

Thanksgiving

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Main theme: One of the defining marks of a mature Christian is thankfulness.

Thanksgiving—the giving of thanks—to God for all His blessings should be one of the most distinctive marks of the believer in Jesus Christ. – Billy Graham

This sermon highlights three aspects of biblical gratitude:

1. Thanksgiving is an act of praise

- It comes very naturally to most people to think of gratitude as a kind of relational currency that is owed as payment from the receiver to the giver of a gift.
- However, when it comes to our relationship with the Lord we need to understand that in giving thanks to God we are not paying God back for anything.
- Who of us could ever pay God back for sending his son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins? Certainly not one of us!

In Scripture, thanks to God is never repayment but it is always praise!

Psalm 100:4–5 Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations. (ESV)

Psalm 106:1 Praise the LORD! Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever!

Psalm 35:18 I will thank you in the great congregation; in the mighty throng I will praise you.

Heb. 12:28 Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe

Is. 12:4-5 [the Prophet Isaiah declares] And you will say in that day: “Give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted. “Sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously; let this be made known in all the earth.

- As Christians, when we say “thank you” to another person - yes - we are being polite And yes we are engaging in social courtesy — but that’s not all we are doing.
- Biblical thanksgiving begins and ends with God, therefore when we speak words of thankfulness to one another – it is right and good and appropriate for those words to be the overflow of passionate, thankful praise to God.
- A thankful heart is like a river that never stops flowing.
 - In private prayer is flowing.
 - Throughout the day at work or when you’re with the kids its flowing.
 - When you go to church for Sunday worship, its flowing.
- If your heart is like that, what’s going to happen with others who relate to you?
 - Well they are going to get splashed with thankfulness.
 - They are going to be drenched with thankfulness.
- Jesus says, out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks – and so if your heart is overflowing with thankfulness to God, that thankfulness will spill out onto people as we are regularly expressing our gratitude to them

“I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus...(1 Cor.1:4)”

- The Apostle Paul understood that all blessings ultimately come from God.
- So when Paul saw God’s grace in the Corinthians what he saw produced such gratitude in his heart to God that it could not be contained.
- His gratitude to God overflowed... and the Corinthians were soaked by Paul’s gratitude.
- He said ‘Corinthians, I thank God for you!’
- What a great model for us!
- A good application question might be — “what are you splashing those closest to you with? Gratitude? Thankfulness? Or something else? Perhaps your critique, your criticism, your complaining.”
- Too often we splash those we love with something other than our thankfulness.
- Where those patterns exist may the Lord help us to repent and by his grace with his help to cultivate thankful hearts that splash over in thanksgiving to others

2. Thanksgiving is an act of humble submission to God

Colossians 2:6-7 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.

- Here the Apostle Paul helps us to see that living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and being thankful go hand in hand.
- We submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ our king in part by abounding in thanksgiving to him

1 Thess 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. - 1 Thessalonians 5:18

In Eph 5:20 we are told to give thanks "always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

- In these two verses, God says that it is God's will for us to give thanks in all circumstances and for all circumstances. I am thankful to Doug Wilson for this insight drawn from those two verses.
- Putting this all together -- as believers we submit, we yield to the Lordship of Jesus Christ and to the will of God in part by giving thanks in all circumstances for all circumstances.
- Admittedly, this is hard to do in part because in the midst of suffering, we do not always see the good God is working through our suffering.
- The voice of thankfulness is the voice of faith that trusts God even when we can't make sense of our suffering.

Perhaps the most difficult time to be thankful is when we're in the midst of a setback, a challenge, or a trial. When the storm comes, giving thanks is rarely our first reaction. Being thankful for adversity is never easy, but it is always right. From experience I know the difficult times are the ones in which God seems to be most at work in our lives, strengthening our weak spots, comforting our hurts, and drawing us to greater dependence. Businessman John Marriott offered this perspective: "Good timber does not grow with ease; the stronger the wind, the stronger the trees." Let's not neglect to thank God for the strong winds He allows to blow our direction. – John MacArthur

3. Thanksgiving is a response to the Gospel

- In God's call to be thankful, he doesn't call us to ignore circumstances; he doesn't call us to ignore trials and ignore pain or to pretend that something difficult isn't happening to us.
- However, he does call us at all times, to remember and to respond to who He is and what He has done for us in saving us -- with thanksgiving.

“In Pauline theology, the primary focus of Pauline thanksgiving is the redemptive work of God through his son.” – David Pao

- What This NT scholar is saying is that whenever the Apostle Paul expresses gratitude or teaches on thankfulness, his primary focus is the gospel—it is on all that God in Christ has done to save us!

Romans 7:24-25 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

- Here Paul doesn't just lament his battle with sin and leave it there. Rather, he confidently affirms that through Christ, and because of Christ we can by God's grace and in God's power overcome sin!

1 Cor 15:56-57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Even when life feels like it is spinning hopelessly out of control--this as our sure and steady hope that never changes -- Christ Jesus our Lord who was victorious over sin and death!
- When trials come, We can feel like, “how can I be thankful, when I am experiencing such pain and sorrow?”
- Here's how we can be thankful:
 - By focusing our attention on Christ.
 - By contemplating the gospel.
 - By considering what Christ has done for us until our souls are happy in God
- May God help us by his Holy Spirit to do just that.

Questions for Discussion/Application

- Re-read the passages under point #1, “Thanksgiving is an act of praise.” What initial observations and insights do you have from reading these verses?
- We heard that “In Scripture, thanks to God is never repayment but it is always praise.” What is this important to keep in mind when it comes to this topic of thanksgiving?
- What has God done for you that causes you to want to give Him thankful praise?
- How can we grow in becoming more thankful for what the Lord has done for us?
- How are expressions of thanks to others the overflow of our relationship with God?
- How do you want to grow in expressing gratitude to those around you?
- How can contemplating the gospel help us to still be thankful even when life is disappointing and difficult?
- Consider taking time to pray and give thanks to the Lord for His many blessings to us!