God to restore in you the joy of your salvation...
  - You need to have the root of gratitude that will always be in you when you are filled with the Spirit so that you will always give thanks.

TRANS> When that root of gratitude is there—when you are filled with the Spirit—you will be continually thankful.

- That is the second characteristic of Spirit-filled thanksgiving...
  - (the first was that you direct your thanksgiving to God in Jesus' name)
- And now we turn to the third:

### **III. When you are filled with the Spirit, you will give thanks for everything.**

A. This includes giving thanks for affliction...

- Look at our verse (Eph 5:20)
- 1. Notice that it does not simply say to give thanks “*in*” everything,
  - but to give thanks “*for*” upper *hoop-er*’ everything.
    - a. To give thanks *in* everything would mean that you keep on thanking God for all the good things He has done even when a lot of things are going wrong—
      - That you never lose sight of the blessings you have in times of trouble.
      - Sort of what I as just talking about—that you have the root of thanksgiving in you...
        - the remembrance of what God has done to save you, the recognition of what He is doing, and the hope of what He has promised to do...

TRANS> That is important to do, but here there is something more...

- b. To give thanks *for* everything means that you give thanks for everything from the flat tire to the cancer to the broken marriage.
  - You actually give thanks—
    - not just in spite of these difficult things—
    - but actually *for* these things.

2. How does this work?

a. Well first, understand what it is not...

- 1) It is not a stoical “I’m tough and nothing can hurt me” kind of attitude.
  - No, you are not called to become a stone...
  - You know, you can step on a stone or beat on it with a stick, but it won’t bother it a bit...
  - The Lord is not looking to make you callous and hardened...
  - He wants us to be tender under our difficulties.
- 2) Nor is it a merely legalistic sort of mindset that says “We are not supposed to complain so I won’t.”
  - “God commands us to give thanks so I will do what He says”...
  - It is good that you want to obey and sometimes our obedience will be mechanical at first...
  - But to give thanks for everything is something more than this...

TRANS> What is it then?

b. It is gratitude for affliction that recognises that affliction is God’s instrument:

- 1) All through the scriptures, we are told that God uses affliction to bring about good in us and in His kingdom...
  - Just look at the cross as the ultimate example...
  - Jesus did not glory in the pain and the shame of the cross—
    - He would have been one calloused, hardened man if He had done that!
    - But He did not—He despised it...
      - Yet, He loved the cross because by it He brought glory to the Father and redeemed His people from their sins, and showed His love for us and for the Father.
- 2) What are some of the things the scripture points out that affliction will do for you?
  - Well, I think of Romans 5...
    - a) It says that affliction works patience in you—perseverance—
      - In other words, you learn to keep going for God when there are difficulties in your life...
      - Even Jesus learned obedience through suffering—

- when it was hard to obey, His obedience was deepened...
- Job learned a deeper patience when he had to suffer...
  - So you give thanks for affliction as God's way of making you stronger and more patient and of teaching you obedience.
- b) Next, Romans 5 says that affliction, as you are patient under it, brings about proven character...
  - That is, people begin to see that you really mean it when you say you love God—
    - They see that you are willing to suffer for His sake...
      - They see that you are sincere even if they don't agree with you...
    - And I tell you,
      - There have been more people converted watching believers suffer than watching them prosper.
  - If you yearn to testify for Christ in a way that will make a difference, it may be that God will give you affliction to bear.
    - And there is an added benefit to all this...
      - Not only will your Christian character be proven to others...
        - it will be demonstrated to you also...
        - because you will see the grace of God at work to sustain you in your sufferings...

TRANS> and that brings us to the next benefit of affliction that is mentioned in Romans 5...

- 3) that affliction brings about hope because the love of God is poured out in your heart by the Holy Spirit...
  - a) It is in affliction more than any other time that the Lord comes to you and gives you a clear sight of the glories of heaven...
    - and of Himself and His glory...
  - b) The report of Job is the report of many Christian's who suffer...
    - before I heard about you with my ear, but now my eye sees you...
  - c) Affliction forces you to look to God...

