***Giving Thanks

Colossians 1:1-2

COL-095***

Our subject is "Prayer for the Colossians," segment number 29 in Colossians 1:9-14.

The objective of the Christian life is to be transformed into the character or the image of Jesus Christ. This, of course, is an ongoing process, as a believer matures spiritually throughout his lifetime. The full knowledge of doctrine develops the mind of God in the Christian. Part of the divine mind is the quality of happiness that we looked at this morning in greater detail. Happiness in the Christian is an inner quality produced by the Holy Spirit under the guidance of the Scriptures. The very happiness of God is shared by the believer who is in temporal fellowship. The world itself is antagonistic to the Christian, and is the source of a great deal of suffering to all of us. Mere human happiness has no staying power, and is, in fact, a step on the road to great sadness. God's inner happiness stabilizes the believer for every eventuality in life. And it enables him to produce much spiritual fruit of divine good works.

**Giving Thanks**

This evening we direct your attention to Colossians 1:12, where the apostle goes on and describes the grateful saint – the expression of thanks. Colossians 1:12: "Giving thanks." The Greek word looks like this: "eucharisteo" (yoo-khar-is-teh'-o) E U C H A R I S T E O. And you'll recognize within it the Greek word for "grace:" "charis" (khar'-ece), and that this is an action of the grace of God. This little prefix "eu" (yoo) here refers to the idea of good. So, this indicates good grace action on the part of God. This word "eucharisteo"³ gives us the English word "Eucharist," which is another description for the Lord's Supper. And it is indicating that the Lord's Supper is an expression of our gratitude to God.

**Gratitude**

This word connotes an appreciation for something that we have received. Gratitude, of course, is a primary duty and a characteristic of the Christian who is in temporal fellowship with the Father. Christians who are out of fellowship – Christians who are in carnality, are ingrates. They are not characterized by gratitude. Those who walk with the Lord are increasingly sensitive to what the Father has done. And you'll discover that your gratitude level will rise precipitously as you walk with Him. Whether you're a young person or an older person, you'll discover yourself just stopping and thanking God for things. You will find yourself looking at somebody. And all of a sudden, in your mind, you will thank God for that person. You will see something being done in the way of Christian activity, and you'll just stand there, and your heart will look up to heaven, and you will thank God for what is being done. And you'll suddenly discovered that the whole Christian life is a series of walking with God in the presence of the people of God, with a great deal of appreciation for what people in the Lord's work are doing.

For that reason, it is not surprising that grammatically, this is in the present tense, which in the Greek language, you may remember, indicates that it's a continual activity. In a Spirit filled believer, thanksgiving is a thing that is done again and again. And it is something (active voice) that we personally choose to do.

I look across there at our thermometer, and I'm happy to report to you that I have kept my word to Ken Boozer at the annual business meeting. I didn't get around to it today. I told him I would not eat until I did it, and boy am I hungry tonight. But now we've got it done, and everything is up to date. That white gap is all that we have to close. That looks like a great deal, and it is. It happens to be something like $66,000 that's left up there. But I want you to know that two years ago it was $180,000. Now, that's something to look over there. You should walk across there, and every time you walk, you'll look; shake your head; and, say, "Thank God." And there are people whose hearts are so captivated. I had to tell somebody today that I've had to go a little easy on calling attention to it, because some people have gotten so carried away that their money goes to that, and we're having trouble paying the bills. So, people are responding to the leading of God. And, of course, we don't want to discourage that. But you can hardly look anywhere, in a ministry like Berean: at the people; at what's being done; and, at the ultimate product in the lives of the kids, such that we can't stop, and look up to God, and have an expression of gratitude and thanksgiving.

Well, that's what Paul understands – that he; his associates; and, all believers are to be characterized now in the view of all that has been said before about the potential power of God (the might of God in action), the attaining of a steadfastness, being able to stand up under the enduring things of life.

Every now and then, somebody comes to me (it happened recently) with bad news. And now this person, as a believer, has to endure under a piece of bad news while the miraculous, powerful hand of God must deal with it. And yet, those who have attained this kind of stability have this endurance, and they have the patience to stand by and let God unravel the issues. And additionally, they handle all this in a spirit of great joyfulness. Now for that, Paul says, you have to thank God. So, it's not unusual that in the next verse he says, "Thanking God."

