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EPHESIANS 5:1-4

Ephesians: Recognizing Who You Are in Christ

Today we're going to talk about one word. I was actually surprised in the passage in Ephesians that this word was there where it was. It took me on a path through God's word to understand it a little bit more. It's the word 'gratefulness.' I'm surprised to see it where it is in Ephesians 5 and my goal for you in the next thirty minutes is to motivate you in this area of gratefulness, to inspire you to have a heart of gratefulness. That is my desire because I think that in the trash of life sometimes we find ourselves getting down by that and God, I believe, would have us to have grateful hearts.

I want you to look at Ephesians 5 and see how that is demonstrated right there in Ephesians 5:1-4. Notice it says, *Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.* We need to imitate God. The word there is where we get the word 'mimic' from. It means to imitate. God wants us to be Godlike in our lives. Who are we patterning ourselves after? We need to be looking for ways that are godly.

What does that mean in practical terms? Since God isn't a human, how do we imitate Him, what are we to do in the midst of that? So verse 2 tells us – *And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

This is the word *walk* again that we've talked about in Ephesians. This living of our lives in a way that is honoring to God is the word *walk*. He's saying *walk in love* or *live in love as Christ loved us*.

Notice in verse 3 there are a bunch of trashy things mentioned. I want you to see them because I think that many of us live with trashy things around us. And then notice the last word *thanksgiving*. Let me read it in context.

Verse 3 says, *But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.*

I was shocked to see that because if I were writing this I would've written a different word. Probably because we just got off of these bad things that we don't want to have, coarse joking, we don't want to have this filthiness, we don't want to have this foolish talk. But instead what? In my mind I'm thinking he would probably say instead righteousness or clean speech. But that's not what he says. He uses the word *thanksgiving*. Why does he use that word?

That's where I spent most of my time this week meditating. I want to share with you some of the path that I took as I went through the scriptures trying to understand the benefit of gratefulness in our lives.

It seems that Paul is saying here that gratefulness is the antidote of some of the trash stuff that happens in our life. If we spend time with gratefulness it will affect our hearts, we'll be drawn in a particular way for what God has for us. So I want to have in my own heart this attitude of gratitude. I want to have in my own heart this responsiveness to God that has this thanksgiving.

Let's talk a little bit more about what it is. The first thing I did was ask the question, where is this idea of thankfulness or thanksgiving already talked about in the book of Ephesians? Or in general in this book? Here's where I saw that the word is used three times in the book of Ephesians.

First of all, Paul practices this in his reflection of other people. As he's reflecting on his time with the Ephesians (he's writing a letter and he's reflecting back on them) he says in 1:16, *I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.*

Often when we're remembering people, when we're remembering things that thanksgiving can overpower us and we can be grateful for what has happened. I'm sure that some of the negative things also came to his mind, but he is overwhelmed with gratefulness and that patterns his thinking. So as he reflects back on this experience of his time with the Ephesians he remembers the positive things. He's remembering with thankfulness those people.

Now comes our verse in chapter 5:4. But look down later in chapter 5 in verses 19-20 it says, *Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

I'm going to show you in a moment another passage that talks about how thanksgiving can enhance our worship as we even prepare for Sunday mornings, as we come before the Lord. What we're seeing here is the value of thanks or the value of gratefulness in our lives. What does that mean? It seems to me that thankfulness or gratefulness is a key to the Christian life in some way or another.

I don't have all this down and defined at this point, but it's pretty clear to me that the gratefulness is the attitude of the heart that's always aware of the blessings provided by God and others. It's an attitude of the heart.

I'm impressed with the whole emphasis that the Bible places on this idea of gratitude and gratefulness. If you look at the Old Testament, for example, we see that there are a number of sacrifices. You know about the sacrifices. The sacrifices that talk about you bring a bull or a sheep or a pigeon or something before the Lord and you offer the sacrifices for your sins.

