

It Is Written

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Always Grateful

By Doy Moyer

How we think about God and our level of gratitude are connected. If we think about God respectfully and remember what He has done and continues to do, we will be grateful. How can we not be? Paul makes this connection in Romans 1:21-22. In a context where he is speaking about those who have given up God, he writes, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools..." Honoring God and giving thanks are interwoven. Conversely, failing to be thankful indicates a lack of honor for God, which leads to futile thought and action.

There is, arguably, an integral connection between a lack of gratitude and an attitude of entitlement. If we think that we ought to be treated in a special manner or that people ought to give us things, then why should we be thankful to those who give us what we think we deserve? We are entitled, so why the need to be grateful? Yet we know there is something particularly egregious about this kind of attitude. The ungrateful cannot see when grace has been given because they don't see their need for it. Grace has no place for them, and because grace is shunned, so is a thankful spirit.

David DeSilva points out, "Generosity was a highly valued characteristic in people in the Hellenistic and Roman periods." Just as important was the attitude of those who were on the receiving end of a gift. While a giver was not to act out of self-interest, "The recipient should be a virtuous person who will honor the generosity and kindness behind the gift, who would value more the continuing relationship with the giver than any particular gift." The "gift must always be met with gratitude" [Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity, pgs. 105-108].

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:23). Our response to this gift speaks volumes about how we view both the gift and the Giver. No amount of work that we do will ever make up for it, for all we can say, after doing what God asks of us, is, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (Luke 17:10). Humility, praise, and gratefulness should flow from our hearts.

How much do we value our relationship with the God who has given, not just a few gifts, but Himself as a sacrifice to atone for our sins? Christians value salvation and ought to be eternally grateful for what God has done to make forgiveness viable. Yet we ought not to value only the gift of salvation but also the Giver Himself — the God who made us in His image and wants us to be in fellowship with Him. Our thankfulness, then, goes beyond thanking God for forgiveness (as great as that is). Our thankfulness is for God Himself. "Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you; let those who love your salvation continually say, 'God is great!'" (Psalms 70:4).

Being thankful is a continual attitude that should characterize us no matter what else is going on in our lives. This is one of the reasons that Christians ought not to be given to grumbling and complaining (Philippians 2:14), for this demonstrates a lack of gratitude and focuses more on our circumstances and lack of contentment. A lack of gratitude is more a sign of selfishness and a corollary to a lack of love. Thankfulness should be pervasive and consistent, as Paul indicated:

"Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:16-17).

The Hebrews writer also makes an interesting connection: "Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom

that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful. By it, we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and awe” (Hebrews 12:28). The link here is that our service to God with reverence and awe flows out of our gratitude for God and His mercy toward us. We cannot serve God acceptably or have proper respect for Him if we do not maintain the gratitude (grace) in our hearts.

Connecting our last two passages (Colossians 3 and Hebrews 12) would show that our praise and worship of God are always to be attended by thankfulness and gratitude. This goes beyond assemblies to our daily offering up of ourselves as living sacrifices (Romans 12:1-2). Indeed, we are to “give thanks in everything; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thessalonians 5:18).

“Give thanks to him and bless his name. For the LORD is good, and his faithful love endures forever; his faithfulness, through all generations” (Psalms 100:4-5).

They Went Out From Us

By Terry Wane Benton

Sometimes it is a hidden blessing to the local church when we lose some people and numbers. John spoke of some who ceased in heart to be “of us” (I John 2:18f). They “went out” because, in heart, they had been secretly drifting away from the truth being preached and could no longer “endure sound doctrine” and as a result lost commonality with the local group.

They went out to manifest that the disconnect had already been brewing in them for some time and discussing with knowledgeable leaders their issue was not an option for them since they knew they could not defend their attitudes or issues on a sound scriptural basis.

As their attitude and disconnect continued they were not a good influence on the church or for the church. It was better for the local church to lose that number than to try to cater to them just to appease them and keep the number. A little leaven of that kind would not be good for the church. So, it was a cancer, a drag on the church. It was better if they could not or would not repent, for them to leave than remain a drag on the church.

While ideally, we want people to be of one mind (I Corinthians 1:10), we find the reality to be that divisions must occur to reveal the truth (I Corinthians 11:19) that some members are not really dedicating themselves to God's word. That is unfortunate, but a reality we must acknowledge in local churches from time to time, which means we must all diligently examine ourselves regularly whether we are in the faith (II Corinthians 13:4) and truly abiding in Christ (John 15:4).

What I've Learned About Repentance

By Perry Hall

When I review my life I have become convinced of three (among many) necessities for spiritual victory:

1. True repentance is more than being sorry. It is peeling back, again and again, the layers of your sin, finding how many sins were involved even within "one" sin. Does one sin ever involve one sin?

2. True repentance is more than one time of being convicted. Repentance has to be lived every day, not in guilt for past transgressions; but in awareness of how easy it is to slip back in. His subtleties are soft triggers. Does the enemy ever permanently leave after his one failure?

3. True repentance gives me compassion for other sinners. Compassion isn't overlooking their sin, because it is understanding I am no better than them. Does my "little sin" in my eyes become a "greater sin" in God's eyes when in pride I make myself the lesser sinner?

If these observations help you, then that helps me to continuously be repenting as I stand watch, and watch out as Jesus warned.

"Stay awake (lit., keep watching) and pray, so that you won't enter into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak" (Matthew 26:41 CSB'17)