

THE GRACE OF GRATITUDE

"O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." Psalm 107:1.

"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High; To show forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night." Psalm 92:1-2.

"Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men." Psalm 107:8.

"Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Ephesians 5:20.

"And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful." Colossians 3:15.

"In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." I Thessalonians 5:18.

Under the watchful care and guidance of the Lord, we have been carried safely through the years. God has graciously opened His hand and dealt bountifully with us, far beyond what we deserved. Consequently, we should bow in gratitude to Him for His many favors and blessings.

Thanksgiving wells up most profusely in the hearts of those who do a lot of thinking. It is no accident that the two words, "think" and "thank," are so closely related and are spelled so nearly alike. Permit me to remind you that the words think and thank come from the same root. Those who take time to think will also take time to thank. Unthankful people are unthinking people. Ingratitude is thoughtlessness solidified. One can judge the refinement of another by his sense of gratitude. In fact, gratitude is one of the most beautiful and fragrant flowers that grows and blooms in the soil of the human soul. On the other hand, ingratitude grieves the heart of God. Even a human heart, with all its weaknesses and inconsistencies, is hurt by ingratitude. How much more, then, must it be displeasing to God when we neglect to thank Him! Having been the recipients of so many blessings from Him, it is certainly appropriate for us to thank and to praise the Giver for what has been and is being received from Him. An expression of gratitude for blessings received cheers the heart of the Giver and makes glad the heart of the receiver.

Gratitude is an obligation resting upon all irrespective of their attitude to the claims of the Christian gospel. Every man is indebted to God, whether he acknowledges God or not and whether he acknowledges his debt or not. The fact that God does something for every man means that every man is under a moral obligation to express his humble thanksgiving to God. Never be one of those thoughtless individuals who passes through life receiving all, enjoying all and expecting all without bestowing a thought on the bountiful Giver. Giving thanks to God for His bountiful blessings is always a comely thing for us to do. The acknowledgment of favors received is not only kindly and courteous but just and honorable.

We all know that to give thanks to God is a duty. Not only is this duty taught in the Bible, but it is felt to be right in itself. If anyone bestows a gift on us, the least we can do is to thank him or her for it. Since we know that from God we receive every good and perfect gift, we are naturally obligated to give Him thanks for that which He has bestowed upon us. It is a duty incumbent upon all to render thanks unto God for mercies received and enjoyed. Anything done for us which we could not do for ourselves ought to awaken in us a sense of gratitude. Giving thanks is right for us, for others and for the Lord. It shows Him that we appreciate what He has done for us. Besides, it enlarges the blessing received. Gratitude is microscopic and magnifies the insignificant.

Perhaps ingratitude is the most common sin in the world. Christ once cleansed ten lepers, but nine of them continued their journey without expressing any appreciation whatever to the Lord. They did not have a sufficient sense of indebtedness to Christ to thank Him for healing them. He had bestowed upon them the greatest physical blessing, but they did not show Him the least symptom of appreciation. This ingratitude stung the Lord deeply. Right-thinking people are startled by a display of ingratitude. What a pity that some people are content to get all they can from Christ but do not want to show Him any appreciation for what He has done for them!

Are ten per cent of Christians known for praise to Christ? How rare is this virtue of praise! Have you ever said, "I thank Thee, Lord, for giving Thy life for me?" Many there are who profess to be Christians who never offer praise to God for the provision of their daily food, let alone for all other temporal and spiritual blessings. The thoughtfulness and kindness of others is often accepted without comment.

On September 6, 1860, Edward W. Spencer, who was then just a lad, rescued seventeen people from the wreck of the Lady Elgin on Lake Michigan. When he was beyond seventy-five years old, on a public occasion in Los Angeles, Dr. R. A. Torrey asked him if there was anything remarkable about that experience that he had never told. He replied: "Nothing, except not one of the seventeen ever hunted me up to say a word of thanks."

I. Give Thanks For Physical Blessings.

Let us thank God for this mysterious, wonderful and unfathomable thing called life. Have you ever expressed gratitude for life and a strong, healthy body? Thank Him for the ability to hear the glad sound of the early morning birds and the evening nightingale, the chatter and laughter of little children, the conversation of friends and loved ones. Have you thanked God for your good eyesight which enables you to see so many wonderful things?