An ingrate is a horrible person. The more ungrateful people are, and the more unkind they are, the ugly they are in their spirit. Just thanking God is a proper thing to do. And it's an ennobling thing to do, but not the least thing is: Romans 1 says that those things that you esteem, you will protect them and not lose them if you are grateful for them. The human race, when it was not grateful for the knowledge of the Word of God that it originally had through Adam, descended into worshiping the stars; the interstellar spaces; the moon; the sun; and, creeping things. So, they thought that they were very wise and very sophisticated because the Bible was so boring and so simple, and they went on beyond that to greater knowledge, and the Bible says that they became fools. So, be grateful (be thankful) for these things that God gives us that are the critical things of life for us.

**Thanksgiving**

And where do they come from? "Giving thanks to the Father," because He's the source of this. This is *the* Father, the first person of the Trinity. When we express thanksgiving, it is, in fact, expressing a prayer. And prayers are always addressed to God the Father. And we address this thanksgiving to Him because he is the author of the plan of salvation. Thanksgiving to the Father for prayers granted is certainly a fitting response on the part of believers.

2 Corinthians 1:11 indicates this to us: "You also, joining and helping us through your prayers, that thanks may be given by many persons on our behalf for the favors bestowed upon us through the prayers of many." One of the reasons we remind ourselves to express thanksgiving to God is so that people may rejoice that prayers have been offered, and God has responded. Do not ever get tired of writing on those prayer requests Wednesday night "PAP." I know what it means: "Praise for Answered Prayer." And you should always (some people are very religiously careful to) make that expression. They do not forget when they're asking God for something, that they already have returns on previous reserves that they've asked Him for.

This is what Paul is saying – that these people joining him in praying for the problems that he carries as a missionary with all the churches, that through their prayers, God may respond, and now thanksgiving may be in order, so that many persons would be blessed by hearing what God has done.

Thanksgiving to the Father is also to be part of the believer’s daily practice. The Bible indicates very clearly, for example, in Philippians 4:6: "Be anxious for nothing." That's a pretty tough statement. You cannot be anxious for nothing unless you understand that you are in the hands of a God who is not going to let you down: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." By prayer (the general word); by supplication (the intensity of the crises of the moment prayer); and, throw in thanksgiving, because God is going to respond. If you are in fellowship with Him, and if you are walking as a humble child of God, making it clear that you want to play square with Him, and that you want to be square with the Word of God, and that you don't want to be the typical hypocritical Christian, but you want to be real with God and with His people, then you may throw in thanksgiving because He is going to answer. And He will answer it appropriately, but He will not let your request go unheard. So, thanksgiving is to be part of our praying even before the answer comes.

**Rejoice, Pray, and Thank**

Please notice an interesting sequence in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Rejoice always." That's what we've been talking about: happiness in the Lord – the inner happiness. Look at 1 Thessalonians 5:17: "Pray without ceasing." In the midst of your joyfulness (in the midst of your happiness), and that means happiness when the hard times are there as well as when the good times are there, pray without ceasing. Don't give up. Keep praying. And this is one of the things you finally learn: when you don't get the provision that you need for something in prayer, you have to go back, and you have to go back, and you have to keep asking – pray without ceasing. And then look at 1 Thessalonians 5:18: "In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." What an interesting sequence. Rejoicing always; happiness in the Lord; and, full trust in your Father in heaven. You approach Him without ceasing; in intercession; prayers may be necessary. And then in everything giving thanks, in anticipatory of His response, and in subsequence to His response. Rejoice; pray; and, give thanks. That's real. And the younger you are, and the sooner you learn that, the better your life will be.

It is easy for us to forget that, both in the Old and New Testaments, the Bible lays great emphasis upon the subject of prayer. We have indeed already shown you how large and important a role prayer played in the life of the Lord. But to us, the saints of the Old and New Testaments, God repeatedly says, "Prayer is the way you work with Me." That's the easiest thing to do, and it's the hardest thing to do. It's the easiest thing to forget. It's the easiest thing to neglect. But look what the Word of God has to say about our need for prayer, and particularly our need for thanking God – being a grateful people.

Psalm 50:14: "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving. And pay your vows to the Most High God "elyown" (el-yone)." Do not make commitments to God that you will not keep. If you make a commitment to God, then keep your commitment. But make a sacrifice of thanksgiving. In the Old Testament animal sacrificial system, they had sacrifices that they just bought to the priest just to thank God for something that He had done.

Notice Psalm 92:1: "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your Name, O Most High." Giving thanks to the Lord – it is a good and wise and proper thing to do.

Psalm 107:21-22, "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness (the Old Testament word for 'grace'), and for His wonders to the sons of men." Throughout the Old Testament, you have this emphasis again and again. Give God thanks for what He has done. Be a grateful person. It's an ennobling practice.

When we come to the New Testament, we have the same thing. Take Ephesians 5:20: "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." Here through Christ giving thanks always to the Father.

In the book of Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

**Spiritual Sacrifices**

Then in the book of Hebrews 13:15, we have the same thing: "Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. That is the fruit of lips that give thanks to His Name." In the New Testament, we do not offer animal sacrifices. There has been a sacrifice made once for all, and Christ has covered our sins. Only in some pagan system (some mongrel religious system, like Roman Catholicism), will you still have them trying to have an altar on which they're making a sacrifice of Christ anew. But here, we have different kinds of sacrifices, and that is spiritual sacrifices. One of them is the fruit of our lips. One of them is the expression of thanksgiving. So, every time you do that, you're making a spiritual sacrifice. And God your Father, I can assure you, on the basis of the Word of God, is enormously pleased when this sacrifice is made to Him.

In the Word of God, there are many thought-provoking examples of thanksgiving to God. And I would direct your attention to a few of those. Notice in the gospel of John 11:41. Here we have the Lord Jesus Christ thanking His Heavenly Father: "And so they removed the stone, and Jesus raised his eyes (this is at the tomb of Lazarus) and said, 'Father I thank You that You heard Me.'" Now, here's that principle. If I'm praying in the will of God, and I'm on track in fellowship with the Father, I'm asking, and then I'm thanking, even before it came. Lazarus was still all tied up and all wrapped up inside the tomb, but the Lord Jesus Christ, in His humanity, was always in fellowship. And therefore, He would never be inclined to ask that for which he should not ask. So, when He asked, it was going to be done. And here the resurrection of Lazarus was a done deed.

In Revelation 7:11-12, we have the impressive sight of the angelic host thanking God: "And all the angels were standing around the throne, and around the elders, and the four living creatures (the heavenly honor guard). And they fell on their faces before the throne, and they worshiped God saying, "Amen, blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen." With all these tremendous expressions of appreciation and gratitude with these great words, not the least of them was the word of "Thank you, Lord, for Who you are, and what you have done for us as the angels."

**King David**

In the Old Testament, we have the attractive sight (record) of a great man like the King of Israel, King David, who had great power in his hand, but who knew how to thank God. Psalm 28:7: "The Lord is my strength and my shield. My heart trusts in Him, and I am helped. Therefore, my heart exalts, and with my song, I shall thank Him." David was a musician. He had musical ability, and he had poetic ability. That's why he wrote so many of the songs of the Hebrew song book, the book of Psalms. And in those we have repeatedly the expression of thanksgiving to God. And this is what David says here: "I wrote songs in which I expressed my thanksgiving to God."

The people who served God, and as religious leaders, were consistently aware of the fact that they needed to thank God for the service that they were doing, and for the assistance He gave them. Here you have the Levites, the whole tribe of Levi, which was dedicated to the service of God. This is an analogy (a type) of what all of us are as priests of God. In 1 Chronicles 16:4, the Levites expressed their thanksgiving: "And he appointed some of the Levies as ministers before the ark of the Lord, even to celebrate, and to thank and praise the Lord God of Israel."

Moses selected appropriate men from the priesthood, and he said to them, "Your job is to keep thanking God for everything that happens to this people, and to this nation that comes in our society for which you should be thanking God." Wouldn't it be something to see on nightly news: for Jennings to get up and say, "Tonight we want to thank God for the following things that have taken place for which we are grateful?" Wouldn't that be a can of worms? Talk about a television tower falling! The sets would blow out all over the country. And yet, here it is exactly what they did. These people in public life, on behalf of the nation, Moses says, "You stand here, and you thank God. You keep track of all the things that He's doing for us, and that takes place. And you are officially responsible for saying, 'Thank you Lord.'"

