

An Attitude of Thanksgiving

Giving thanks to God is on a different level than thanking a human. We are only able to thank human beings and God. We thank people when they do something nice to us or give us something we don't deserve. We acknowledge them because they reached out to us in some positive manner.

Paul thanked Priscilla and Aquila for risking their lives for his sake (Romans 16:4). Paul sent his thanks to the Ephesians for their strong faith and love for the saints (Ephesians 1:16). He also thanks the Lord for the Philippians (Philippians 1:3).

Paul also, many times, thanked God. Examples are found here:

- Thanks for God for spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 14:18)
- Thanks to God for His salvation and work of sanctification (Romans 6:17; 7:25; 1 Corinthians 1:4; 2 Corinthians 9:15)
- Thanks for God's faithfulness (2 Corinthians 2:14)
- Thanks to God for victory over death (1 Corinthians 15: 57;
- Thanks for others growing in spiritual maturity (1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:13)
- Thanks for the spread of the Gospel of Grace (Romans 1:8; 2 Corinthians 2:14; 4:15)
- Thanks for God's physical supply (Romans 14:6; 1 Corinthians 10:30)
- Thanks for all things (Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17; 1 Thessalonians 5:18)

Praise and thanksgiving please the Lord

Psalm 69:30—31 ⁵⁰I will praise the name of God with song And magnify Him with thanksgiving.

⁵¹And it will please the Lord better than an ox Or a young bull with horns and hoofs.

When a child gives mom or dad his/her heartfelt thanks, it pleases the parents to no end. We, as God's created being, please Him when we do the same. We hold Him up high by doing so. We acknowledge the Creator is over all things and none is higher. We humble ourselves to raise Him up. We show our helplessness and weakness and reliance upon Him.

Focus on things above

Praying acknowledges our weakness and God's power. Paul understood his weakness when he speaks of the power of the glory of God's Gospel contained in a common vessel. God can more effectively show His power in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). We are also to be in a continual state of prayer (1 Thessalonians 5:17). With this admonishment to remain in close communication with God, we are to rejoice always (1 Thessalonians 5:16). This goes along with prayer, setting our sights on things above and not on things below (Colossians 3:1 —4). We are to set our minds on things above, not on this earth, until we are revealed with Him in glory. We're told this because it is human nature for us to set our mind on things

below. When we approach God in a spirit of rejoicing and thanksgiving, we are setting our minds away from this earth and toward eternal things of heaven.

Thanksgiving is closely tied to prayer and rejoicing throughout the Bible.

- Hannah's prayer of thanksgiving (1 Samuel 2:1)
- Leader of thanksgiving in prayer (Nehemiah 11:17)
- Daniel praying and giving thanks to God (Daniel 6:10)
- David, in the Psalms, gives thanks to God (Psalm 69:30, 86:12, 109:30; 119:7, 62; 122:4)
- Paul (2 Corinthians 1:11; Ephesians 1:16; Philippians 4:6; Colossians 1:3; 4:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 2:1; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 1:4)

The admonishment to pray, praise and thank is not just to give God His worth or build Him up. We are told to do this for our own good. This is how we are to raise our sights from off this earth, heavenward. We need to live in the world but we need to not be of the world (Romans 12:1—2).

The Holy Spirit makes it possible to give thanks to God

We were naturally enemies of God and have no desire to come to God (Romans 5:10; Ephesians 2:3; Colossians 1:21). The natural man has no desire to understand or obey God. In fact, the natural man is unable to even do so (1 Corinthians 2:14). Before we were saved, we were unable to glorify God with our thanksgiving, even if we had the desire to do so. The unsaved, who seemingly glorify God and thank Him for what He has done for them, are really deceived. The God they are praying to is not the God who has saved those of us in the Body of Christ. It is impossible to love someone who is your enemy. The indwelling Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to fall on our knees in gratitude for all the blessings bestowed upon us at the point of our salvation.

Colossians, a Book of Thanksgiving

One of the minor themes that runs through the book of Colossians is that of thanksgiving. Paul speaks of thanksgiving three times in this book. It fits in well with Paul magnifying Jesus Christ as the perfect image of God and creator and sustainer of all things (Colossians 1). Paul desired that they possessed the true knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ (Colossians 2:3) and thus stabilize their faith (verse 5). Growing in faith would be observable by their actions. There were those who wanted to pull them to be under the Mosaic Law and Paul was fighting for them to live by Grace.