But one of the interesting sacrifices in Leviticus 3 is the thank offering, a voluntary gift that someone could bring to the priest. They would put their hand on the sheep before it was sacrificed as an identification of just identifying with this sacrifice and saying, "God, I am

grateful for what you're doing." You can imagine a family in Old Testament times saying, "We are so grateful for the Lord. Let's go before the priest and let's offer a sacrifice, a thank offering before the Lord." So that was one of their rituals.

Some people believe that sacrifices were over at the cross and there is definitely the truth that when Christ died on the cross that the sacrifices representing the atonement of sin were ended. But that doesn't mean that we don't offer sacrifices. Because the New Testament tells us about sacrifices that need to be offered. Just look at this idea of sacrifices in the New Testament.

In Romans 12:1 it says, *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.*

There is a sense in which we're offering sacrifices today. In this passage I just read it's talking about the importance of offering our bodies as a living sacrifice before God daily, regularly coming before God as a sacrifice. A commitment, a demonstration of our heart. Because when the Old Testament sacrifices were offered what happened was the person offering the sacrifice would connect with who God is, who we are, and God's plan. In the same way when we come before God and we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice, we're connecting to who God is, who we are, and God's plan for us.

Let me show you another sacrifice in Hebrews 13 that talks about thanks. *Through him then (that is through Christ) let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.*

Every time that you come before the Lord and you say, "Thank you, Lord" for something, it's a sacrifice that's pleasing to God. It's as if you were putting your hand on the sacrifice in the Old Testament identifying with that and that sweet smelling aroma was coming out before the Lord. There's a sense of identifying with this grateful heart that God wants us to do. It's a beautiful thing that God contains in His word for us. The point here is that thanksgiving is an act of the heart. It's not just an act of the mouth; it's something that takes place inside your heart and it actually changes who we are.

Lord, I want to come to you right now and not ask for anything. I just want to thank you for something. Do we do that? I mean, that should be part of our regular prayer that we're saying, "God, I just want to thank you for that sunset. I want to thank you for the privilege of living this day. That this day, today, unlike any other day, is special because it comes today."

Thankfulness is a choice that we make. A grateful heart is something we choose to do. It's not determined by circumstances. We must keep that in mind. Wherever you go you can find something to complain about. If you travel somewhere you can complain about the lumpy bed or the lines that you have to wait in. Or you can stay home and complain that you never go anywhere interesting and that there's nothing good on television. Anywhere you go you can find something to complain about. We can also find things to be thankful about.

Here are several things about gratitude. I think this will help us understand it and grab it a little bit more in our lives so that we can appropriate this on a daily basis. I want to make four points about gratefulness that I think will help us grasp it a little bit better.

One is that gratitude is not dependent upon circumstances. If we come to this idea and think that our gratefulness must be determined by our circumstances then we have a problem. Because there's always something we can be grateful for. There's always something we can complain about. How are we going to approach that dilemma? Gratefulness is not determined by our circumstances. We can always find something to be grateful for.

Number two, gratitude is about awareness and sensitivity. I think this is very significant that we want to be aware of what's going on. We want to know what's going on and the awareness of things becomes very important. I think we lose our sensitivity to the awareness of the good things in our lives when we just experience them all the time. When God blesses us we get used to God's blessing and we even expect it that God owes us something. Some kind of entitlement mentality in our own hearts.

A third statement about gratitude is that gratitude is a continual choice. Will I focus on gratefulness today or will I get pressured down by the circumstances? When someone asks you, "How are you doing today?" and you say, "Well under the circumstances..." I've just got to say, "What are you doing under the circumstances?" Because God has called us to rise above the circumstances. Gratitude is a way that we do that.

Fourthly, the more you practice gratefulness the more joyful you become. I'm convinced that gratefulness is not just a matter of speaking some words that say "thank you," although I think that's a very good way for us to demonstrate gratefulness in our own hearts. I'm convinced that it's a world view. It's a world view issue that we're able to embrace gratefulness as a way of looking at life the way God designed us to look at life and it does something for us inside. Expressing gratitude transforms us.

If you imagine an experiment that had two people involved, one person was told that for ten minutes every morning and every night I want you to think of all kind of things you can complain about. And the other person for ten minutes in the morning and ten minutes at night I want you to think about all kinds of things you can be grateful for.

So the person who's complaining would say things like, "I don't like this job. I don't like this traffic. I don't like this neighborhood. I don't like this particular dog. I don't like the things that are going on around here." They would complain about these things. Where the person who's grateful would be saying things like, "I'm grateful that I have a job. There are a lot of people today who don't even have a job. I'm grateful for the beauty of this day. I'm grateful for the nice summer breeze that's coming through." This person's focusing on gratefulness.

I guarantee that at the end of a year those will be self-fulfilling prophecies in a person's life. The person who complains all the time is going to see all the negative stuff continually. They've developed a habit of that. God wants a transformation to happen inside of us. He wants this

gratefulness to change who we are. Now we're thinking more about what God has done and the good things that are going on in our lives.

I'm convinced that what Paul was saying in Ephesians 5:1-4 is that thanksgiving is a key for living among the trash that we live in. I know that some of you live with trash in your life. Sometimes it's the fact that you go to work and there's somebody there who has a foul mouth. Sometimes you don't go to work but you watch TV and the foul language is there. He's talking about three different things there. He's talking about foolish talking, filthiness, and coarse joking. That's what he's talking about in that passage.

We'll look more into that next week, but you've got to understand what he's saying here is the solution, thankfulness. You want to keep the washing machine of your heart clean? Then you're going to be a thankful person, grateful for what God has done and God is doing.

Let me show you some other ways that this word 'gratefulness' is used or 'thanks' or 'thanksgiving' are used in the Bible to help us understand what God wants us to do in our lives.

In Colossians 3:15 we have thankfulness tied to peace inside of our hearts. Notice what it says. *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*

There's something about thankfulness that maybe even releases this peace of God inside of our hearts. You want to have peace in your heart? Then somehow it's going to be tied to this idea of thankfulness. It's not joy in our lives that breeds thankfulness apparently; it's this thankfulness that brings joy inside of us. So thankfulness or gratefulness does something to us and builds something inside of us that is strategic for life.

In Colossians 3:16 it says this: *Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.* So when you come to worship together, as well all do this, we want to have gratitude in our hearts and it's this gratitude that somehow lifts us out of ourselves into this admiration for who God is that's part of worship. Strategic as mentioned in this passage.

It's not optional though. Look at Colossians 3:17. *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* It seems to be a mandate there that in everything we do we want to have thanks tied into it.

I just find it fascinating that God has taken the word 'gratitude,' 'thanks,' and 'thanksgiving' and placed it in so many strategic places in His word. And so as we're processing life, gratitude is going to be one of those things that's going to lift us up above the rest. It's going to lift us up above the trash that happens in our lives. It's not optional; it's a command as seen again in 1 Thessalonians 5:18. *In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*

So if you look at your week this week and you say, "Well, this was not a week for me to give thanks. This was definitely a bad week for me." It says *in everything*. Could there have been

something in your week this week that may have allowed you to rise above the trash by being grateful and experience that gratitude.

It appears that gratitude is not optional. It is part of who we are. I would even suggest it is one of the signs of a mature Christian life is the person who can embrace this idea of gratitude and gratefulness in their lives.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a great theologian, said this: “In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great more than we give and it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich.” The world is so full of wondrous things that we all should be like kings, enjoying the beauty of what’s going on in our lives.

