



## ***A Theology Of Thankfulness***

***Selected Scripture***

***2006***

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It is amazing to me how after becoming a believer so many things took on a whole new significance. Before I knew Christ, this earth was just a hunk of rock cruising around a rather ordinary mass of burning gas in a vast universe. After the Lord mercifully saved me I see that the heavens declare the glory of God and the earth shows His handiwork.

Before I knew Christ my body was just a mass of cells, fluids, tissues, and interconnected biological functions. After the Lord mercifully saved me I now see that I am fearfully and wonderfully made.

Before I knew Christ Christmas was a high point in a rather depressing time of year, a time to make a concerted effort to be cheerful and be kind to your fellow man in hopes that there might be peace on earth and good will toward man. (Of course the presents helped me feel cheerful, peaceful, and good will.) After the Lord mercifully saved me I now see that Christmas is the celebration of the coming of the Prince of Peace without Whom there can be no 'peace on earth.' Now I see that it is because God has shown 'good will toward men' that He sent His Son. More on this next month.

Before I knew Christ, Thanksgiving was the day I woke up real early, went hunting and got really cold and wet. Then I came home and warmed up by the fire while I anticipated a meal the likes of which I only saw a couple times a year. After gorging ourselves we would all sit around the TV watching football while we tried to find room to choke down a piece of pumpkin or apple pie. The arrival of Thanksgiving always turned my thoughts toward Christmas which was only a month away. I would begin to anticipate the presents, and of course, I forgot to mention the two week release from

school, also known to us school kids as "prison."

After the Lord mercifully saved me I can now see that Thanksgiving is not a day, but a way of life. The holiday that we call *Thanksgiving* is one day of the year on which I am reminded that giving thanks is a daily exercise, not an annual one.

This month I want to share with you how thankfulness fits with the rest of your theology. Is it simply a heart attitude, or is it much more? Is it a feeling, or is it an indispensable part of our theology and worldview?

### **The Unthankful**

Before we look at what Scripture says about thankfulness, let's take a moment to remember what scripture says about unthankfulness.

In **Romans 1** Paul describes man's lost estate and the justness of God's wrath against sin (**Rom. 1:18-23ff.**) Paul argues that fallen men stand guilty and condemned before God because they know about God from creation and yet "suppress the truth of God in unrighteousness." In fact, man goes farther than just suppressing the truth. Lost man actually refuses to honor God and *refuses to give Him thanks*. That is not to say that fallen man never *feels* thankful. It is to say that fallen man does not recognize the One True God as the source of his blessings and he does not give that God thanks for those blessings in a way that honors God for Who He is.

As John Calvin put it, "*Our hearts are perpetual idol factories.*" That is precisely what Paul says. Rather than giving thanks, the unbeliever exchanges the glory of the incorruptible God for the glory of idols in the

image of man or animals.

In **2 Timothy 3:1-5**, Paul lists *ungrateful* as a characteristic of evil men in the last days. That trait occurs in the list along with *lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient, unholy, unloving, malicious gossips, and haters of good*.

Unthankfulness is the mark of an idolatrous, unredeemed heart. As someone once said, "An atheist is someone who when he feels *really* thankful, has no one to thank."

### **Biblical Thankfulness**

Just a list of the references in Scripture that deal with the subject of thankfulness would fill up the rest of this column, even without any commentary! The Bible's teaching on thankfulness could be summed up with the following words: *Thanks should be given to God through Christ from the heart at all times and for all things*. That may sound simplistic, . . . until you try to apply it!

We are commanded to "*Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving and pay your vows to the Most High*" (**Psalm 50:14**). God tells us that "*He who offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me; and to him who orders his way aright I shall show the salvation of God*" (**Psalm 50:23**).

The thanks that we offer to God are to be offered through Jesus Christ (or in His name) at all times and for all things. **Ephesians 5:20** says, "*always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father*." There it is in one verse. Thanks to the Father, through Christ, always and for all things. Paul says it in other words in **Colossians 3:17**, "*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father*."

The attitude of a redeemed heart is perpetual thankfulness at all times and for all things.

Jesus set an example of being thankful to the Father (**Matt. 11:25; 26:27; John 11:41**). The angels engage in giving thanks (**Rev. 4:9; 7:11, 12**). We should give thanks on behalf of those in ministry (**2 Cor. 1:11**), during private worship (**Dan. 6:10**), in public worship (**Ps. 35:18**), upon the completion of great undertakings (**Neh. 12:31, 40**), before taking food (**John 6:11; Acts**

**27:35**), after taking food (**Deut. 8:10**), at the remembrance of God's holiness (**Ps. 30:4**), and for the goodness and mercy of God (**Ps. 106:1**).