Colossians 1:3—12 God's blessings and our expected response

Paul opens with his thanksgiving expressed for the Colossians who have accepted the Gospel and are growing. These verses can be outlined as follows:

- Give thanks to the Father (verse 3)
 - For your Faith (in Christ), Love (for the saints), Hope (of heaven) (verses 4 – 5a)
 - Because of the Gospel (verse 5b)
 - Learned from Epaphras (an example to them)(verses 7 – 9)
 - To have the knowledge so you will walk in a worthy manner (verses 9 – 10)
 - So you will be Steadfast (in faith), Patient (with saints), Joyful (of heaven)
 - Giving thanks to the Father (verse 12)

From this we can see how thanksgiving should be an internal part of all believers. We should thank the Lord for our salvation and all those blessings that come with our salvation. We give thanks because we have been qualified, by God, to share in this inheritance with all the saints.

Colossians 3:12 – 17 Our relationship with other believers

Paul focuses on our relationship with other believers by telling us how we should behave with them. We are to put on attributes of a Spirit-filled life (compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience). These are all things that are foreign to the old nature, which is why we are to put them on. We are not naturally wearing these things. Here's how this section would be outlined:

- * Bearing with each other (verse 13a)
 - Forgiving each other (verse 13b)
 - **Loving each other** (verse 14)
 - Filled with God's Word to teach and admonish (verse 16)
 - Overflowing with thankfulness (verse 16b)

— While giving thanks to the Father (verse 17) —

Our ministry is in helping and encouraging others, according to Scripture. We are to build up each other so that we are all filled with joy and thankfulness that overflows to praise of God the Father.

Colossians 4:2 – 4 Our relationship with the Father

Here, Paul finishes up the book of Colossians with an admonishment to be devoted (persistent) in prayer, with an attitude of thanksgiving. Our prayers are not meant to be all about us, although God tells us to bring all our concerns to Him (Philippians 4:6 – 7). Paul

trains us to take our eyes off ourselves and focus on God. When we thank Him, we acknowledge that He is the source of all things. When we pray, we are to be watchful (be awake, attentive, vigilant) and thankful. It appears we are to be very attentive to things we need to pray for, and to pray with thankful hearts.

Paul adds specific requests for them to pray for, all concerning the spread of the Gospel. Again, Paul was raising our prayer life beyond our little world to help us understand that prayer and thanksgiving should extend to those around us.

Indicator of spiritual health

A thankful heart points to a life satisfied with God. It indicates a life looking to God for his or her well-being, acknowledging God as in control. Those who rise above the day-to-day ups and downs find it easier to focus above, beyond life's problems making it much easier to thank God regardless of circumstances. As Paul was imprisoned in the dungeon with Silas in Philippi, he and Silas were singing hymns of praise to God. They were able to count themselves privileged to be found worthy to suffer for Christ (Acts 16:25). Paul and Silas were able to rise above their circumstances and focus on the God they were serving. Thanksgiving was being given because of who God is, not because of what He would do for them or because they were being blessed materially.

In the same way, we need to rise above our problems and challenges and give thanks to God. Thanking God acknowledges our insignificance and His overwhelming greatness and glory. It puts our circumstances in His hand, knowing that He will use whatever happens for His glory with Him allowing us to play minor roles in His program for the universe (Romans 8:28). The big picture is that we have been redeemed, sealed by the Holy Spirit and destined to live with and work for Him for eternity. Our puny minds can't comprehend God's greatness or even the idea of life beyond the grave. We should reach out to God in trust, knowing He has been doing what's best in our lives.

So What?

As we celebrate Thanksgiving this year, we need to see how God views our thanks toward Him. He wants us to praise and thank Him for His great love bestowed upon us, not just to hear us say thank you, but to change our attitude and grow in Him. Thanksgiving gets us out of ourselves and directs our focus away from all the cares of this world. It raises us up into the heavenly places, far from all those things that so easily take a hold of us and drag us back into this world.