

THE DUTY OF THANKFULNESS

"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.

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

In praising God for His goodness, the Psalmist said, "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 loving-kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night." Psalm 92:1. But what is this thanksgiving to which he refers? It is an expression of gratitude, the acknowledgment of kindnesses, or mercies received. It is one of the emotions which help to enrich every life which is fortunate enough to develop it.

Surely none will deny that it is right to give thanks for all that we receive. This thanksgiving begins with our attitude of appreciation. The heart of our Heavenly Father is warmed when we express our thanksgiving to Him. Not only is it right, but there is something beautiful in the thought that we at times approach our Heavenly Father, not with a plea for some blessing or gift or help, but with a hymn of thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving for the common and ordinary things of life creates an enthusiasm for living that can be had in no other way. God becomes even more real to us when we begin to be grateful to Him for what He has done for us. He is at work, watching over us, caring for us, preserving us from danger, leading us in paths that are better for us than those we would seek for ourselves. If we are grateful to God and give thanks to Him as we should, He becomes more real to us, like the loved ones who minister to us, or the friends who give us gifts. Real thanksgiving also makes us mindful of the many things which are kept away from our lives, or of the things we are saved from. It gives us a correct perspective with reference to all that we have or do not have.

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 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.

If there is one thing lacking today more than any other in the realm of religion, it is the spirit of gratitude. The beautiful note of thanksgiving is too often silent in many of our religious services. We readily accept the manifold gifts of God, but so many times we fail to recognize the Giver. Far too many eat and drink, enjoy good health, boast of their possessions, revel in their liberty, glory in their land, etc., but never stop to render thanks to the Giver of all these wonderful gifts. Thanksgiving is a Christ-like attribute. Over and over again He gave thanks to the Father. Over and over again we should do the very same thing. Let us say with the Psalmist, "Oh, give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good: for his mercy endureth for ever." Psalm 107:1. He also said, "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" Psalm 107:8.

Gratitude is a grace that struggles for expression. It does not shut itself up in the heart. It does not merely allow itself to be felt. It wants to speak. It wants to say something. The one hundred and seventh Psalm recognizes the giving expression to grateful feeling as a duty. It says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." Let them give voice to their grateful feelings in regard to the favors received.

Giving thanks to the Lord for His mercies and blessings is always a comely thing for us to do. We ought to bestir ourselves to perform this important duty at this time of our national Thanksgiving. When the human heart is thankful for past mercies, new mercies are not very far away.

Paul's ideals are revealed in his advice given in this chapter. He urged them to put off certain things that vitiate the Christian life. He wanted them to disrobe themselves of their sinful past. He told them to put on the elements of the finest character; then, to let the peace of God dwell in their hearts. That peace is the result of harmony with God. Then, he said, "And be ye thankful." The peace of God can never dwell in an unthankful heart.

The American custom of observing one day in the year as a national day of Thanksgiving is a good one. While its observance is often defective, it is a public acknowledgment of Divine sovereignty and human dependence, implying obligations to God and to our fellow men. In so far as it is observed in the right spirit and with suitable conduct, it has a salutary effect upon individuals and upon society as a whole.

While this day of national thanksgiving has become one of the fixed institutions of our fair land, it should be more than a mere festival observed out of habit. Thankfulness should be our daily attitude. If there be no such undersong of gratitude in the life, then there is no genuine gratitude at all. Not pleasing unto God is that thanksgiving which is occasional unless it is the expression of a thanksgiving which is continuous.

Thanksgiving wells up most profusely in the hearts of those who do a lot of thinking. Permit me to remind you that the words think and thank come from the same root. Those who take time to think also take time to thank. Unthankful people are unthinking people. It is a matter of choice whether we are thankful or thankless. It is even possible to judge another's refinement 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, it is certainly appropriate for us to thank and to praise the Giver for what has been and is being received from Him. Therefore, our thanksgiving is an expression of gratitude for blessings received. Such thanksgiving cheers the heart of the Giver and makes glad the heart of the receiver.

There are very few duties which the Bible enjoins in terms in so large a requirement as the duty of thanksgiving. Under the watchful care and guidance of the Lord we have been carried safely through another year. God has graciously opened His hand and dealt bountifully with us, far beyond what we deserved. We have so much for which to be thankful.

