

## 168 In everything give thanks

After their amazing experiences in Philippi (Acts 16.12-40), Paul and Silas and the others travelled about 80 miles to the west, to the city of Thessalonica. As always on arrival in a new, Gospel-unreached city, Paul "set to work", first going to the Jewish synagogue, where, again as usual, some believed and some did not (Acts 17.1-4). The Messiah-rejecters got a mob together, "set all the city on an uproar", and went to Jason's house intent on bringing Paul and his companions out to the mob for some "rough stuff". Mercifully, Paul and the others were not found there, so Jason and some fellow believers (presumably these men were Jews newly converted to Christ through Paul's ministry) were then brought before the rulers of the city.

Without meaning to, the accusers then paid Paul and his companions one of the greatest compliments ever! - "These who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (17.6). The Christians were accused of going against Caesar, Jason and the others were given bail, and the case was perhaps put off to another time. But that was enough for the newly-converted group of Christian believers - "they immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night to Berea" (17.10), thus bringing to an end Paul's time in Thessalonica.

That is the background to the first letter that Paul wrote to this little Christian community in Thessalonica. He wrote from Corinth, within a year or so of his time in Thessalonica. In view of all that they had gone through together, it is little wonder that Paul was so fond of them - his whole letter is one of prayerful concern, support, practical guidance and encouragement.

As his letter draws to a close, the Holy Spirit gives us through Paul some brief but beautiful instructions, one of which is simply - "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (5.18).

Giving thanks - in everything??! In all that Paul and his fellow Christians in those early days went through - riots, beatings, stonings, abuse, false accusations, shipwrecks, martyrdom? And in the sufferings common to us all today, Christians included? - illness, job fears, pain, hospital tests, weariness, money worries, discrimination, disability, unemployment, violence, bereavement, divorce, persecution, abuse, wrong use of drugs or drink, loneliness, homelessness, war - the list of possible troubles is long, especially at times for those who bear the name of Christ. So how ever can it be possible to give thanks in any of these trials??

The answer lies in that tiny word "IN", for there is quite a difference between "IN" and "FOR"! In Christ we know that, come what may, all is well, and all shall be well. Nothing that happens to us in our lives, or might happen to us, alters one scrap the great eternal, spiritual blessings in which Christians, purely by God's grace, are so privileged to dwell. We are at peace with God through faith in Christ Jesus - Unalterable Fact (Romans 5.1); all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose - Unalterable Fact (Romans 8.28); NOTHING can or shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus - Unalterable Fact (Romans 8.35-39) - to give just three examples from the hundreds of rock-solid promises in God's Word.

Such unalterable facts as these explain why we are not merely invited but instructed to give thanks IN everything. In doing so we acknowledge both the Lordship of Christ over all things, and the gracious resources of Christ that enable us to cope, and even conquer, right here and right now, in whatever circumstances we may be facing.

When all is said and done, the Lord is the Lord, who knows what He is doing, and why. "Oh taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man who trusts in him" (Psalm 34.8). Amen to that! No wonder we can and should give thanks - in everything.

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