

I do not plan Christmas or New Years messages ahead of time. I rely on the Spirit of God to direct me and this year, like last, He provided both.

"We give thanks" is the Greek verb eucharisteo from which we get our word "Eucharist" for the Lord's Table.

It means to give thanks and is a present tense verb indicating a continuous action on Paul's part; something that characterized his ministry.

We have looked at his persistence in prayer some of the passages such as Romans 1:9 where he talks about praying without ceasing, 1 Thessalonians 3:10 "night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith," Philippians 1:3-4 "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all."

And we have focused on three verses from the Gospels which focus on the priorities in our Lord's life where He would take Himself away from His disciples, from the press of the crowds, and use that time as a focal point on His relationship to God.

Remember that this is Jesus in His humanity.

This is not Jesus, the second person of the Trinity pulling away to have communion with God the Father, the first person of the Trinity.

This is the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ living out His spiritual life and demonstrating the priority of prayer even in His spiritual life.

So from that we learn how important it must be for us as fallen sinners to make it a priority and pull away from all the pressures of life—to get away from social media, the computer, smart phones—and focus on the Lord, restore some quietness to our life.

Then we have the emphasis on praise and gratitude.

Ephesians 1:3 "Blessed {be} the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly {places} in Christ."

This tells us something about what God has given every single one of us, what we have received at the instant of salvation.

We need to look at that word for "blessing", especially how it is used in the first line.

God is the one who is the source of blessing.

True blessing can only come from God and that is what we see reflected in the next two uses of the word "blessing"—that God has blessed us with every blessing.

But that first statement, "Blessed be the God and Father ...", does not mean we bless God.

The word makarios is another way of talking about praising God.

When we talk about blessing God what we are really saying is praise to God, expressing thankfulness and gratitude to God for what He has done. That is what Paul is doing in Ephesians 1:3. We need to thank God for the spiritual blessings He has given us in Christ.

How many of us can sit down and list the privileges and blessings that God has given us in Christ—our positional blessings in Christ.

We have positional blessings related to God the Holy Spirit, related to our priesthood, related to our new life in Christ, blessings related to all of the facets of salvation—redemption, regeneration, propitiation, imputation of righteousness, justification, reconciliation.

All of these are part of the blessing package that God gave us at the instant of salvation.

And notice that He blessed us with *every* spiritual blessing: blessings which we cannot fathom; blessings that are beyond our comprehension.

And they are ours because we are in Christ.

That relates to something that happened at salvation when we were identified by God the Holy Spirit with our Lord Jesus Christ—the baptism by the Holy Spirit, described in Romans 6:3 that we are identified with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection, and as such we have died to sin. Sin no longer has a power over us like it did before we were saved—unless we give it to the sin nature.

The sin nature was the only authority in our life before we were saved; we had no option but to live under the power of the sin nature.

But once we were saved, because of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, we were free to live a life free from sin.

Now that is not realized experientially for us very often.

We have to be walking by the Spirit and if we don't learn those dynamics it doesn't happen.

So the first area we see emphasized is praise.

It is very closely connected to thankfulness, expressing thanks to God for what He has given us.

Notice that in this verse this is tied to their reputation, the reputation of the Thessalonian believers in terms of their spiritual life.

The same thing is said about the believers in Rome.

Romans 1:8 "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world."

One thing we should observe here is that Paul is addressing his prayers in each of these instances to God the Father, not to the Son and not to the Spirit.

And it is very clear that He comes to God the Father through Jesus Christ.

This indicates that Jesus Christ is a means of entry to God the Father.

He is our intercessor, as is God the Holy Spirit. Paul's thanks is "for you all", so gratitude is towards everyone.

This is an aspect of his love toward all of those in the congregation in Rome—people he did not know, had never met.

He did not have to have a personal relationship with them in order to love them.

This kind of love is impersonal.

That doesn't mean it is cold or distant, it means that a personal relationship is not at the heart of this kind of love.

It is not something that is built around those the apostle had a personal attachment to.

Notice what he is thankful for: "because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world."

They have a reputation.

We must pause here and ask: What is our spiritual reputation?

Is it obvious that our life is different from others?

The faith of the Roman believers was being talked about, there was something distinctive about this group of believers and, of course, it also generated hostility.

Their faith here is not talking about their salvation; it is talking about their ongoing use of faith, believing the promises of God or what we refer to as the faith-rest drill.

