

Giving Thanks to the Father

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Giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:12–14)

Paul's prayer is a model or pattern for all believers to follow. Like his prayers here and elsewhere, our prayers should include praise as well as petitions. To the Philippians Paul wrote, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6). In 1 Timothy 2:1 he urged that "entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men." Later he told the Colossians to "devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving" (Col. 4:2). Paul constantly gave thanks in his prayers (cf. Acts 27:35; Rom. 1:8; 1 Tim. 1:12).

Giving thanks is too often demoted to a secondary place in the prayers of Christ's people. Our attitude in approaching God is often reminiscent of the leech's daughters: "Give, Give" (Prov. 30:15). We are quick to make our requests and slow to thank God for His answers. Because God so often answers our prayers, we come to expect it. We forget that it is only by His grace that we receive anything from Him.

The Bible repeatedly stresses the importance of giving thanks. "Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Ps. 50:14). "Let them give thanks to the Lord for His loving-kindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! Let them also offer sacrifices of thanksgiving, and tell of His works with joyful singing" (Ps. 107:21–22). "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Thy name, O Most High" (Ps. 92:1). "Always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father" (Eph. 5:20). "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Col. 3:17). "Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (Heb. 13:15). Thanksgiving should permeate our speech, our songs, and our prayers.

Our Lord knew the importance of giving thanks. In Matthew 11:25 He said, "I praise Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and intelligent and didst reveal them to babes." Before feeding the five thousand, Jesus "took the loaves; and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated" (John 6:11). Just before raising Lazarus from the dead, "Jesus raised His eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me' " (John 11:41).

Revelation 7:11 tells us that the angels give thanks: “All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen.’ ”

David (2 Sam. 22:50; Ps. 28:7), the Levites (1 Chron. 16:4; Neh. 12:24), Asaph and his relatives (1 Chron. 16:7), Daniel (Dan. 6:10), and the priests, Levites, and descendants of Asaph (Ezra 3:10–11) also gave thanks to God.

In addition to those positive examples, the Bible teaches that failing to give thanks characterizes the wicked. One indictment of unbelievers is that “even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks” (Rom. 1:21). Evil men are marked by ungratefulness (Luke 6:35; 2 Tim. 3:2).

Scripture instructs us to thank God for many things. We are to thank Him for who He is. Psalm 30:4 says, “Sing praise to the Lord, you His godly ones, and give thanks to His holy name” (cf. Ps. 97:12). We should also thank God for His nearness. “We give thanks to Thee, O God, we give thanks, for Thy name is near” (Ps. 75:1). Paul gave thanks to God for his salvation and his opportunity to serve Him: “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service; even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. And yet I was shown mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:12–13).

The apostle also gave thanks for the spiritual growth of others: “We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater” (2 Thess. 1:3).

Even mundane things like food call for giving thanks (1 Tim. 4:3–4). First Thessalonians 5:18 sums it up: “In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

What makes Christians most thankful is the work of Christ. In 2 Corinthians 9:15, Paul exclaims, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” He gave thanks for the result of the work of Christ, which is our salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 1:4). That is also his theme in Colossians 1:12–14. Paul sums up the doctrine of salvation in three great truths: inheritance, deliverance, and transference. They are both a description of salvation and a cause for thanksgiving. He unfolds the specifics of his gratitude in those verses.

Today’s post adapted from John’s commentary on Colossians & Philemon (Moody, 1992).

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