Thank God for the ability to think, to speak and to remember. Have you thanked Him for your material comforts? Let us thank God for every beam of light that delights our eyes, every breath of air that cheers our spirits, every drop of water that quenches our thirst, every bite of food that satisfies our hunger and every minute of comfortable repose.

II. Give Thanks For Material Blessings.

Let us be thankful for this beautiful and glorious world in which we live; for the wonder of seedtime, summer and autumn harvest; for the spur of necessity which impels industry; and for the stores of material good for our use and welfare. For us the rains descend; for us the brooks murmur; for us the rivers flow; for us the seas open their bosoms to admit our commerce; and for us the sun sheddeth abroad its creative beams. There is so much in our land to arrest the attention, excite the interest and admiration and to swell the heart of every citizen with pride. I call you to a new appreciation of the privileges and responsibilities that are yours.

How grateful we should be for food and raiment! We have ample food and respectable clothing. Many are not as fortunate as we are. How grateful we should be for employment! We enjoy so many comforts and conveniences, but are we grateful for them as we should be? Do we appreciate our liberties?

"Count your many blessings,
Name them one by one,
And it will surprise you
What the Lord hath done."

III. Give Thanks For Social Blessings.

I shall ever be grateful for the parents who gave me birth. How thankful I am for the memory of a home in which God was honored and the training was given that the intervening years have not dissipated or destroyed! We should be grateful for our loved ones. How much poorer we would be without them! How we would miss them if they were taken from us!

Let us be grateful for our friends. When I list the choicest blessings on this earth, I am compelled to put near the head of the list the Christian friends who have loved me, stood by me and whose friendly smile, warm handclasp and encouraging words have enabled me to face life with new courage and confidence. I would rather have one true Christian friend than all the material things in the state. For us our friends make life rich and full, bright and joyous, tender and sweet.

IV. Give Thanks For Spiritual Blessings.

1. God's love for us.

He created us, redeemed us, saved us, sustains us and blesses us.

2. The Saviour.

Let us thank Him with the gratitude of our hearts, with the praise of our lips and by the obedience of our lives. Let us consider it a joyous privilege to love, to obey and to serve Him, Who for more than nineteen centuries has been the center of the best thought, the inspiration of the best sacrifice and the motive of the best living.

3. The Scriptures.

For the matchless light and power of the Scriptures let us offer our thanks to God. To try to pay rhetorical tribute to the Scriptures is like the needless task of painting the lily or of decorating a sunset. The Scriptures are supernatural in origin, universal in appeal, unerring in guidance, regenerative in force, timeless in appropriateness, deathless in destiny, with man's hand behind their penmanship but with God's heart behind their authorship. They ought to be in our homes, hands, heads, hearts and habits.

4. The church.

I think of our church as a spiritual body, a redemptive force, a company of disciples and a group of friendly helpers. It is an institution which concerns conscience, convictions, character, consecration, conduct and charity. It urges understanding, unselfishness and usefulness. It calls for courtesy, cheerfulness, compassion, courage and cooperation. I think of it as the place where the Word of God is preached, the power of God is felt, the spirit of God is manifested, the love of God is conceived and the salvation of God is received. It is a place to go for communion with God in worship, for Christian fellowship with God's children, for instruction in the Word of God, for spiritual inspiration and for real service. The church is a necessary institution, the best teacher of righteousness we have, the friend of childhood, the inspirer of youth, the strengthener of middle life, and the comforter of old age.

As I think of the blessings of God upon our church during these ten years, there are various things for which I am grateful to Him. I thank Him for the souls which have been saved, for the large growth in membership, for our enlarged facilities, for the truths that so many have learned from His Word, for capable and progressive leadership and for the spirit of unity which prevails.

5. The assurance of a home in heaven.

"For we know that, if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have

a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (II Corinthians 5:1). This is a description of our new home, which is the best home of all. I am so thankful that I have a home in heaven. I am so grateful that I have the assurance that when He calls me home, I shall have a rest from my labors, a reward for my service, a residence with the Lord and will enjoy a reunion with all the saved.