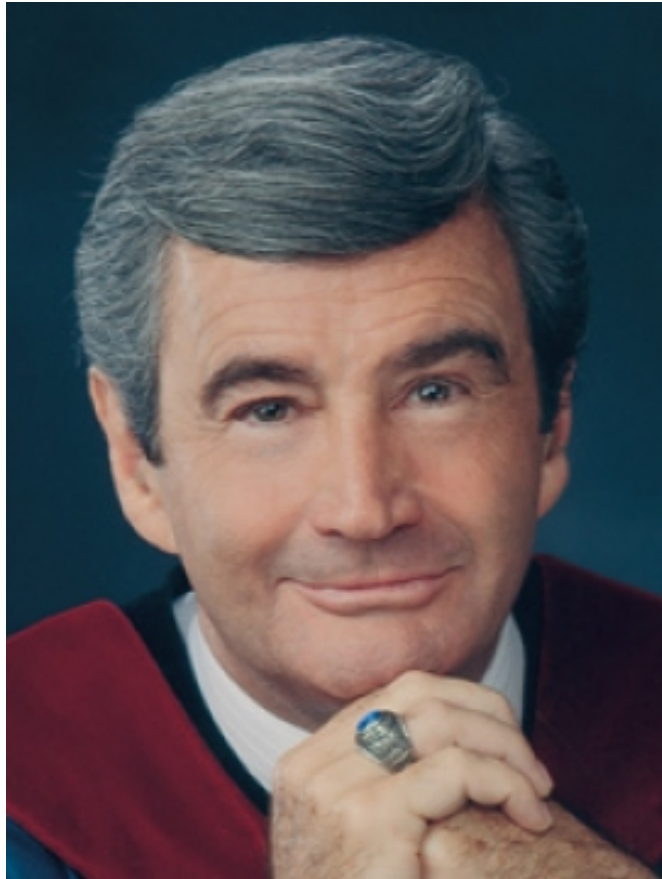


ROME & THE BIRTH OF CHRISTIANITY

Part 10: Introduction

The New Testament writers, we have claimed, lived under the far-reaching yoke of Rome. The story which they tell, from the closing years of the pre-Christian era to the end of the first century A.D., presupposes throughout the dominating presence of Roman power. Their Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, had been handed over by Pontius Pilate to be executed as a common criminal, leaving them, for a time, in confusion and bewilderment. However, after Jesus' resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, their character, attitudes, speech, and actions were radically transformed. What they had been, they were no longer. In addition to everything else, they had learned to be thankful, even in the midst of a vast, secular, military power.

The Christian's Magic Wand



D. James Kennedy
1930-2007

“Do you remember reading fairy tales as a child about wonderful magicians with their magic wands? They would simply wave their wands and – poof! – something would be instantly and gloriously transformed. I’m sure there are very few of us who did not wish, deep in our hearts, to have a magic wand of our own. Think how many unpleasant aspects of life could have been changed into something wonderful!”



The Christian's Magic Wand

“Well, I believe that the Lord *has* offered something very much like a magic wand – something with which we are all familiar, but something we take very much for granted. What is it? *Thanksgiving*. Thanksgiving is, of course, the outward expression of the inward attitude of *gratitude*. It can work like a magic wand upon the circumstances of our life. Someone has said that gratitude is the most deified, and yet the most deserted, of virtues. That is, we love to sing its praises, but we practice it only sparingly. We even need to set aside a special holiday once a year, just to remind ourselves to give thanks. But how much thought do we give to expressing our gratitude once the fourth Thursday of November has passed each year?”



“Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow” (James 1:17).

What Does “Good” Mean?

“Good morning!” said Bilbo, and he meant it. The sun was shining, and the grass was very green. But Gandalf looked at him from under long bushy eyebrows that stuck out further than the brim of his shady hat.

“What do you mean?” he said.



