

Be Thankful

One great sin that people often commit is that of ingratitude. Paul writes concerning God's revelation in the created order that although they knew God (exist), *they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking.* (Romans 1:21)

Too frequently we are not grateful for what we do have and stress the problems that we experience. Sometimes this so characterizes us that we develop a negative outlook on life. All people should be grateful to God for the good they experience in life which includes the basics of life- food, clothes, shelter, sunshine and rain. (Matthew 5:45) In his common grace God makes the rain to fall on just and the unjust. *The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.* Psalm 145:9 But of all people Christians should be the most grateful because they know the Source of life. They also know the source of continuous blessings that come with eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord. Thankfulness is a mark of the Christian faith whereas ingratitude is a characteristic of paganism.

The Bible identifies the Source of all good with our heavenly Father. James 1:17 reads, *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.* Let us be thankful to him.

When we talk about gratitude or thankfulness, we are describing a sense of deep appreciation, even a warm emotion or internal glow, for the benefits that we have received. Christians primarily express their thankfulness to God and the Lord Jesus who is the ultimate source of all blessings and the only true source of spiritual blessings. However, our gratitude also flows to individuals and groups who convey blessings and benefits on us. Other people are often the hand of God's blessing.

In a world full of needs, violence and exploitation we can be thankful when we remember our sovereign God has all things under his control. Nothing is too big for him to handle and nothing will stop the fulfillment of his ultimate purposes. He can take the evil men and devils intent and turn the end result into something good for all who love him. Joseph who had been sold into slavery by his jealous brothers expressed this truth to them years later when they came to Egypt for food. Joseph said to his brothers, "Please, come near me," and they came near. "I am Joseph, your brother," he said, "the one you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now don't be worried or angry with yourselves for selling me here, because God sent me ahead of you to preserve life. ... ⁷ God sent me ahead of you to establish you as a remnant within the land and to keep you

alive by a great deliverance. ⁸Therefore it was not you who sent me here, but God. Genesis 45:4-8

How can we cultivate a thankful spirit? We can cultivate a thankful spirit by emphasizing the blessings we enjoy in life. This is especially so of those spiritual blessings that come from union with Christ. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places... (Ephesians 1:3) And because of [God] you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption.” (1 Corinthians 1:30)*

As believers we can be thankful because we are “hid with Christ in God” and have received full forgiveness for all our sins. Christ bore the punishment due to them so God can righteously, justly forgive us. But Christ Jesus not only died for us he also rose in triumphant for us. The Heilberg Catechism question 17 explains how Christ resurrection benefits us. “First, by his resurrection he has overcome death, so that he might make us share in the righteousness he won for us by his death. Second, by his power we too are already now resurrected to a new life. Third, Christ’s resurrection is a guarantee of our glorious resurrection.” In short, eternal life is ours now and we are experiencing continual spiritual renewal in the inner person. Thus as Christians we have the security of the abiding presence of God and of his indwelling Spirit. We are accepted as holy in Jesus and have the certain hope of heaven. Jesus said in John 5:24, *Truly, truly, I tell you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and will not come under judgment. Indeed, he has crossed over from death to life. And in John 6:47 he declares: Truly, truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.* The guarantee on earth in the Spirit who seals us. *In Christ Jesus, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.* Ephesians 1:13-14
For all of this and so much more we can be truly thankful.

Another way to cultivate thankfulness is to simply obey God’s Word when it instructs us to be thankful and express our praise to God. Here the psalmist, *Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! (Psalm 100:4) Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! (Psalm 107:1)*

David learned even in the midst of opposition and heartache to say from a full heart: O give thanks to the Lord, O my soul. The Apostle Paul followed in David’s footsteps when in the prison at Philippi he and Silas prayed and sang praises to God at midnight. (Acts 16:25) Paul tells us in Philippians 4:6: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*

One can find no better or higher example of thankfulness than in the actions of the Lord Jesus. He praised the Father for spiritual knowledge and wisdom given to his disciples. (Luke 10:21) In fact thankfulness marked every aspect and step of his life.

Perhaps the greatest portrait of true thankfulness is to be found in Jesus' prayer in the Upper Room when he gave the disciples his memorial meal. He gave them bread from the Passover feast and wine and he offered thanks to God. These were sacred symbols of his precious body and blood soon to be given in sacrifice on the cross for the remission of the sins of many. On the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:24) Here is the main point- If Jesus could be so thankful to the Father in his own death in our behalf how can we remain unthankful for everything he has done for us and for all that he has given us?

This has been Wayne Conrad with Bible Insights until next time- be thankful!

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