We ought to thank God for the gift of Christ (**2 Cor. 9:15**) and for Christ's power and reign (**Rev. 11:17**). We should be thankful for the reception and effectual working of the word of God in others (**1 Thess. 2:13**), for deliverance through Christ, from indwelling sin (**Rom. 7:23–25**), for victory over death and the grave (**1 Cor. 15:57**).

We should thank God for wisdom and might (**Dan. 2:23**), for the triumph of the gospel (**2 Cor. 2:14**), for the conversion of others (**Rom. 6:17**), for faith exhibited by others (**Rom. 1:8; 2 Thess. 1:3**), for love exhibited by others (**2 Thess. 1:3**), for the grace bestowed on others (**1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3–5**), for the zeal evident in others (**2 Cor. 8:16**).

We can thank God for the nearness of His presence (**Ps. 75:1**), for appointment to the ministry (**1 Tim. 1:12**), for willingness to offer our property for God's service (**1 Chr. 29:6–14**), for the supply of our bodily wants (**Rom. 14:6, 7; 1 Tim. 4:3, 4**). We can thank God for all men (**1 Tim. 2:1**) and for all things (**2 Cor. 9:11**). Of course, I could go on!

With so much to thank God for, it is amazing that we have time to ask Him for anything!

### **Count Your Blessings**

I think the hymn writer was on to something when he wrote, "*Count your many blessings - name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done*."<sup>1</sup>

Have you ever sat down and done that? Have you ever taken just 20 or 30 minutes to list out loud your blessings? Have you taken the time to recount all the things for which you can be thankful?

Will you join with me in listing our blessings? Let's begin with God. I'm thankful that God is holy, righteous, just, loving, gracious, merciful, kind, eternal, unchanging, omnipotent, ever-present, omniscient, wise, good, infinite, and true. I'm thankful that God is sovereign! I am thankful that He rules in the heavens and that He does what He pleases. I am thankful that no one can ward off His hand and that every purpose of His shall be accomplished. I'm thankful that every

promise He makes will come to pass and nothing that He purposes can be thwarted. I am thankful that His dominion is an everlasting dominion and that His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom. I am thankful that He raises up kings and puts down kings and that He rules in the affairs of men and places over kingdoms whomever He chooses.

I'm thankful for Christ, for His sacrifice, His death, His humility and meekness. I am thankful for His sinlessness, without which I could not be saved. I am thankful for His Resurrection, for sending the Spirit, for commissioning Apostles to write Scriptures. I am thankful that He sits now, exalted in heaven at the right hand of the Father always living to make intercession for me. I am thankful that He has perfected for all time those for whom He made atonement (**Heb. 10:10**).

I'm thankful that the Spirit of God dwells with and in His Church. I am thankful that the Spirit of God convicts of sin, rebukes and draws us to Christ through the Word preached. I am thankful that the Spirit comforts, guide, protects, convicts, and sanctifies God's elect. I'm thankful for the illumination of the Spirit, without which, understanding truth would be impossible.

I am thankful for the Word of Truth, the gospel, the message of salvation.

When we have been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, can we even begin to list them? We can try. I am thankful that I was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world and granted grace in eternity past (**Eph. 1:3-4; 2 Tim. 1:9**). I am thankful that I was predestined to adoption as a son, predestined to an inheritance and predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. I am thankful for my adoption, redemption and that I have been sealed with the Spirit of promise till the day of the redemption of God's elect. I am thankful for the grace that God has lavished on me and that He has made known to me the mystery of his will (**Eph. 1:1-11**). I am thankful for answered prayer and for all those prayers that He did not answer!

I am thankful that while I was dead, He made me alive; while I was an enemy, He made me a son; while I was a sinner, He made me a saint; while far away, He brought me near; while a stranger to His grace, he made me a heir. I am thankful that the Spirit of God

drew me to Christ and overcame my resistant, rebellious, enslaved and stubborn will.

I am thankful that my body will be redeemed. I am thankful that the fear of death has been removed. I am thankful for the hope of glory to come, rewards for service to be given, and eternal joy in Christ.

I am thankful that he considered me faithful and put me into service even though I was once a blasphemer. I am thankful for the spiritual gifts that He has given me to be used in His service. I am thankful for the calling that exists upon my life.

I am thankful that God continues to sanctify me by His truth and conform me to the image of His Son. I am thankful for the faithful men and women who diligently, obediently, and faithfully shared the gospel of Christ with me.

I am thankful that my affections have changed. I am thankful that the Lord has caused me to hate sin, love righteousness, pursue holiness and love His people. I am thankful that those things that I once hated, I now love, including righteousness, holiness, purity, truth, God's people, God Word, worship, preaching, heaven, and the gospel. I am thankful that all the things of this world that I once loved are becoming more and more distasteful with each passing day.

I am thankful that the Lord saved me when He did; not a day earlier and not a moment later. As with every detail of life, His timing is perfect!

