

IT IS GOOD TO GIVE THANKS

"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." Psalm 92:1.

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 fellowmen. 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. In fact, 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. Indeed, 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 displeasing then it must be 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.

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. Such gratitude cheers the heart of the one who expresses it and also makes glad the heart of the Receiver.

To neglect to express gratitude for blessings received is by no means a new fault in human practice. The Saviour while on the earth after having cured ten miserable lepers of their loathsome disease, when only one had practical appreciation enough to even render thanks for the inestimable blessing of health which had been bestowed by miraculous grace, said pathetically, "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine?" Gratitude is the mother of happiness, and finds the sweet expression of her life in thanksgiving for benefits received.

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 the 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.

Gratitude is one of the essential elements of character. No one can be happy or useful without it. It gives depth and permanence. He who holds it as a principle that God and men are under lasting obligation to him, and no matter what he receives he has never yet been the recipient of that which his worth demands, that man, no matter how rich or brilliant he may be, is superficial, unreliable, disagreeable and unhappy. On the other hand, he who takes the attitude of Paul that he is debtor to God and men, and has a spirit of thankful appreciation, will prove himself to be stable, reliable, agreeable and happy.

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 accept the manifold gifts of God, but how many times do we fail to recognize the Giver? Many people eat and drink, enjoy good health, boast of their possessions, revel in their liberty, glory in their land, etc., but never stop a moment to render thanks to the Giver of all these good and perfect gifts.

The recurrence of the day for our special national thanksgiving reminds us once again of the blessings God has bestowed upon us as individuals and as a nation. Our material blessings have been abundant, and our spiritual blessings have had no limit except that of our willingness to receive them. If we have neglected to give thanks during the remainder of the year, let us now say with the Psalmist: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

"It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord." This is true for various reasons:

I. It is right.

God deserves our thanksgiving.

1. He created us.
2. He has preserved us.
3. He has redeemed us. John 3:16.
4. He has saved us.
5. He sustains us.
6. He guides us.

II. It is a duty.

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 to God proves that we appreciate what He has done for us. Besides, it enlarges the blessing received. Gratitude is microscopic and magnifies the insignificant.

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."

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

III. It is winsome.

It is a good thing to be thankful because such a spirit exhibits Christianity in a beautiful form to others. We have read of instances of great thankfulness in the midst of great privations, and we have seen some of them. We may have gone to some

wretched abode of poverty, where it seems, that had it been our lot to dwell there, we could discover nothing but occasion to murmur at our hard fate, and we may have heard there expressions of gratitude and acknowledgments of God's goodness that have amazed us. Have we not gone away with a real love for such a spirit, and ashamed that we did not possess more of it? "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord."

IV. It is God-honoring.

God loves the returns of gratitude. It is true that our returns of praise can add nothing to God's glory or happiness, and yet He has declared that "whoso offereth Him thanks and praise, he glorifieth Him." Thankfulness opens the heart to God, and God's blessing fills the open heart as the fresh air rushes through the open window, and the light of heaven fills the unshuttered room. When the heart is thankful for past mercies, new mercies are not far away.

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" Psalm 116:12. We cannot purchase His blessings, to be sure, nor can we in any sense pay for them. But there are many things we can do that will be well pleasing unto Him.

1. We can give Him our hearts.
2. We can praise Him, remembering that "praise is comely for the upright."
3. We can love Him.
4. We can dedicate ourselves fully to the doing of His will.
5. We can let our gratitude to Him so overflow our lives that it will not rest until it finds satisfaction in helping others in His name.

Doing these things, thanksgiving will be to us a perpetual attitude of mind and heart and life that will make our lives well-pleasing unto the Lord. "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord."