

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Thanksgiving Day (USA) – November 28, 2024

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”

–Philippians 4:6–

An English teacher once taught me that I ought to observe that in a sentence that uses the word “but,” what is most important is whatever follows that conjunction. That is important for us to note when it comes to this well-known verse from Paul in Philippians. It’s important for us to not ignore that conjunction because for anyone who worries or is anxious is not helped by being told, “Don’t be anxious,” or “Don’t worry.” That is bound to make someone more anxious and then become anxious about being anxious, and so on. Paul knows this problem. So, he adds the conjunction, “but” after which the most important part of the sentence follows. He knows where our anxieties can be directed and through whom we are given a peace that passes all understanding. So, he says pray to God in and about everything.

In this section of chapter four, Paul is teaching his church both the Second Commandment, how to use God’s name in prayer, and also the Fourth Article of the Lord’s Prayer, that not only bread on the table, but that everything we have comes from God. He wants his church to recognize that God is not stingy towards his creatures with what he has, but that he is abundant in love and with his gifts towards us. He observes how God, through their giving to him, he received “full payment, and more. I am well supplied” (4:18). He uses this example to preach to them the promise that for them, “God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (4:19). And Paul, like Luther states in the explanation of the Fourth Petition, is opening their eyes so that they will realize that God gives them everything, and more than they even think to pray for.

We will often pray for example, for good weather, good health, for work and income, a good reputation, etc. Not only does he give us every need, but (there’s that word) he also gives, creates, and sustains our lives in the intricacies and minutia of everyday life, which we don’t even think to pray for, like praying for every breath we take, every heartbeat, every grain in the field to sprout that eventually is baked into a warm loaf of bread for us to eat and be satisfied. Daily, God is helping us to recognize all the ways he is extravagantly bestowing his riches upon his sinners such that we are released from our anxiety and are given a peace which surpasses all understanding. In Christ and his cross you are well supplied, and more, for this life and the life to come.

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