I am thankful for those who have taught me the Word of God and disciplined me. I'm thankful for the opportunity and provision to go to Bible College. I am thankful that the Lord has protected me from being deceived by a cult, or blinded to truth.

I am thankful for a wonderful church family. I give thanks for all of you because you were chosen by God from the beginning for salvation (**2 Thess. 2:13**). I am thankful for the spiritual gifts that God has given to those in our congregation. I am thankful for a church family that has a high regard for Scripture and a desire to learn and obey God's Word.

I am grateful for two godly men who serve with me as elders and for their families. I am thankful for the encouragement I receive from other believers and the privilege of growing with you in grace and in the Word of God.

I could on, but I am running out of space so I better move on to the **physical blessings** we enjoy.

I thank God that I live in a free country with such immense opportunities, blessings, and bounty. I am thankful that I get to vote, speak my mind, worship freely, and proclaim truth.

I am thankful for every beat of my heart and every breath I take. God does not owe me even one beat or one breath. I am thankful for the splendid variety of food that my God provides for us. I'm thankful for steak, steak sauce, shrimp, lobster, fish, chicken, vegetables, salads, fruit, apple pie, and ice water, strong coffee and of course, cheesecake!

I am thankful for the clothes on my back (and in my closet), a roof over my head, a car to drive (and a truck), a piece of land to call my own and a garden. I am thankful for all the books in my library. Speaking of books, I'm thankful that I can read, that I have eyesight, hearing, taste, smell, and feeling.

I am thankful for a wonderful wife and 4 great kids. I'm thankful that God has blessed me with a great relationship with both my wife and kids. I thank Him that we are all healthy and whole.

I am thankful that He has given me neither poverty nor riches that I be not full and deny Him saying, "Who is the Lord?" or that I be in want and steal and profane the name of my God (**Proverbs 30:7-9**).

I know that I am fearfully and wonderfully made, so I thank God for all my physical and mental liabilities and shortcomings. I'm thankful that I am not as smart as I wish I were. I am thankful that I am not athletic. I am thankful for the talents, skills, and abilities that I lack.

I thank God for the ability to work with my hands, think with my mind, and reason with my intellect. I thank Him for the gift of humor. I'm thankful that I can enjoy a good laugh and a good joke that can make my sides hurt!

I thank God for adversity when it comes. Not every day in ministry is a sheer joy. I'm thankful for that. I'm thankful that God uses adversity, suffering, pain, affliction, and hardship for His glory and my good. I'm thankful for the illnesses I have suffered, the pains I have known. I'm thankful for bruises, sore muscles, sore throats, headaches, back pains, and fingers smashed with a hammer. I've had my share of all of

those.

I thank God for the jobs I have had and the one I have. I am thankful that He gives me the ability to earn a living, to give offerings to Him, and to see the money earned used in the furtherance of His work.

I am thankful that I live in North Idaho. I am thankful for all four seasons, green grass, yellow leaves, snow, and buds on the trees in Spring. I am thankful for the lake, Schweitzer, the mountains, trails, trees, streams, camping, and s'mores.

So is that enough? Are we done yet? There are more we could name. Many have no doubt come to mind as you read through all of this.

You can thank God for kids or that you are barren. You can thank God that you are married or that you are single. You can thank God that you are healthy or that you are sick. Thank God for being young or old, beautiful or not so beautiful, talented and not talented, rich or poor, tall or short, athletic or awkward, skillful or unskilled, smart or dull, quick or slow, black or white, male or female.

We can be thankful for spiritual blessings as well as physical blessings, but let us never forget the warning of C.H. Spurgeon, "*An enlightened man is grateful to God for temporal blessings; but he is much more grateful to God for spiritual blessings, for temporal blessings do not last long; they are soon gone. Temporal blessings are not definite marks of divine favor, since God gives them to the unworthy, and to the wicked, as well as to the righteous.*"

This is what it means to be thankful for all things at all times; in good times and in bad, for those things you like and for those you don't. If God is sovereign and He is in control then any complaint is a complaint against the goodness of God be it about the weather, wealth, or health.

Everything we have comes from Him. Everything! (**1 Cor. 4:7**) **Being thankful keeps us humble.** It destroys pride. It makes us to realize how dependent we are on God for everything we have, everything we receive, everything we do and everything we are. Suddenly we realize that we cannot boast about anything since we don't have anything we did not first receive.

Do you thank God for **all** things and at **all** times? Or

are you just thankful when things are going peachy for you?

Remember Job? After losing his family and all his wealth and possessions, Job worshiped God saying, "Naked I came from my mother's womb and naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD." After being physically stricken with boils and other afflictions, Job's wife said, "Why don't you curse God and die!" Job replied, "**Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?**" In all of this Job did not sin with his lips! Rather, he blessed God. Job thanked God at all times and for all things. How much more should we who have tasted of the heavenly kingdom in Christ! It's amazing how theological thanksgiving can be, isn't it?

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