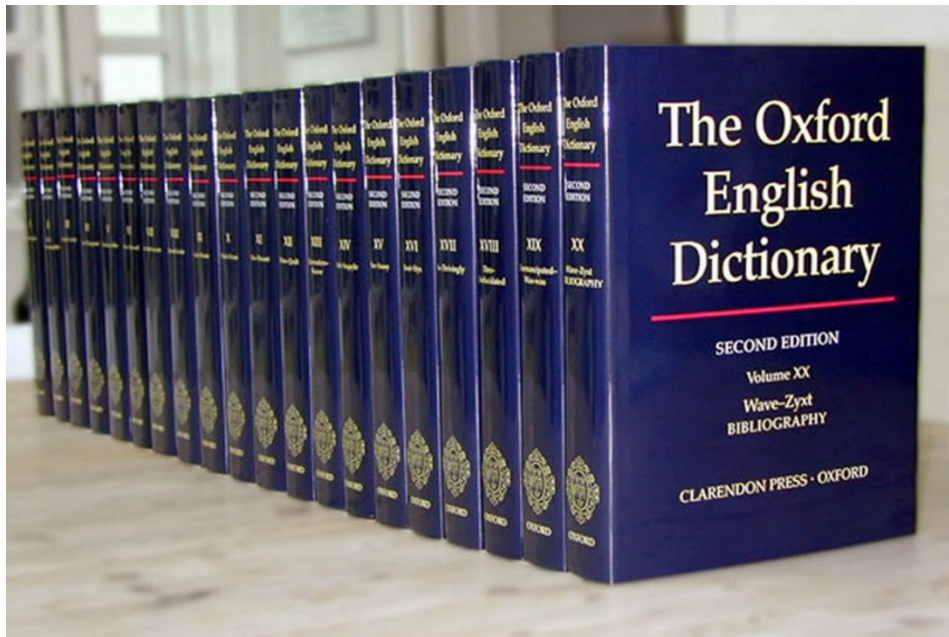
What Does “Good” Mean?

“Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?”

“All of them at once,” said Bilbo.



The Meaning of *Good*



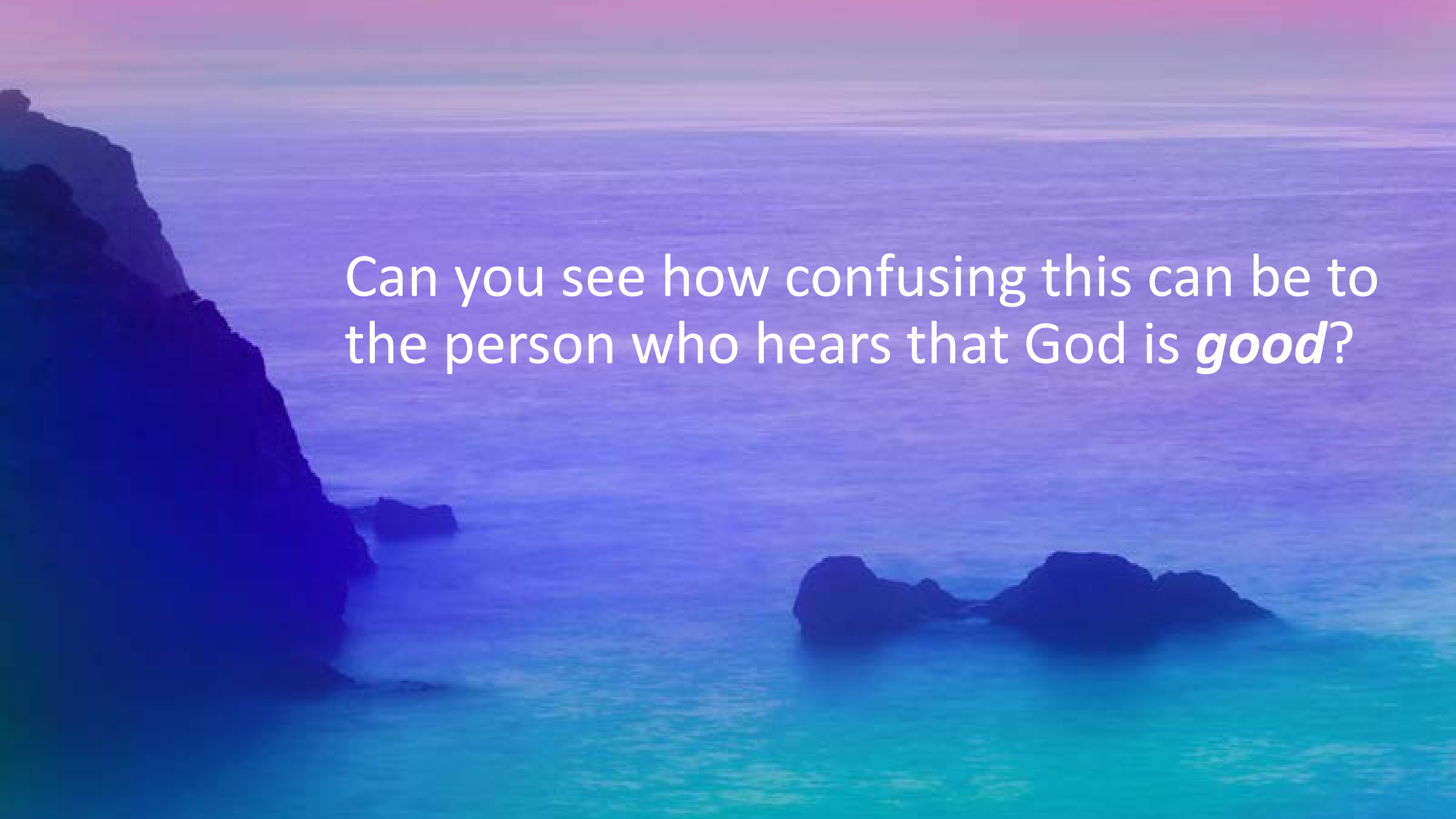
It takes 61 pieces of paper to print the entry for the word *good* as found in the Oxford English Dictionary.