Now let’s look at a couple of passages where thankfulness seems to be a remedy for something. Let’s look first of all at Philippians 4:6. In Philippians 4:6 it talks about anxiety and worry and about how thankfulness is going to be part of the solution for that. Philippians 4:6 says, *But in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

So the person who’s experiencing anxiety inside, the person who’s worrying a lot must turn around then and use prayer and petition and thanksgiving. The gratefulness for what you have instead of what you don’t have. The gratefulness for the control that God has given you, not just worrying about the control that God hasn’t given you. So there’s this gratefulness that does something inside that addresses the anxiety that we experience in life. Gratitude, again, is the solution here. God has a plan for us. As mature believers one of the things we work on and build in our lives is gratefulness, gratitude, and when that happens it helps us to address even emotional issues that sometimes we experience in our lives. Anxiety being one of them.

How do we develop this attitude of gratitude in our hearts? Colossians 4:2 says, *Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.* So there’s this idea of commitment. Devoted has this idea of being committed to this. We’re going to be committed to three things it says there. Be committed to *prayer*, be *watchful*, and also be *thankful*.

Again, I’m surprised that the word *thankful* is there. I would’ve thought God would’ve said in the things you’re going to do in life be sure you’re devoted to prayer, be watchful, and be righteous. He doesn’t say that. He emphasizes this idea of gratitude which just makes a statement about God that is fascinating to me. There’s an awareness that we develop in life that changes who we are. It makes us more grateful for what happens.

There’s an interesting story in the Bible in the New Testament about Jesus who came into a town and there were ten lepers there. Leprosy was a terribly disease causing the damage to your skin, nerve endings that hinder your ability to feel. These people would lose toes and fingers, faces would be deformed, things would happen because of the skin diseases that would take place. The remedy for a skin disease is because they were not something that were healable in essence, physically speaking, then the solution for the community is those lepers, those who had leprosy would live on their own in a quarantine outside of the community. When anybody came by they would have to yell out, “Unclean! Unclean!” so people would know to stay away from them.

As Jesus is going into town, here's the colony, the ten lepers that are there and probably yelling out "unclean" but actually wanting to be healed. Jesus goes over to them and He heals them. He heals these ten people who were in this place where they had a problem that was unhealable. Jesus heals them and the solution at that point when they were healed from leprosy is if you thought your skin disease went away the way to find out was to go to the priest. The priest was the one who would pronounce you clean or not clean. That is, he would determine whether you were able to be free from your infectious disease and be able to go back into the community and live there.

Jesus sent them to the priest so they would go and get checked out. The Bible says that one of the guys came back and said, "Thank you," and bowed down before Jesus. "Thank you for doing this. This is so valuable." And Jesus said this: "Weren't there ten people who were healed? Where are the other nine?"

I think sometimes we're like the other nine because God does so many things. He touches us in ways that are so special and we forget to have that attitude of gratefulness inside of our hearts. We forget to come back and thank Him. But it's not just the thanks, the words of thank you. I think we need this attitude that says I am so grateful for all that God has done for me. It's going to change the way I live. I'm going to live a particular way because of this thing inside of my heart that God has done. He has blessed me in so many different ways that I am so grateful for even the small things that go on.

There's a psalm in the Old Testament, a psalm written about gratitude. I want you to see the psalm because it talks about how we come into the presence of the Lord. Many of the psalms are Psalms of Ascent we call them because they were sung on their way up to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was about 3,000 feet above sea level or so, about 2500, and people would come up from all sides to Jerusalem to offer their praise. So Psalms of Ascent were kinds of psalms that people would sing on their way up.

Crowds of people (they weren't in buses or cars in those days) as they were walking along they would hear the psalms being sung by the crowds as they were going up knowing that we're going to worship, knowing that we're going to come to the temple, knowing that we're going to come to the special place where we're going to be celebrating this feast that God has designed for us. People would come to this place and they would be prepared for that.

In the same way I believe that we get in our cars or in our buses or in our motorcycles and we drive to church. And so how are we to handle ourselves on our way to church?