1 Chronicle 16:7-8 goes to another one of the people who were in the Israeli ministry: Asaph and his relatives: "Then on that day, David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to the Lord: 'O, give thanks to the Lord. Call upon His Name. Make known His deeds among the people," and so on: "Sing His praises," and so on. "Speak of His wonders." Here again, David puts a specific family and all the relatives of that family, and he says, "Your job is to keep thanking God, and telling people (reminding the Israelites) what God has done for us.

**Daniel**

Certainly, Daniel was a man who had reason to thank God. And we have that example in Daniel 6:10: "Now, when Daniel knew that the document was signed;" that is, this document that said that anybody who prays to anybody other than the king will be thrown into a den of lions. Now, these people in governmental authority (the other commissioners and the satraps) who wanted to bring Daniel down, they talked Darius into foolishly signing this decree: "Now, when Daniel knew that the document of death had been signed, he entered the house. Now, in his roof chamber, he had windows open toward Jerusalem, and he continued kneeling on his knees three times a day, praying and giving thanks before his God, as he had been doing previously."

Now here was a man who very clearly was in fellowship with Almighty God, and who had a spiritual maturity structure in his soul so great that he was not fearful of the highest authorities of the land. He was not fearful of death itself. So, he was told to stop praying to the real God, and stop kneeling down in front of that window and letting everybody know that you're in prayer, looking toward the holy place of Jerusalem, or it'll cost you your life. And I don't think Daniel sat around and even thought about it. When he was through with his work at the office that day, and he looked at his timepiece, it was time for prayer, as was his custom three times a day, and he went home. And the window was open, and he knelt down before it, looking out across the great expanse toward Jerusalem, with longing in his heart, wishing that they were back there, and that the temple was being rebuilt, but that was going to take time. 70 years had a pass before that could happen. And what he did was that he gave thanks to God. He gave thanks for what? He gave thanks for the fact that he was going to survive. He didn't know how, but he was right, and God was on his side. God was on his side because he was on God's side.

**Ezra and Nehemiah**

When Ezra and Nehemiah finally did leave the people back, there was a lot of disorientation and reorientation that had to be made in the relationship of the people of Israel to God. And the first place it had to start with was the religious leaders. If you have religious leaders who are not grateful to God, you have big trouble. And when religious leaders are more grateful to people, or they're grateful to their own abilities, or they're grateful to their public relations capacities, then you have big trouble in river city.

Ezra 3:10-11: "Now, when the builders had laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord (this is the rebuilding now – the second temple), the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with symbols to praise the Lord according to the directions of King David of Israel. And they sang, praising and giving thanks to the Lord, saying, 'For He is good. For His loving kindness is upon Israel forever.' And all the people shouted with a great shot when they praised the Lord God because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid."

Here's thanksgiving to God for a building. Now, to them, of course, it was a very sacred building, because, under their system of Judaism, this was where they met with God. But nevertheless, it was a structure that served the purpose of worship as the one in which we are in now serves our many purposes of worship and ministry. How often do you come in here and just stand at the back there, as I very often do? And especially before the Sunday service on Saturday night, I look at everything that's set up here, and all that's going to take place the next day, and the great opportunity that's going to be extended to the people of this city. And I thank God for the means and the location and the facilities and everything that He's provided us to do it.

You have probably walked into this place, in and out, and it never occurred to you that once this was an open field with nothing. This was nothing. It was not quite nothing. It was a slew of water filled with polliwogs that eventually, one day when I struck the water, turned into frogs. And they were all over this place – this whole area as far as you could see. I have pictures of my sons when they were little boys at the time, and they're floating in rubber inner-tubes, and they're paddling all through this slew of despondency here, filled with polliwogs and incipient frogs. And when we put the pump on to pump the water out, it was great fun to see those polliwogs being gobbled up as they went into that meat grinder and came shooting out the other end all over the countryside. It was nothing. And from that nothing, we come to this. This is deserving of our saying, "Thank you Lord," not only for the fact that we have it, but for all the people, some of whom are in heaven now, who made this possible.

