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Grace and Gratitude Selected Passages

Thanksgiving is the special time of year set aside by our nation to remember and give thanks for God's goodness and blessings. The very name, "Thanksgiving", should cause us to pause and consider for what and to whom we are giving thanks. We have certainly been blessed in our nation, yet it is difficult for us to be truly grateful as we should. This might be best summed up in "Shenandoah", the Jimmy Stewart movie where his character, Charlie Anderson offers up this prayer of thanks for their meal:

"Lord, we cleared this land. We plowed it, sowed it, and harvested it. We cooked the harvest. It wouldn't be here and we wouldn't be eating it if we hadn't done it all ourselves. We worked dog bone hard for every crumb and morsel but we thank You just the same anyway Lord for this food we're about to eat, Amen."

We have to ask whether Charlie Anderson was truly grateful for the blessings his family received. He felt they had earned the bounty on their table and deserved it because of their hard work. Though he went through the motions of giving thanks, he certainly did not have a thankful heart.

Does this reflect our own attitude towards the many blessings God has given us? In America we pride ourselves on hard work and individualism. The "American Dream" says that if we study hard and work hard we can achieve success. It is easy for us to feel that we have earned and deserve the many blessing that we have received.

Since we are approaching the Thanksgiving holiday, I would just like to offer this study as a reminder that all the blessings we have received, whether physical, material, or spiritual come from God and we should be truly grateful for all He has given us. I would also like to point us to the real secret of having a truly thankful heart. **It is when we realize that everything that God has given us is an undeserved gift of His grace that we really become truly thankful.**

Every Person Owes God Thanks

Since God is our creator, and the creator of everything around us, we owe God thanks for everything we are and everything we have. Pastor John Piper sums up this truth well:

"If there is such an all-powerful, infinitely glorious God who made all things, then I, too, am his creature. And everything I have is from him. Who but the Creator gives to all men life and breath and everything (Acts 17:25)? Standing before the

*irresistible logic of the lesson book of creation, I have to admit that everything is a gift. It is inconceivable that the Creator should ever owe me anything. For when could I ever give a gift to him that I should be repaid? "For from him and through him and to him are all things" (Romans 11:35-36). I am not my own; I belong to my Maker. My existence is owing to him, and therefore my existence must be for him."*¹

Yet it is our human nature to rebel against God and one of the ways this is demonstrated is an ungrateful heart. Romans 1 tells us that even though sinful people recognize God's glory in creation, **"...they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened."**

Charlie Anderson, Jimmy Stewart's character in the movie sounds like he expressed this very attitude. He forgot the truth of what we often call "common grace". This is God's blessing which He shows to all people. Jesus spoke of how His Father **"...Causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous"** (Matt. 5:45). We, like Charlie Anderson might fail to remember who created us in the first place. We forget who gave us the strength to work. We

neglect the fact that He gave us family, friends, and all the things in life we enjoy.

The great truth of which the Thanksgiving holiday should remind us is that we have an infinitely marvelous, eternally powerful Being Who created us and all we have. Therefore, we are his creatures. He owns us. Our life, our breath, and everything we have is a gift. Our duty is simply to be thankful to him from our heart and to pursue his glory.²

The Bible Places a High Priority on Being Thankful

Every person should be thankful to God. However, the believer has even more for which to be thankful as he has experienced not only God's common grace, but His saving grace as well. The Bible shows that a heart of gratitude will be a main characteristic of a follower of Christ.

The Psalms are full of songs expressing thanksgiving to God for His blessings and for His grace and mercy. Psalms 7:17; 18:49; 28:7; 30:4, 12; 107:1, 8 are just a few of the over 50 times thanksgiving is mentioned.

In the New Testament, Jesus gave a great example of thanksgiving. Matt. 26:27; John 6:11; John 11:41; all show how Jesus gave thanks to His Father. As in every other aspect, Jesus is the only perfect example of true and complete gratitude. The rest of the New Testament is full of examples and exhortations for the believer to give thanks. In 1 Cor. 9:15 Paul thanks God for the indescribable gift of His Son. In Col. 1:9-13 Paul writes of us "**joyously give thanks**" for all that God has done for us. In Col. 2:7 he says we should be "**overflowing with gratitude**". In Col. 3:15-17 we see Paul challenge believers three times to give thanks as an automatic response from those who have given so much through Christ.

The Link Between Grace and Gratitude

There is another passage where Paul writes about thanksgiving that I believe gives us the secret to having a truly thankful heart. In 2 Corinthians 4:15 Paul shows us the link between grace and gratitude. There Paul writes that the "**...Grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.**" There is a connection between "grace" and "giving of thanks" which doesn't show up in our English translation. They both come from the same Greek word. It is interesting that our English words "grace" and "gratitude" come from the same Latin words. Why is this important? It demonstrates the close link between grace and gratitude. We have learned that grace is ***the free and loving working of a holy God in the lives of undeserving sinners.***

Gratitude is the heart's response to this grace. It is not merely an action (saying "thank you" or saying "grace" at a meal). Gratitude is a feeling of happiness or joy directed toward a person for giving you something good. It is a happiness that comes not merely from the gift, but from the act of giving. Gratitude is the feeling we have about a giver because of his giving something good to you or doing something good for you – especially something we do not deserve. If we believe or feel that we have earned or deserve God's blessings and favor, then we will not be truly thankful. One writer has well said that "*gratitude is an echo of God's grace*".

If we are not careful, we can become like Charlie Anderson when it comes to our faith. We tend to feel we are right with God because of our work, our effort, and our goodness. Grace says it is only through Christ and His work that we can be right with God.

It is when we realize that all that we have and all that we have been blessed with – physically, materially, and spiritually – are all undeserved gifts from God that we become truly grateful.

This Leaves Us with Three Important Truths This Thanksgiving:

God created us and all we have. We are his creatures. He owns us. Our life, our breath, and everything we have is a gift. Our duty is simply to be thankful to him from our heart and to pursue his glory.

All of us have fallen short of this duty. We have not consistently been thankful or pursued God's glory.

God, in his great mercy, sent his Son to suffer the judgment of people who realize their ingratitude, are broken and contrite in spirit, AND who trust in him. Jesus is our perfect example of gratitude, even in the middle of the greatest of trials. His perfect gratitude is credited to us when we place our faith in Him. How can we not be thankful when we understand all He has done for us!

¹ Piper, John. Sermon *Proud People Don't Say Thanks*. Nov. 20, 1983. <http://www.desiringgod.org>.

²Ibid.

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY

Thursday, November 8

12:00 McManus Conference Room

(# M252 Located near House Minority Offices)