- When you are in pain, you say, “Lord, do you really love me?”
  - And as you cry out to Him, He shows you in a fresh, clear way, what He had done for your salvation...
    - He shows you His forgiveness,
    - He shows you His present work in you,
    - And He shows you the glory He has prepared for you in heaven...

TRANS> And so you see that there is much reason to give thanks for affliction...

- God uses it to make you stronger in obedience, to give you an opportunity to prove your love to Him, and to reveal to you Himself and His love for you in Christ.
  - It’s not a military toughness or a raw obedience that enables you to give thanks for afflictions...
    - It is a realisation that God has purposed to use that affliction in your life for good.
    - That what He brings into your life is the best!
  
- But I must add that giving thanks for all things not only includes giving thanks for affliction, but ...

B. Secondly, you are to give thanks for blessings...

1. You will say, “well of course, that’s easy enough...”
  - But is it really?
    - a. It ought to be easy to give thanks when God has given us:
      - running hot and cold water,
      - comfortable places to live,
      - beds to sleep in,
      - friends,
      - health,
      - family,
      - beautiful mountains and valleys and sunsets,
      - advanced technology that enables us to communicate with people all over the world,
      - books,
      - entertainment,
      - leisure,
      - work that is safe and often very pleasant and interesting,
      - things like silver and gold and jewels,
      - and then there is the amazing variety of foods that we have from all over the world...
        - and even that he made us with the ability to distinguish between one pleasant taste and another!

- How much reason we have to give thanks to Him!
  - Yes, it ought to be very easy for us to thank Him for all our blessings.
  - We are one of the wealthiest societies that has ever lived...
- b. But the truth is that it is not so easy for us...
- 1) The truth is that we are so fallen and corrupt that the more God gives us, the more we are prone to forget Him!
    - We have more than most people who have ever lived, yet we complain more than most people who have ever lived
    - We are a society that is full of whining—
      - we complain if we miss a single meal!
  - 2) Just look at Israel...
    - Yes, they had a problem with complaining and bitterness in the wilderness,
      - but then when God brought them at last into the Promised Land and richly blessed them, what did they do?
      - They forgot Him!
- c. Now my brothers and sisters, that is what you must guard against in your prosperity...
- The Lord has given us all of these things as an expression of His love.
  - And it is the height of wickedness for us to get so caught up and focused on His gifts that we forget Him!
  - No, you are to receive all these things from His hand with thanksgiving!
  - You need to see that you remain filled with the Spirit and with gratitude in your prosperity.
2. And let me add that there has been a peculiar kind of ingratitude that has sometimes appeared in the church...
- a. It is an ingratitude that results from seeing the way that the blessings of this world seem to cause us to forget God...
    - And like Adam who blamed his wife for his sin,
      - this ingratitude blames the blessings of this life for sin...
    - And so, instead of giving thanks for God's blessings, it despises them...
      - God hands them to you generously and you reject the gift!

- b. Paul addressed this problem in 1 Timothy 4—
- He called it the doctrine of demons...
    - 1 Tim 4:1-5: Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.
  - A person who always wants more more more is certainly an ungrateful person...
    - but so also is the one who refuses to enjoy the gifts that God has given us and who calls His good gifts evil and harmful...
      - And who takes it upon himself to deprive others of them...
      - It is one thing to warn about dangers of riches, it is another to be ungrateful for them.
      - God calls us to gratitude...
  - And if Christians feel guilty for enjoying the good things of this life (instead of grateful),
    - it has a very negative affect on them...
      - rather than drawing them God to give thanks,
        - it causes them to avoid Him because they feel guilty for feasting or for enjoying a vacation...
      - Where there ought to be gratitude, there is guilt.

## Conclusion

If you are filled with the Spirit, you will have the root of gratitude that I spoke about before ...

- the root of thanksgiving for God's salvation in Christ...
- And that root will show itself in a general disposition of gratitude for everything—
  - both affliction and blessing that God sends...
- That root of gratitude will be so smitten by God's goodness in Christ and by what He is doing in our lives through Christ that it will see the goodness of God in everything!
  - Instead of a whinny complaining attitude there will be a heart full of gratitude.

In short, if you are filled with the Spirit,

- you will be among those who are found:
  - “giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,”
  - May it be so with all of you!