In contrast to all these examples of the people of God being grateful, you have the people of Satan. And the one thing that characterizes the people of Satan, and why it should not characterize us is that they are not grateful. Romans 1:21 – I referred to this a moment ago: "For even though they (humanity) knew God (they knew he was there, and they were well aware of him, and they had direct contact with him from people who lived so long, for those hundreds and hundreds of years they told them – their direct relationship to God), they did not honor him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened." They thought they were just so sophisticated and so smart.

So, Romans 1:22 says, "Professing to be wise, they became fools." Now, the best way to become a fool is not to be appreciative, and not to be grateful for what you have, and for the people that you have, and for the people that you're associated with – for those that God has given you in your life.

**Love Your Enemies**

In Luke 6:35, Jesus says, "But love your enemies" (naturally, it is the 'agape' word) – "Love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you'll be sons of the Most High, for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men." Isn't that interesting? God is kind to ungrateful and evil men. He most certainly is. He alerts them to the Word of God. He makes available the Word of God. They turn their backs on Him, and they ignore him. But He is kind to ungrateful and evil men. Now, there's an example for us to follow. It is not too hard to be nice to the people who are responsive to us, and who are appreciative of what we do. But somebody who is a low-down life type, who is not appreciative; you want to turn your back. And I have to remind myself when I want to just slough someone off, to say, "No, wait a minute, I'm still going to make an effort, unworthy as they are, because God is kind to those who are ungrateful.

2 Timothy 3:2 is another example of that: "For men who will be lovers of self; lovers of money; boastful; arrogant; revilers; disobedient appearance; ungrateful; and, unholy." This is what characterizes the unbeliever. Now, why in the world should we go through all of this effort – this constantly being alert to the necessity of expressing gratitude? The Word of God is very explicit about that. There are reasons why we should do this.

**God's Holiness**

For one, Psalms 97:12, Before we are through, you'll be very much impacted by the realization that thanking God is a big thing in the Word of God, and it should be in our lives. Psalm 97:12 is thanking God for his holiness: "Be glad in the Lord, you righteous ones, and give thanks to His holy name." Those who worship pagan gods are worshiping gods who are mean. They're crude. They're evil. They're vile, because those gods are made in the image of man's sin nature. And they are unholy. Therefore, they are destructive. And what they bring into the lives of people is terrible. You don't want to thank God for what those people do. You don't want to thank those gods. But here is a God who, because He is holy, He brings nothing but the best – that which is loving, and that which is good. And we should thank God for the fact that He is a Holy Person.

**God's Transcendence**

There is also the thanksgiving that is due for the fact of God's transcendence. That's a theological word, and it simply means "the nearness of God." He's not off in some distant place.

**Deism**

There is called the concept of deism – that God is not near at hand, running things anymore. Deism says that He just put it together; kicked it into motion; and, now it's for men to handle it themselves. And you are out there on your own. But notice what Psalm 75:1 says: "We give thanks to You, O God. We give thanks, for Your name is near. Men declare Your wondrous works." God is very much involved with His creation, and He is doing the wonderful works. That's why we are to be engaged in thanksgiving.

Here's a very good one. I can assure you there are some people now who wish that they could express this bit of thanksgiving. 1 Timothy 1:12-13: here thanking God because he uses us in His service. Have you ever stopped thought how sad it would be if you were not able to serve the Lord? 1 Timothy 1:12-13: "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord Who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor, and yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief." The apostle Paul says, "What a character of evil I was. What a low-life type I was. And yet, He has regenerated me. He has transformed me into the image of Christ. I have His absolute righteousness, and now He uses me in His service." Now, that means that you have capacity to do it.

The first time I ever had a stand by someone who is on the verge of death, in the very first year ministry here at Berean Church, it was a lady who suddenly came down with one of those deadly diseases, and it took its rapid toll. And I had stopped by to see her and her husband the very night she died. And she was saying, "Oh, I can't believe that God is going to take my life. I want to serve Him. There's so many things I want to do – all those things that we're doing at the church now with young people." And her focus seemed to be on the young people. She says, "Oh, I can't believe He's going to take me. I just want to serve Him. What we're doing is so wonderful. I want to be part of that." And before the night was out, her service was over.