We all know that to give thanks to God is a duty. It is a duty that is not only inculcated in the Bible, but it is felt by every person to be right in itself. If anyone bestows a gift on us, the least we can do is to thank the donor for it. It is a duty incumbent upon all to render thanksgiving unto God for mercies received and enjoyed. We are to be thankful in the midnight darkness as well as in the bright sunshine. "In everything give thanks."

Why should we give thanks? Because it is right, it is a duty, it pleases the Lord, it enriches the life, and it enlarges the blessing received.

There are various things which afford us abundant reason for genuine thanksgiving.

I. Life.

Let us thank God for this mysterious, wonderful, yet unfathomable thing called life. Thank Him for your senses. Thank God 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. Thank God for the ability to speak, to think and to remember.

II. Parents.

I thank God for the parents who gave me birth and the memory of a home in which God was honored, and training was given that the intervening years have not dissipated or destroyed.

III. The Age In Which We Live.

This is an age of tremendous outward development, vast activities, multiplied discoveries, annihilated distances, and general education.

IV. Food And Raiment.

We have ample food and respectable clothing. Many are not as fortunate as we are.

V. Employment.

VI. Home.

Only those who do not have a home know the preciousness of it. Think of the multiplied thousands of boarders and of their lonely days and nights.

VII. Family.

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!

VIII. Friends.

For us they make life rich and full, bright and joyous, tender and sweet.

IX. Material Blessings.

1. This wonderful world.

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 goods 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. We enjoy the splendors of the sunrise, and the ordered coming of the seasons. Proof that this is a wonderful world is indeed abundant when we take note of the chirping of the birds outside our bedroom windows at the break of day, the fragrance of the beautiful flowers wafted in on the morning breeze, the fleecy clouds changing from one color to another in the early dawn, the fertile valleys, beautiful hills, quiet lakes, rippling rills, rushing rivers, restless seas, mighty forests, towering mountains, glorious sunset, silvery moon, and twinkling stars.

2. This great nation.

There is much in our land to arrest the attention, excite the interest and admiration, and to swell with pride the heart of every citizen. There is its great extent from ocean to ocean, its vast and varied productions, its diversified

scenery--which is beautiful, attractive and picturesque, as is seen in its widespread, waving forests, its boundless flower-decked prairies, its rolling rivers, rushing cataracts, stupendous waterfalls and numerous lakes, its snow-capped mountains, its great institutions, and its wonderful progress in all the elements of national greatness. I call you to a new appreciation of the privileges and responsibilities that are yours.

X. Physical Blessings.

Have you ever thanked God for the physical blessings you enjoy? Have you ever expressed thanks for a strong healthy body? Have you thanked Him for your good eyesight which enables you to see so many wonderful things? Have you thanked Him for good hearing? Have you expressed your gratitude to 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.

XI. Spiritual Blessings.

1. The Saviour.

Christ was born as nobody else was ever born. None other was ever heralded, honored, or hated at his birth as was Jesus. He lived in poverty, and was reared in obscurity. He worked in a carpenter shop until He was thirty, and then for three years, He was an itinerant teacher and preacher.

To take Him out of history is like taking the matter out of physics, the heat out of fire, the fragrance out of flowers, and the numbers out of mathematics. The searchlight of criticism has been focused upon Him, and yet it has failed to find in Him one suggestion of sin, one ill-advised word, or one selfish deed.

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.

2. The Scriptures.

For the matchless light and power of the Holy 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 contain the mind of God, the state of man, the way of salvation, the doom of sinners, and the happiness of believers. Their doctrines are holy, their precepts are binding, their histories are true, and their decisions are immutable. They have light to direct, food to support, and comfort to cheer.

The Bible is supernatural in origin, universal in appeal, unerring in guidance, regenerative in force, timeless in appropriateness, deathless in destiny, with man's hand behind its penmanship but with God's heart behind its authorship. It has Christ for its subject, our good for its design, and the glory of God for its end. It involves the highest responsibility, it will reward the greatest labor, and condemn those who trifle with it. It is the loveliest and best of all books to guide us in our glooms, to direct us in our doubts, to help us in our hazards, to prompt us in our perplexities, and to be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway. The Scriptures ought to be in our homes, our hands, our heads, our hearts, and our habits.

3. The churches.

I think of my 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, for Christian fellowship with the best and most devout people, for Bible instruction, for spiritual inspiration, and for real service. The church is a necessary institution, the best teacher of righteousness which we have, the friend of childhood, the inspirer of youth, the strengthener of middle life, and the comforter of old age.