That is important because we have to distinguish the various ways in which faith is used in Scripture.

Sometimes it talks about faith in Christ in relationship to salvation—[Ephesians 2:8-9](#).

Then there is the faith that is operational on a day-to-day basis as we live out the Christian life.

It is the ongoing sanctification faith, that faith-rest drill faith that was being spoken of throughout the world in the case of the Roman believers.

It was also true in Thessalonica. [1 Thessalonians 1:7](#) "so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia."

Their spiritual life became an example to others.

This is held out several times in Scripture where believers who are pursuing spiritual growth and have their priorities right and are living out their lives in a way that glorifies God is an encouragement to other believers.

So Paul expresses his thankfulness and directs it to God through Jesus Christ.

This reminds us of [Hebrews 4:15-16](#) which tells us why we have this access through Christ.

He is our intercessor, the one who stands in our place as our high priest.

"For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as {we are, yet} without sin.

Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."

What kinds of things should we be thankful for?

Often when we hear people pray they are thankful for the details of life that they have, for the way that God has given them a new car, their education, their spouse or their kids.

These are fine, but let's not be quite so superficial in our gratitude towards God.

Let us try to dig down a little more profoundly into what God has given us and how He has supplied these things for us.

We see some examples in what Paul expresses his gratitude for in his prayers.

We have examples such as in [1 Corinthians 1:4](#)"I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus."

First of all, he is not focused on himself and that is one of the important things about regular, consistent prayer and writing out, listing things to be thankful for.

We should discipline our thinking to get it off of me, me, me; to get it off of my problems, my issues, what I need to happen and all of the things that are going on in my life, and to focus on others and be thankful for what God has given to others.

The NKJV has translated "by Christ Jesus" here, and it is incorrect.

It is the Greek preposition en and it should be "in Christ Jesus."

It is emphasizing positional truth blessing here—what we have in Christ.

Paul is giving thanks for what has given in Christ Jesus.

This is our possession.

It is one of the blessings that we have been given at the point of salvation, as we saw in [Ephesians 1:3](#).

It is part of that package of blessing that God the Father gives every believer at the instant of salvation. [4] "that in everything you were enriched in Him ..."

"Enriched" is the Greek word ploutizo, which means to be made wealthy beyond all your dreams, to be given an overabundant supply of whatever it is you think you might need.

This also relates to the doctrine of the sufficiency of God's grace.

He has given us more than enough.

The word is used in economic contexts to talk about financial enrichment, and it is used in spiritual contexts to talk about being supplied abundantly in terms of everything we need to live our spiritual life and for our relationship with God.

A challenge: When you sit down to pray next time, sit down and make a list of what this "everything" is in terms of your understanding of God's Word and your understanding of what God has given you at the instant of salvation. Make that part of the specifics of your prayer life.

"... in all speech and all knowledge."

That is, in everything related to the communication of the Word of God, and knowledge, i.e., that which is needed in order to live the Christian life.

It is based on knowledge. Some people think we know too much.

No, we don't know enough.

The more we know the more we can apply.

In any field of life, whatever it is, we never apply but a small percentage of what we know.

The more we know overall, the more we are going to be able to apply.

There is a proportional relationship between the amount we know and the amount we are able to apply.

This is seen also in another area of prayer.

That is, prayer for spiritual knowledge in Ephesians 1:15-18

"For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which {exists} among you and your love for all the saints, do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention {of you} in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

Love for all the saints is not something that happens immediately.

Think of a child who is three or four years old.

They love Mommy and Daddy.

But when they are 30 or 40 and they say they love Mommy and Daddy it is a totally different thing.

They now have an adult comprehension of reality and who their parents are, and it means something.

Whereas when they are three or four years old they are just basically expressing a child's view of love.

And so when we are a baby believer we have a spiritual infant's concept for God and love for others, but it is not a mature adult sense that we see commanded in the New Testament.

John 13:34-35.

So we see here a couple of the different spiritual skills.

These are spiritual skills that summarize the ongoing spiritual life.

Love takes us to a more mature level in the spiritual life where we are truly living and being motivated on the basis of love for God the Father and our love for one another.

What Paul is expressing here by using both of these phrases, "faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints," is thankfulness for their spiritual growth and spiritual maturity.

" ... do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention {of you} in my prayers ..."

Again, this emphasis on praying for others.

And why is he mentioning "in my prayers"?