It is good for you to realize that tomorrow morning you can go out and still serve. All this week, you are engaged in a variety of services, both within the Berean ministry, and throughout your own personal life in the people you're contacting, and you can do it. And you should not turn your back and ignore it, because the time may come when you'll not be capable of doing that. So, here's one reason we thank God, because He lets us serve him. And service means storing an enriched eternity for ourselves.

2 Thessalonians 1:3, gives us another reason for thanksgiving to God, and that's because He enables us to grow spiritually: "We ought always to give thanks to God for you brethren, as it is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater." What can be greater in a body of local church believers than the grace of God enlarging their faith in the Word of God, and their positive volition to that word, so that out of that comes the expansion, as He says, "If you love Me, you'll keep My commandments?" We can put it the other way: "If you know My commandments, you'll be able to love Me." Capacity to love comes from knowing the Word of God. If you don't know the Word of God, you're a chief imitator of love. You don't have the real thing. And here is the capacity to treat one another with great spiritual dignity, and for us to grow in the capacity of love. Please remember that if there is the quality of "agape" love, it is because you are filled with the Spirit, or it wouldn't be there. So we thank Him for that.

Here's another good thing you might want to thank the Lord for. And that's your food. 1 Timothy 4:3-4 shows why we give thanksgiving before we eat: "Men who forbid marriage (speaking of religious groups like Catholicism who forbid marriage) and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude." And what God has created for our wellbeing in the way of food is to be received with gratitude, not with this: "It's Friday, so we don't eat meat. We go to fish," and this nonsense that flows from that.

I was in the presence of a Catholic priest one time as a teenager, with other teenage kids who were Catholics, and one of them said, "Father, is it all right on Friday to eat soup which has been boiled with some meat in it – to eat soup that has meat boiled in it on Friday." And he said, "No, you're not supposed to eat the soup." I thought, "How dumb!" You won't eat soup because it had a piece of beef in it, and so now you have violated the law of God, when the Word of God says, "No, you'll receive it all with gratitude in thanksgiving?"

It is a terrible thing when a family sits down to eat, and like pigs on some Arkansas farm, they just elbow their way in without stopping to eat. Pigs in other farms in other states do the same thing, however. No offense to Arkansas.

Another reason why we give thanksgiving to God is for everything that He brings into our lives. Oops: this could be a little sticky. When my son was principal of Berean Christian Academy, he was speaking on this verse to the kids in chapel one day: 1 Thessalonians 5:18, which says "In everything give thanks for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." And he was explaining to the children that everything that comes into your life is a work of God, and you thank Him. Sometimes those are good things. Sometimes not. You thank Him for it. One little boy came up after, whose father was a weekend pilot, and he had gone out to the airport to fly in a private plane. Something went amiss, and the plane crashed, and the father was killed. The boy comes to school, and the next day, his father's dead. And he goes up and says, "Mr. Danish, do you thank God when your father gets killed?"

This is thanksgiving to God because He never treats us in any way that he wouldn't treat His Own Son. And in the hardest situation, in the most disappointing and the most tragic, there is indeed, while it may seem kind of pollyannish to say, "There is a purpose," indeed there is. And there is a very big purpose and a very grand design, in fact, that it will someday become very clear. The principle here is for everything that God brings into our lives, we give Him thanks, because you will learn; you'll be refined; and, your capacity will be greatly increased to some degree even if it isn't pleasant at the moment.

Then there's one more. Certainly, one of the reasons we give thanksgiving is because of the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 9:15 is that great and simple and concise little succinct statement: "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift."

So, a Christian's proper response to God's grace is continual prayer. We have seen in both old and New Testaments that this was the practice of the believers. They were thankful people. They thanked God. And we've seen that there are reasons throughout the Word of God, very specifically, why we should give this kind of thanksgiving. It is doctrine that enables us to be genuinely appreciative, not pretense appreciation, but really appreciative of what God has brought even especially when it's not so pleasant. It is the Word of God that enables you and me to appreciate fully what God the Father has done in saving us. So, we respond with hypocritical thanksgiving in the face of suffering for Him.