Psalm 100 is a beautiful psalm. It says this:

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;

come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his;

we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

*Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise;
give thanks to him and praise his name.
For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;
his faithfulness continues through all generations.*

What that means is that when we get in our cars on Sunday morning and we start driving to church we want to get ourselves ready by praising God, by thanking God, so when we get here we have something to overflow to others who need that as well. We don't come to church to get pumped up. We come to church to share with other people what God has been pumping us up during the week. There's a sense when we come to the Lord with a sense of gratitude that God does something pretty powerful inside of our hearts.

There is in our lives an opportunity for us to be grateful. It's in our hearts. And when we're grateful God does something special on the inside. We all have something to be grateful for. Even the idea that today is a special day. The idea that this is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.

If we got up every morning and we said this is the day, today, that God has given to me, we would think differently about this day. If we looked at this day as the first day that we've ever experienced, we would see things that we hadn't seen before. We would not take them for granted. If we knew that this was the last day that we would live in our lives we would look around and we would see things we didn't see before. The awareness level would increase and we would be grateful people.

I prepared a video for you. I actually took some things from different places and put them together to create a video that would hopefully inspire you this morning as you consider gratefulness in your own heart. This particular video has a number of scriptures in it from our passage today, a number of scriptures that address the issue of gratefulness and thankfulness. Just take a moment and allow God to speak to you from this as you watch this video.

[START OF VIDEO]

You think this is just another day in your life. It's not just another day. It's the one day that is given to you. Today. It's given to you. It's the only gift that you have right now. And the only appropriate response is gratefulness.

If you do nothing else but to cultivate that response to the great gift that this unique day is. If you learn to respond as if it were the first day in your life and the very last day then you will have spent this day very well.

Begin by opening your eyes and be surprised that you have eyes you can open. That incredible array of colors that is constantly offered to us for pure enjoyment.

Look at the sky. We so rarely look at the sky. We so rarely note how different it is from moment to moment with clouds coming and going. We just think of the weather and even with the weather we don't think of the many nuances of weather. We just think of good weather and bad

weather. This day right now is unique weather. Maybe a kind that will never exactly in that form come again. That formation of clouds in the sky will never be the same that is right now. Open your eyes. Look at that.

Look at the faces of people whom you meet. Each one has an incredible story behind their face. A story that you could never fully fathom. Not only their own story, but the story of their ancestors. We only go back so far. And in this present moment on this day all the people you meet, all that life from generations and from so many places all over the world flurries together and meets you here like a life-giving water if you only open your heart and drink.

Open your heart to the incredible gifts that civilization gives to us. You flip a switch and there is electric light. You turn a faucet and there is warm water and cold water and drinkable water. It's a gift that millions and millions in the world will never experience. So these are just a few of an enormous number of gifts to which you can open your heart.

So I wish you that you will open your heart to all these blessings and let them flow through you. That everyone whom you will meet on this day will be blessed by you. Just by your eyes, by your smile, by your touch. Just by your presence. Let the gratefulness overflow into blessing all around you. And then it will clearly be a good day.
[END OF VIDEO]

As we ponder the idea of gratefulness there's one verse in 2 Corinthians 9:15 (the very first verse I memorized when I was two) – *Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!* Back then it was *thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift* when I was two, but now the translation is different. This indescribable gift describing Jesus Christ who sacrificed His life for us so that we have much to be grateful for spiritually.

We're going to sing two songs. Both of them have to do with thankfulness. The first one that we're going to sing ties into this thankfulness to the cross, thankful for what God has done and the sacrifice for our own sins. I would encourage you during that song to just remind yourself of the gratefulness you have toward God for the sacrifice that He has given for you.

The second song is really a rejoicing song about just being thankful for God and just a time for us to rejoice together and be reminded of what God wants to do in our hearts. Not just that we remember and be thankful and then we walk out of here. But He wants to create inside of us this culture of gratefulness, this environment of gratefulness inside of us that allows us then to be a blessing to other people because of what God has done for us. Of all the people in the world, Christians have more to be grateful for than anybody. Of all the people in the world Christians have something to share with others that others don't have to share. We have something special and it starts with the gratefulness inside of our own hearts that frees us then to share that message with other people.