

The Apostle Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, which is most likely the first letter written of the whole New Testament, breathes of thankfulness. The second verse of his letter could literally be translated: "We always whenever we pray give thanks concerning you." Oh, may the Lord breathe upon us this Thanksgiving season, giving us not only a thankful spirit, but most importantly, filling our prayers with constant thanks concerning our brothers and sisters in Christ.

**Monday/Tuesday: Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-2 and 3:5**

**A Safety Fence**

Look again at Paul's expression of thanks for the Thessalonians: "We always whenever we pray give thanks **concerning** you." The word translated "**concerning**" is from the word "**peri**" meaning "around," as in "**perimeter**" or "**periscope**," so that Paul was literally **encircling** the Thessalonians with prayers of thanksgiving. He could have let his anguish, concern and even fear of disappointment over the Thessalonians swallow up his prayers of gratitude for them! (See 1 Thessalonians 3:5 to see how upset Paul was about the Thessalonians' potentially wasting all his effort expended to found a church in their city!) It is easy to have other kind of prayers than thankful ones for such potential "failures" isn't it?

Here then is an instructive secret to Paul's ongoing commitment to the imperfect and often disappointing motley crew which we call the church of the New Testament: Paul places a thanksgiving prayer "safety fence" around all his thoughts regarding the Thessalonians in order to protect his own mind from the negative, critical and despairing fears that always ruin prayers, whether those prayers are Paul's for the ancient church or ours for each other today.

**Meditate and Pray:** Ask the Lord to help you appreciate in a new way that the only way you will maintain a solid commitment to other believers in the body of Christ is by covering over their disappointing weaknesses and your upset about them with prayers of thankfulness. What good is our professed love for each other if we grow silent and cold in our prayers of gratitude? Use Hymn # 353 in our Red Trinity hymnal to revive not only your love for Christ's Church, but also your thankfulness for the body of believers in your local fellowship:

*I love Thy kingdom, Lord,  
The house of Thine abode,  
The church our blessed Redeemer saved  
With His own precious blood.*

*I love Thy church, O God.  
Her walls before Thee stand,  
Dear as the apple of Thine eye,  
And written on Thy hand.*

*If e'er to bless Thy sons  
My voice or hands deny,  
These hands let useful skills forsake,  
This voice in silence die.*

*Beyond my highest joy  
I prize her heavenly ways,  
Her sweet communion, solemn vows,  
Her hymns of love and praise.*

**Wednesday: Read 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3 & 9-10.****Value-Added Blessings**

Paul realizes that all Christian blessings are first purchased by Christ. If Christ didn't die to bring us every good thing we need, then we have no hope of possessing any lasting blessings for which to be thankful. Paul expresses his gratitude for the Thessalonians' spiritual endurance because it is "inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ," (1 Thess. 1:3). In the same way, he ends this first chapter by describing how Christians live their whole lives "waiting for the Son from heaven" in verse 10. Jesus's blood purchased every Christian blessing, and we can only enjoy blessings in the Christian life when we each day wait upon Him as our Lord, Savior, and Giver of all thanksgiving blessings.

**Meditate and Pray:** Thank God for the great *increase in value* which all Christian blessings acquire in our eyes when we remember that they have been purchased by the sacrificial life and death of Jesus Christ. The precious and perfect life of Jesus was poured out so that we, as vile, guilty and polluted sinners, might not only be redeemed from sin, but also might enjoy all the untold blessings of God's daily grace in our lives. What greater incentive to thankfulness can we have than to realize that Christ's blood gives not only forgiveness but also purchases all the daily graces we need to grow as believers?

**Thursday/Friday: Read 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 and Psalm 77:7-11****Memory Modification Needed**

A thankful spirit is no automatic feeling which we can take out of a box at the appropriate season, like many of us unwrap Christmas decorations the day after Thanksgiving. It is tied to an active prayer life in which memories of God's blessings are stimulated. Only as we draw near to God the Father will our memories be refreshed and thankfulness grow within us. That is why verses 2 & 3 in 1 Thessalonians 1 must be taken together: "We always thank God for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers, **remembering** before our God and Father..."

Do you see what is happening to produce a thankful spirit in the Apostle? Paul draws near to God the Father in prayer, and God stimulates Paul's memory of all that *He* had done for the Thessalonians. The end-result is that Paul's gratitude wells up as God refreshes His memory. Prayer and memory are stimulants to thanksgiving!

The lesson? Come as you are "before your God and Father" in prayer... He'll do all the memory work needed to stir up within you a thankful spirit! Isn't that just what the Psalmist experienced in Psalm 77:7-11? As he draws near to the Father in prayer, at first he cannot find any grounds for being thankful to God (verses 7-9). But then faith reminds him of what he should do: "I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago."

**Meditate and Pray:** Lord, please do not abandon your great memory work in our lives. Do not let us live in the darkness of a forgetful, ungrateful frame of mind. When we stray, please recall us with a penetrating look, as you did Peter, who "remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him," (Luke 22:61) and wept tears of repentance which lead to his restoration. Restore us by renewing our forgetful minds. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

**Saturday/Sunday: Read 1 Thessalonians 1:4-5****Memory + Gratitude = Confidence**

Just as a renewed memory is a great help in turning our minds towards thankfulness in verse 3, so confidence in God's electing work also results in gratitude in 1 Thessalonians 1:4.

Now, this confidence in God's electing power is in direct contrast to the low level of expectation on the part of most Christians when it comes to election. Sadly, as those who take pride in being called "Reformed," we often restrict our expressions of confidence in the matter of election to knowing those who appear *not* to be the elect. By contrast, note the Apostle's confidence in what God has done for them and in them. May the Lord likewise increase our confidence in His Word and His Work in and among us as a church. Surely then our thankfulness for the Body of Christ will grow like the Apostles!

James Denney, in his great commentary on 1 Thessalonians, describes our ungrateful inability to recognize election in others this way:

The doctrine of election has often been taught as if the one thing that could never be known about anybody was whether he was or was not elect. The assumed impossibility does not square with the New Testament way of speaking. Paul knew the elect... at least he knew the Thessalonians were elect. In the same way he writes of the Ephesians: "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world; ... in love He foreordained us to adoption as sons."

**Meditate and Pray:** May the Lord renew our confidence in the great doctrine of election, so that we by faith expect to see God revealing His electing work in our day. May the Lord also give us a charitable, confident faith which assures others: "We see the fruit of election in you and welcome you as our brother or sister." Use Hymn # 470 to express your confidence in God's electing grace

*How vast the benefits divine which we in Christ possess!  
We are redeemed from guilt and shame and called to holiness.  
But not for works which we have done, or shall hereafter do,  
Hath God decreed on sinful men salvation to bestow.*

*The glory, Lord, from first to last, is due to Thee alone;  
Aught to ourselves we dare not take, or rob Thee of Thy crown.  
Our glorious Surety undertook to satisfy for man,  
And grace was given us in Him before the world began.*

*This is Thy will, that in Thy love we ever should abide;  
That earth and hell should not prevail to turn Thy Word aside.  
Not one of all the chosen race but shall to Heav'n attain,  
Partake on earth the purposed grace and then with Jesus reign.*