I heard a person recently deriding Christmas. And his point was sitting around with a bunch of people opening gifts that you don't want. And yet you say, "Oh wonderful." And you smile, and you thank them for it. And he was talking about being hypocritical about what we pretend to be grateful for. Well, maybe there's a problem there, and maybe there isn't. It never is with me. I like to get everything I can at Christmas time. So, I don't make any big issues over it. But the point is that, in view of what He has done for us, and the suffering that has brought us a place in heaven, and not only a place in heaven, but because of the Word of God, we have the ability to be able to prepare ourselves to be administrators in his heaven, and we will have a place of authority (a domain over) which we will reign? He does deserve our thanksgiving. And it is proper that that become a habit of life, and it can be genuine. It isn't hypocritical. We Christians who know the Word have reason that we can thank God without hypocrisy.

Here are a few verses to close tonight on that theme. Luke 6:22-23: "Blessed are you when men hate you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil for the sake of the Son of God. Be glad in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets." Now, that's enables us to say, "Yes, this is a hard time. These are tough times we're going through, but without a hypocritical attitude, I can look up to heaven and say, 'Thank you, Father.' I don't mind the kids at school making fun of me, because I will not join them in their evil ways. I will not join them in the ways that glorify Satan and his world system. It might not be evil, but I'm not going to talk like them. I'm not going to act like them. I'm not going to dress like them. I'm going to be who I am. I'm the child of the King."

Move over to Acts 5:41: "So they went on their way from the presence of the council (these are the apostles who had been brought before the Sanhedrin, beaten, and told, 'Don't talk in the name of Jesus again' – so they went on their way from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His Name." Because they understood who Jesus was; the reality of their message; and what they'd been called to do. They could be grateful, and they weren't just putting on. They weren't gritting their teeth and saying, "I know that I'm supposed to be thankful for all things, whatever comes into my life. So, I'll express my thanks." You don't have to fake it. You don't have to pretend what isn't so. Your heart will rise up in genuine adoration and gratitude to God.

In 2 Corinthians 4:7-17, listen to this extended passage: "But we have this treasure," Paul says, "in earthen vessels" (the treasure of the power of God that comes to the Christian who has eternal life) – We have this treasure in earthen vessels, a human body, that the surpassing greatness of the power can be of God, and not from ourselves. We Christians are able to do supernatural things which we cannot do as human beings, but it's the power of God. So we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always caring about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body. For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake. For the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So, death works in us, but life in you. But having the same Spirit of faith according to what is written, 'I believed, therefore I spoke.' We also believe. Therefore, also we speak, knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people can cause the giving of thanks to God to abound to the glory of God. Therefore, we do not lose heart. But though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day-by-day. For momentary light affliction has produced for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison."

So, when the going gets tough this week in your Christian service; in your earning your livelihood; and, in your walking through the day and associating with people, remember this verse: "We do not lose heart. Our outer man is decaying (it's taking the blows), but our inner man is being renewed day-by-day (and for that we thank God). This is a momentary light affliction, but it is creating an eternal weight of glory." That's an interesting way of putting it – a reward that's very heavy – far beyond all comparison.

So, we close tonight with Philippians 1:12-21. We are genuinely appreciative to God our Father: "Now I want you to know, brethren, that my circumstances have turned out for the greater progress of the gospel, so that my imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become well known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard, and to everyone else. And that most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the Word of God without fear. Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from goodwill. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaimed Christ out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed. And in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice. For I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers, and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope, that I shall not be put to shame in anything, but that, with all boldness, Christ shall even now, as always, be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For me, to live as Christ, and to die is gain."

Now, don't tell me you cannot thank God for the fact that for you to live is Christ living through you as you function upon the mechanics of the Christian life. And if you die, it is the gain of all of heaven itself. That is an object of gratitude beyond anything that we can ever adequately express to Him.

Our Heavenly Father, we are thankful to You for this reminder tonight from the Word of God that thanksgiving is a way of life for the believer. We pray that from our youngest days, we will learn, starting tomorrow, to see how many times we can look about us and simply express in prayer to You a word of thanksgiving: for someone; for something; or, for what has come into our lives.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1995

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