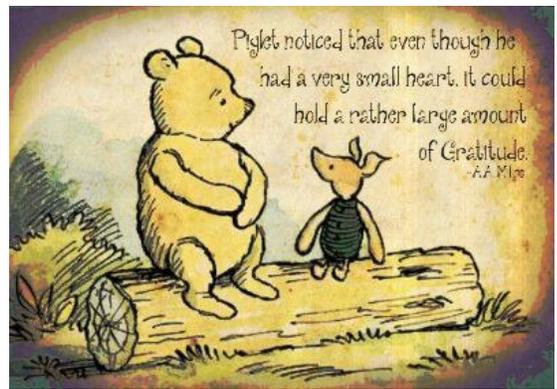


1 Kings 2:10-12, 3:3-14

Psalm 111

Ephesians 5:15-20

John 6:51-58



ALWAYS AND FOR EVERYTHING GIVING THANKS

For the past two weeks we have discussed Ephesians 4-6. These chapters set down man's response to God's grace in Christ, mostly in terms of how we ought to behave and get along with each other. We have already seen that God's standards of behavior differ greatly from the standards of the world.

To prepare for today's discussion, review Eph 4:22-24: *Put off your old nature which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.*¹ The new nature, which is life free from bondage to sin, is what God offers to give to you, and me, and every believer.

This "new nature" is not something we invent or attain on our own. It has already been created for you *after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness* (Eph 4:24). You receive this nature as Christ's life is *formed in you*. Paul was "in travail" until this new nature prevailed throughout the church (Gal 4:19).

Indeed, the primary issue in our discussion up to now has been that the *new nature* the Bible speaks of is not something you generate on your own; it is the very life of Christ, who comes to you and *makes his home with you* when you surrender your life to him. Jesus said, *"If a man loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him"* (John 14:23).

We have seen how difficult it has been for us to *"no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds"* (Eph 4:17) – to *"put away all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander and instead be kind to one another"* (Eph 4:31-32) – without having experienced the new birth which is the result of surrendering our lives to Christ. But the very fact that 4:17 and 4:32 are in the Bible indicates that these things *are* possible for us to obey in Christ. Jesus said, *"You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect"* (Matt 5:48). He meant that. And nothing less than perfection is what God has promised to accomplish in each of us who have believed in his Son.

Eph 5:3-14. *But fornication and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is fitting among saints. 4Let there be no filthiness, nor silly talk, nor levity, which are not fitting; but instead let there be thanksgiving. 5Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 6Let no one deceive you with empty words, for it is because of these things that the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. 7Therefore do not associate with them, 8for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light 9(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), 10and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord. 11Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. 12For it is a shame even to speak of the things that they do in secret; 13but when anything is exposed by the light it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. 14Therefore it is said, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light."*

- Verses 3-14 follow the passage we discussed last week and precede this week's passage. They are worth discussing as a reminder that every person is born with free will, able to make choices, and rebellion against the will of God is not only possible but prevalent in the world today, as it has been since the beginning. We are all like Adam and Eve. We get to choose not only what is right, but what we *believe* to be right.

- *Therefore do not associate with them, for once you were darkness ...* (v.7-8). The Bible's solution regarding this problem of living in the midst of rebellion against the will of God, especially within the

¹ Bible quotations are from the RSV.

church, is clear: *do not associate with them*. Discuss Psalm 1 which begins, “*Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night ...*” What reasons for not associating with people who “walk in darkness” are given in v. 3-4 of Psalm 1?

Nevertheless, this idea may seem surprising and even “unchristian” when we consider that Jesus had a reputation of associating with “tax collectors and sinners,” in other words, people who lived immoral lives. The scribes and Pharisees asked him, “*Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?*” Jesus answered, “*Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*” (Luke 5:30-32). Why cannot we respond in the same way?

The answer is in the saying, “*... for once you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord*” (v.8).

The Bible says “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*” (Heb 13:8). You are not. When Jesus spent time with immoral men and women, either they would turn from their sins and follow him, or they would leave. When you spend time with immoral men and women, there are other possibilities.

- *Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them* (v.11). We have seen why the first part of this is necessary; the second part is also worth discussing in the light of v.12-14. The NLT rendition is, “*it is shameful even to talk about the things that ungodly people do in secret. But their evil intentions will be exposed when the light shines on them ...*” which suggests that when we see unlawful or immoral actions, we *let them be exposed* rather than expose them ourselves. After all, Jesus said, “*Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known*” (Luke 12:2). Also, 1 Cor 4:5 says, “*Do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.*”

When you go around exposing these “unfruitful works of darkness,” you are walking on thin ice. You are apt to make things look worse than they are. “*He who goes about gossiping reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who speaks foolishly*” (Prov 20:19). (See also Prov 11:13.)

Eph 5:15-20. *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, ¹⁶making the most of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, ²⁰always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.*

- *Look carefully then how you walk* (v.15). This short section, v.15-20, is today’s epistle lesson. The word “then” is like “therefore” – it requires that we look back at verses 3-14, because it is in the light of these verses that Paul urges the church to *look carefully* at its daily life, so as not to get drawn into the stream of modern society, which ignores whatever commands of God it judges to be overly strict or no longer relevant. We *walk carefully* through this life, as a troop walks carefully through a minefield.

- *Do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is* (v.17). These things are mutually exclusive. If you understand what the will of God is, you are not foolish. If you don’t, you are.

- *Be filled with the Spirit* (v.18). Assuming you have heard the gospel and believed in Jesus Christ, you have been “*sealed with the promised Holy Spirit*” (Eph 1:13). You have assurance of your salvation in this.

But being “sealed” and being “filled” with the Spirit are different things. If you have sin in your life (and we all do at times), you cannot walk entirely in the light of Christ. 1 John 1:6-7 says, “*If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.*”

- *Always and for everything giving thanks ...* (v.20). Verses 19-20 – “*addressing one another in psalms and hymns ...*” suggests the affection and joy among people who realize what Christ has done for them.

It is indeed a joyful thing to lay down all the trophies and victories we have managed to win at the foot of the cross, and to give thanks to Jesus Christ for achieving things we could not achieve, and winning victories we could not win, and giving us life we could not have without him.