

ARE YOU GRATEFUL?

“Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 5:18

Martin Luther observed that we exhibit a degree of thankfulness in life in reverse proportion to the amount of blessing we’ve received. In *Tabletalk*, Martin Luther wrote: *“The greater God’s gifts and works, the less they are regarded.”* The blessings of life, health, freedom and food are not really appreciated unless they are lost or threatened. Because sunrises and sunsets occur daily, they are taken for granted.

Ralph Waldo Emerson observed that *“if the constellations appeared only once in a thousand years, imagine what an exciting event it would be. But because they are there every night, we barely give them a look.”*

Similarly, the blessings of rain are barely appreciated unless one has been through a drought. A hungry man is more thankful for his morsel than a rich man for his heavily laden table. A lonely woman in a nursing home will appreciate a visit more than a popular person who has a party thrown in their honour. A Christian who has suffered under persecution for decades and receives his first copy of the Holy Scriptures will be more thankful for this one book than we are for all the Christian books, Bible translations and magazines that overflow our shelves.

Helen Keller said: *“I have often thought that it would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days for some time during his early adult life. It would make him more appreciative of sight and of the joys of sound.”*

There are at least 138 passages of Scripture that deal with the subject of thanksgiving. We are commanded: ***“Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to Him and praise His name.”*** Psalm 100:4

“Give thanks to the Father Who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.” Colossians 1:12

*“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And **be thankful.**”* Colossians 3:15

*“Do not be anxious about anything, but **in everything**, by prayer and petition, **with thanksgiving** present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 4:6-7

*“Be joyful always; pray continually; **give thanks in all circumstances**, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”* 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Plainly it is God’s will for us to be joyful, prayerful and thankful.

“No duty is more urgent than that of returning thanks.” Ambrose

“It ought to be as habitual for us to thank as to ask.” C. H. Spurgeon

It has been said that a thankful heart is the parent of all virtues. It is also true that a lack of gratitude is a root sin.

“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness...for although they knew God, they neither glorified Him

as God nor gave thanks to Him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.” Romans 1:18-21

Here, failure to give thanks to God is the root sin that leads to futile thinking and foolish, darkened hearts.

In Luke 17:7-19, we read of the ten lepers that were healed by the Lord Jesus. When one of them, a Samaritan, threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked Him, the Lord Jesus asked: *“Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise God except this foreigner?”*

In our missions experience we’ve also found that barely 10% of those we help or sponsor will bother to express their gratitude either verbally or in a letter or card. Evidently gratitude is something of a rarity.

In 1 Timothy 3:1-5 the apostle Paul gives a list of some of the most terrible sins including: *“People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, **ungrateful**, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, traitorous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God – having a form of godliness but denying its power.”*

Here ungratefulness is listed in the middle of a litany of horrible sins.

One of the first lessons good parents seek to teach their children is to say *“thank you”*. It takes character and courage to admit being in debt to others. It is humbling. However, those who cannot admit their indebtedness to others, cannot learn, nor can they seek forgiveness.

Failure to express gratitude is more than immaturity and rudeness, it is ungodly. We are commanded to honour our parents, our elders and our leaders. It is a sign of maturity to acknowledge indebtedness. Anyone who has learned anything is in debt to somebody else. We are all in debt, firstly, and mostly to God Himself, for our life, health, food, talents, family, friends, opportunities and for our salvation itself. We are also in debt to past generations who have sacrificed for the freedoms we now enjoy: Reformers, martyrs, pioneers, missionaries, soldiers, parents, teachers, pastors and so many others have sacrificed for our benefit.

Those who do not take advice don’t think they have anything to learn. They are often the same people who have a problem expressing a genuine heartfelt gratitude to others. It is a sign of pride to be ungrateful – it reveals an unwillingness to acknowledge a debt to others.

Instead of the Christian character of gratitude, our present culture prefers to promote an attitude of entitlement. This is the very opposite of gratitude. It builds on pride and covetousness, it is fuelled by bitterness, greed and envy. All too many in the present humanistic society take things for granted, demand to get rather than seeking to give.

“One man gives freely, yet gains even more, another withholds unduly but comes to poverty.”

Proverbs 11:24

A grateful mind is a great mind. *“Be thankful, therefore, for the least benefit and thou shalt be worthy to receive greater.”* Thomas à Kempis

“Give thanks to the Lord, call on His Name; make known among the nations what He has done...Give thanks to the Lord for He is good; His love endures forever.” 1 Chronicles 16:8,34

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