How We Use the Word *Good*

John M. Frame: “*Good* is, first of all, a general term of commendation. We describe as good any kind of excellence, including beauty, economic value, practical usefulness, skillfulness – indeed, anything that evokes from us a favorable response.”

Examples from the OED: A good fire; nothing is too good for them; good wine; good soil; she makes good money; good television, good radio, good theatre; that’s a good one; he’s a good man; his wife is far too good for him; good neighbor or good neighborhood; good-quality recordings; a good day; I feel good; a good reputation; good for you; if you don’t have anything good to say...; as good as gold; and be good.

A coastal scene with a rocky cliff on the left and a calm sea under a purple and blue sky. The text is overlaid in the center.

Can you see how confusing this can be to
the person who hears that God is *good*?



Understanding God's Goodness

- **Wilhelmus á Brakel:** “The goodness of God is the loveliness, benign character, sweetness, friendliness, kindness, and generosity of God.”
- **Stephen Charnock:** “Pure and perfect goodness is only the royal prerogative of God; goodness is a choice perfection of the Divine nature. This is the true and genuine character of God; he is good, he is goodness, good in himself, good in his essence, good in the highest degree, possessing whatsoever is comely, excellent, desirable; the highest good, because first good: whatsoever is perfect goodness, is God; whatsoever is truly goodness in any creature, is a resemblance of God.”



Understanding God's Goodness

- **John M. Frame:** “In a broad sense, goodness is conduct (by man or by God himself) that measures up to God’s standards. As such, it is more or less synonymous with *righteousness*....Goodness is, first of all, God’s own character. It is an attribute of God himself.”
- **R.C. Sproul:** “God’s goodness refers both to His character and His behavior. His actions proceed from and flow out of His being. He acts according to what He is. Just as a corrupt tree cannot bear incorrupt fruit, neither can an incorrupt God produce corrupt fruit.”



Understanding God's Goodness

Thomas Manton: “He is originally good, good of Himself, which nothing else is; for all creatures are good only by participation and communication from God. He is essentially good; not only good, but goodness itself: the creature’s good is a superadded quality, in God it is His essence. He is infinitely good; the creature’s good is but a drop, but in God there is an infinite ocean or gathering together of good. He is eternally and immutably good, for He cannot be less good than He is; as there can be no addition made to Him, so no subtraction from Him.”



How do we know God is good?



Answer: By God's Self-Disclosure

- “Moses said, ‘Please show me your glory.’ And he said, ‘I will make all my **goodness** pass before you and will proclaim before you my name “The Lord.” And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,’ he said, ‘you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live’” (Exodus 33:18-20).
- “What Moses desired, therefore, was a sight of the glory or essential being of God, without any figure, and without a veil” (Keil & Delitzsch).
- “Jehovah granted his request, but only so far as the limit existing between the infinite and holy God and sinful man allowed” (K&D).



Three Further Insights about God

- “As our bodily eye is dazzled, and its power of vision destroyed, by looking directly at the brightness of the sun, so would our whole nature be destroyed by an unveiled sight of the brilliancy of the glory of God” (K&D). Now we can only see God with the eye of faith.
- “The manifestation of Jehovah, which passed before Moses, was to reveal nothing else than what Jehovah expressed in the proclamation of His name” (K&D).
- J.I. Packer calls this manifestation “the sum total of His revealed excellences” – including his truthfulness, trustworthiness, unfailing justice, wisdom, tenderness, forbearance, and noble kindness.

Further Disclosures of His Goodness

- “And Jesus said to him, ‘Why do you call Me **good**? No one is good except God alone’” (Mk. 10:18; cf. Lk. 18:19).
- “Therefore you are to be **perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48).
- “The steadfast **love** of God endures all the day” (Ps. 52:1b).
- “You are **good** and do good; teach me your statutes” (Ps. 119:68).
- “**Good** and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way” (Ps. 25:8).
- “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is **good**!” (Ps. 34:8b).

Further Disclosures of His Goodness

- “For you, O Lord are **good** and forgiving, abounding in steadfast love to all who call upon you” (Ps. 86:5).
- “For the Lord is **good**; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations” (Ps. 100:5).
- “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is **good**; for his steadfast love endures forever” (Ps. 107:1; 118:29).
- “Praise the Lord, for the Lord is **good**; sing to his name, for it is pleasant” (Ps. 135:3).
- “The Lord is **good** to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made” (Ps. 145:9).