It is for the purpose "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ..."

Think about that phrase.

It is specifically talking about God the Father.

He is the authority within the Trinity. Jesus Christ is undiminished deity.

He is equal in His deity with God the Father but there is a distinction in terms of their role.

He is further defined as "the Father of glory" or "the glorious Father," recognizing His ultimate position of authority within the Trinity.

And the prayer is that God the Father who is the ultimate bestower of blessing "may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

This relates to spiritual knowledge related to knowing the Word of God and understanding the Word of God so that we might grow to maturity.

How often are we praying that God might give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him?

This is not asking for revelatory gifts; this is asking that God would open up the eyes of our understanding. Ephesians 1:18

"{I pray that} the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints."

Here he uses the physical member of our body, the eye, which lets light into our brain, as a picture of the soul receiving light from the truth of God's revelation.

So this term "eyes of our understanding" is just a way of talking about being further illumined in our thinking by the truth of God's Word.

So Paul is basically praying here that we might have our understanding of God's truth, God's Word, expanded upon and that we might have a fuller grasp of Scripture.

If we are going to pray that then we need to be listening to the Word of God and the teaching of the Word of God more than once or twice a week.

Every single day it should be a focus in our life.

How many times have we sat down and prayed and thanked God for what we know of the Word of God, and prayed that we would know more: that God would expand our understanding of His Word?

And we need to pray that we might be able to practice more of what we know.

"...so that you will know what is the hope of His calling..."

The hope is the future expectation of our calling, what God has invited us to.

The calling has to do with that invitation to salvation but it is not just an invitation to live eternally with God, it is to fulfill a destiny.

That is why we often relate hope to the personal sense of our eternal destiny.

We have a destiny to rule and reign with Christ.

That is our expectation and that is what is going to motivate us today in order to live for Him.

So this knowledge is very important.

It has to be gnosis knowledge, basic knowledge, before it can be converted by the Holy Spirit to epignosis or full knowledge—full, usable knowledge.

1 Tim 1:12-14"I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor.

Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are {found} in Christ Jesus."

He is thankful because God has given him everything he needs for living the spiritual life."

Romans 1:11 talks about intercession.

"For I long to see you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established."

He is not going to give them a spiritual gift, they received that at salvation, but he is going to pray that from his spiritual gift he will impart more knowledge of the Word to them that they may be further established and grounded in their spiritual life and their understanding of the basics of the Word.

This idea of being established is related to building a foundation. [12] "that is, that I may be encouraged together with you {while} among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."

He goes on to say, Romans 1:13 "I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that often I have planned to come to you (and have been prevented so far) so that I may obtain some fruit among you also, even as among the rest of the Gentiles."

He is longing to see them and he has been praying for them. Part of what he has been praying is that he can come to them and teach them the Word.

So we ought to be thinking in terms of our interceding for others of some of the ways in which we can be praying for them in terms of their spiritual life and spiritual growth.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 "and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith."

Again, this is part of that personal part of the first three chapters of 1 Thessalonians where he says that he didn't just abandon them when he left, but that he sent Timothy and Silas back to teach them the Word in order to establish them and make sure that they had a healthy start in their spiritual life.

1 Thessalonians 3:13"so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."

This is where he begins to foreshadow the coming section in chapters four and five dealing with the Second Coming of Christ and the Rapture, that as believers when we are raptured we go before the judgment seat of Christ where we are evaluated.

So Paul is concerned about preparing the congregation of believers now for that future time when they appeared before the judgment seat of Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:17 "comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word."

That is what he is praying for.

He reminds them of this in 2 Thessalonians 3:3 "But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil {one.}" These are the things to pray for.

Philippians 1:9-11 "And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment..."

Are we praying that way? "... so that you may approve the things that are excellent ..." Pursuing a high standard in the Christian life. "... in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness

which {comes} through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God." "Until the day of Christ" is referring to the judgment seat of Christ when we are evaluated.

In the initial part of that prayer he is praying that they will have all discernment (judgment or perception, the ability to make good decisions) and lastly he is praying that they might be filled with the fruits of righteousness.

It is presented as if it was a present tense in the English translation but it is a perfect passive participle, which should be translated "having been filled with the fruits of righteousness which are in Christ Jesus to the glory and praise of God."

Colossians 1:9-11 "For this reason also, since the day we heard {of it,} we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please {Him} in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously."

This covers our priorities in terms of intercession.