

Major Bible Themes

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CHAPTER XLII

THANKSGIVING

True thanksgiving is the voluntary expression of heartfelt gratitude for benefit received. Its effectiveness depends upon its sincerity, as its intensity depends upon the value which is placed upon the benefit received (2 Cor. 9:11). Thanksgiving is peculiarly personal. There are obligations belonging to us which may be assumed by another; but no one can offer for us our word of thanksgiving (Lev. 22:29).

Thanksgiving is in no way a payment for the benefit received; it is rather a gracious acknowledgment of the fact that the one who had received the benefit is indebted to the giver. Since no payment can be made to God for His unmeasured and uncounted benefits, the obligation to be thankful to Him is stated throughout the Scriptures and all thanksgiving is closely related to worship and praise. Under the old order, the spiritual relationships to God were expressed in material ways. Among these, provision was made for the offering, or sacrifice, of thanksgiving (Lev. 7:12, 13, 15; Psa. 107:22; 116:17). Similarly, in this age, it is the privilege of the believer to make sacrificial offerings of thanksgiving to God. However, if while offering the

sacrificial gift of thanksgiving the motive should include the thought of compensation, the essential value of thanksgiving is destroyed.

The subject of thanksgiving is mentioned about forty times in the Old Testament, and thirty of these references are found in the Psalms. In the Old Testament Scriptures explicit direction is given for the thanksgiving offerings (Lev. 7:12-15), and praise and thanksgiving were especially emphasized in the revival under Nehemiah (Neh. 12:24-40). Likewise, the prophetic message of the Old Testament anticipates thanksgiving as a special feature of worship in the coming Kingdom (Isa. 51:3; Jer. 30:19). So, also, there is ceaseless thanksgiving in Heaven (Rev. 4:9; 7:12; 11:17).

An important feature of Old Testament thanksgiving is the appreciation of the Person of God apart from all His benefits (Psa. 30:4; 95:2; 97:12; 100:1-5; 119:62). Though so constantly neglected, this theme of thanksgiving is most important and such praise is reasonable and fitting. "It is a good thing to give thanks unto Jehovah" (Psa. 92:1).

Turning to the New Testament, we find that the theme of thanksgiving is mentioned about forty-five times and that this form of praise is offered for both temporal and spiritual blessings. Christ's unflinching practice of giving thanks for temporal bread (Matt. 15:36; 26:27; Mark 8:6; 14:23; Luke 22:17, 19; John 6:23; 1 Cor. 11:24) should prove an effectual example to all believers. The Apostle Paul was also faithful in this particular (Acts 27:35. Note also Rom. 14:6; 1 Tim. 4:3, 4).

Thanksgiving on the part of the Apostle Paul is worthy of close attention. He uses the phrase "thanks be unto God" in connection with Christ as the "unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15), concerning the victory over the grave which is secured by the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:57), and because of the present triumph which is ours through Christ (2 Cor. 2:14). His thanksgiving to God for believers (1 Thess. 1:2; 3:9), for Titus in particular (2 Cor. 8:16), and his exhortation that thanks be given for all men (1 Tim. 2:1) is likewise an object lesson to all the children of God.

Two important features of thanksgiving according to the New Testament should be noted:

1. Thanksgiving Without Ceasing.

Since the adorable Person of God is unchanged and His benefits never cease and since the abundant grace of God will redound to the glory of God through the thanksgiving of many (2 Cor. 4:15), it is reasonable that thanksgiving shall be given to Him without ceasing. Of this form of praise we read: "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Heb. 13:15. Note also Eph. 1:16; 5:20; Col. 1:3; 4:2). This feature of thanksgiving is also emphasized in the Old Testament (Psa. 30:12; 79:13; 107:22; 116:17).

2. Thanksgiving for All Things.

Again we read: "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20); "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess. 5:18. Note also Phil. 4:6; Col. 2:7; 3:17).

Giving thanks always for all things is far removed from giving thanks sometimes for some things. However, having accepted the truth that all things work together for good to them that love God, it is fitting that thanks shall be rendered to God for all things. Such God honoring praise can be offered only by those who are saved and who are Spirit-filled (Eph. 5:18-20). Daniel gave thanks to God in the face of the sentence of death (Dan. 6:10), and Jonah gave thanks to God from the belly of the great fish and from the depths of the sea (Jonah 2:9).

The common sin of ingratitude toward God is illustrated by one of the events which is recorded in the ministry of Christ. Ten lepers were cleansed, but only one returned to give thanks, and he was a Samaritan (Luke 17:11-19). It should be noted here that ingratitude is a sin, being included as one of the sins of the "last days" (2 Tim. 3:2).

It is probable that there is true sincerity on the part of many unsaved who try to be thankful to God for temporal benefits; but their utter failure to appreciate the gift of His Son leaves them most unthankful in His sight.

It should be remembered that Thanksgiving Day was established in this country by believers and for believers and with the recognition of the fact that the Christ-rejecting sinner cannot give acceptable praise unto God.

QUESTIONS

1. What is thanksgiving and why is it personal?
2. a. Should thanksgiving be considered a payment of obligation?
 - b. How may a thank-offering be related to true thanksgiving?
3. Indicate the scope of thanksgiving in the Old Testament.
4. In what particular does the Old Testament emphasize the Person of God in thanksgiving?
5. Should a Christian be thankful to God for God Himself apart from all His benefits?
6. According to the New Testament what are the reasons for thanksgiving?
7. What example in thanksgiving did Christ set?
8. Indicate various things for which the Apostle Paul was thankful.
9. What lessons may be drawn from his thanksgiving?
10. Name two important features of thanksgiving according to the New Testament.
11. What abiding blessings call for unceasing thanksgiving?
12. What Scripture calls for unceasing thanksgiving?

13. a. Is it humanly possible to give thanks always for all things?

b. By what sufficiency may such thanksgiving be offered?

14. a. What incident in the ministry of Christ illustrates the sin of ingratitude?

b. Wherein do the unsaved fail in true gratitude to God?