God's Goodness Toward His People

- **Forgiveness:** “Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now” (Numbers 14:19). “Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Ps. 32:1).
- **Goodness Paired with Mercy:** “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever” (Ps. 23:6).
- **Provision:** “The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing” (Ps. 34:10). “No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly” (Ps. 84:11).

God's Goodness Toward His People

- **Benevolence:** “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen. 50:20).
- **Source of all Blessings:** “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change” (James 1:17).



God Alone Satisfies

- **Herman Bavinck:** “The creature finds no rest except in God, in him alone.”
- **Blaise Pascal:** “What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are, though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself” (Pascal).
- **Augustine:** “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in Thee.”

Questioning God's Goodness

“To question God’s goodness is not just an intellectual experiment. It is rebellion or tears. It is a little child with tears in its eyes looking up at Daddy and weeping, ‘Why?’ This is not merely the philosophers’ ‘why?’ Not only does it add the emotion of tears but also it is asked in the context of relationship. It is a question put to the Father, not a question in a vacuum.”



Peter Kreeft, PhD

1937 -

Professor of Philosophy, Boston College

R.C. Sproul



“One of the most popular New Testament verses is Romans 8:28: ‘And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.’ This text on divine providence is as difficult to comprehend as it is popular. If God is able to make everything that happens to us work together for our good, then ultimately everything that happens to us is good. We must be careful to stress the word *ultimately*. On the earthly plane things that happen to us may indeed be evil.

No Tragedies!

(We must be careful not to call good, evil or evil, good.) We encounter affliction, misery, injustice, and a host of other evils. Yet God in His goodness transcends all of these things and works them to our good. For the Christian, *ultimately*, there are no tragedies. Ultimately, the providence of God works all these proximate evils for our final benefit.”





Thanksgiving: Our Response to God's Goodness

Gratitude Expressed

- “**In everything give thanks**; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thess. 5:18).
- “One of the lepers fell on his face at Jesus’ feet...and **gave thanks**” (Luke 17:16).
- When Paul considers the question, “Who will set me free from this body of death?” he acknowledges his wretchedness...and **gives thanks** (Rom. 7:24-25).
- When Paul writes about the Christian’s walk, he exhorts the Ephesians to “**always give thanks** for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God even the Father” (Eph. 5:20).

Gratitude Expressed

- Paul instructs the Colossians: “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** through Him to God the Father” (Col. 3:17).
- At the Last Supper, Jesus “took a cup and **gave thanks**, and gave it to them saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you’” (Mt. 26:27).
- “So they took away the stone [from Lazarus’s tomb]. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, ‘Father, I **thank You** that You have heard Me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me. When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out’” (John 11:41-43).

Thanksgiving in the New Testament

- For **food** (Feeding of the 5,000 & the 4,000; Jn. 6:11,23; Mt. 15:36; Mk. 8:6; Paul shipwrecked with the sailors, Acts 27:35; I Cor. 10:30)
- For the **Last Supper** (Mt. 26:26-27; Mk. 14:22-23; Lk. 22:17-19; I Cor. 11:24)
- For **healing** (One of the ten lepers (Lk. 17:16)
- For **raising Lazarus** from the dead (Jn. 11:41)
- For **fellowship** with other Christians (Acts 28:15)
- For **believers who are proclaiming the gospel** (Rom. 1:8; Phil. 1:3)
- For **setting Paul free** from the body of this death (Rom. 7:25)
- For **Prisca and Aquila** who risked their lives for Paul (Rom. 16:4)

Thanksgiving in the New Testament

- For **God's grace** given to believers (I Cor. 1:4; Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:3,12; I Thess. 2:13; II Thess. 2:13; Phm. 1:5)
- For **speaking in tongues** (I Cor. 14:18)
- For **deliverance from persecution** (II Cor. 1:10-11)
- For **loving other Christians** (Eph. 1:15; Phm. 1:4-6)
- For **all things** (Eph. 5:20; Col. 3:17; I Thess. 5:18)
- For **spiritual growth** (I Thess. 1:2f.; II Thess. 1:3)
- For **Jesus taking power** and beginning to reign at the end of time (Rev. 11:17)

Five Biblical Principles

1. By examining the life of Jesus Christ, we are reminded that developing the **habit of thankfulness** needs to be a part of our daily lives.
2. Like the leper, we should return to the Lord with gratitude when He does **extraordinary things** on our behalf.
3. Our gratitude to God will almost certainly be in **proportion to our sense of feeling unworthily blessed**.
4. Gratitude is first and foremost **our duty**, whether we are emotionally invested or not. “In everything give thanks” involves the volitional side of our being and demonstrates that we trust His Word.
5. Gratitude is to be directed to God for “all things” and is an acknowledgement that **God knows and does all things well for His glory and for our good**.