Fundamental Christian Attitudes: Thankfulness
Selected Scriptures
90-123

Let's open our Bibles tonight to the next in our study regarding the anatomy of the church. One of the essential attitudes, one of the essential motivations, essential spiritual realities in the life of the church, through which its life flows, is gratitude. As we've been talking about the church – and we've been having such a wonderful time over the last number of months – as we have been talking about the church, we have been talking about its various internal systems; those attitudes, those concepts, those spiritual realities, those motivations that carry the life of the church, that carry its spiritual life, its real life. We talked about faith, and obedience, and attitudes of love, and humility, and unity, and forgiveness.

And this morning we talked about joy. It was a wonderful, wonderful study, I think, for all of us, and in some ways, these studies come and go too fast. We can hardly imbibe one. I really have never done this in the years of ministry here – that is, to do a series Sunday morning and Sunday night. I always kind of give you a week to think about it and let it sort of settle in your heart, but we're moving pretty fast – but you're up to it, and you can carry two messages through the week, and let God use them both in your heart. But we want to talk about this spiritual attitude of thankfulness, of gratitude.

I can remember many, many years ago reading a very fascinating story in Luke's gospel that has stayed with me as one of those passages that lingers in my mind, and the Spirit of God brings it back to me. It comes in chapter 17 of Luke, and verse 11. "And it came about, while He was on the way to Jerusalem, that He was passing between Samaria and Galilee" – up on the north part above Jerusalem – "and He entered a certain village. And as He did, ten leprous men who stood at a distance met Him." Lepers always stood at a distance because it was believed, and probably true, that their particular disease had infectious capabilities, and so they were basically quarantined, and isolated into leper colonies, and they were kept to themselves, apart from any interaction with healthy people.

And so these ten lepers stood at a distance from Jesus, "and they raised their voices." They had to yell at Him from a distance. Verse 13, "saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.' And when He saw them, He said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.'" It might seem like a strange command, but it wasn't, because when a leper believed that he had indeed recovered from his disease and was well, he was to go the priest, and there was to be a purification ceremony to assure that that, in fact, was the case, as much as they could in ancient times. And then he could recirculate among the people. And so Jesus said to them, "'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went," it says, "they were cleansed."

Now, they started out in an act of faith heading for the priests. Nothing had happened before they started in that direction; it happened as they were going. Ten of them – this is the remarkable part of the story. "One of them, when he saw that he had been healed, turned back, glorifying God with a loud voice, and he fell on his face at His feet, giving thanks to Him. And he was a Samaritan." It's almost inconceivable that one could be cured of something as terrible as leprosy; something which

rendered a person socially unclean, and ceremonially unclean, and put you in an isolation with others of that same frightening disease. Cut yourself off from the family, and loved ones, and the synagogue, and all the social events, all the interaction that makes up life.

And then to be totally cleansed – you would think that ten of them would have come back, and fallen at the feet of Jesus, and given thanks. The only one who did, interestingly enough, is a Samaritan. And the interesting part about that is there was no love lost between Jews and Samaritans. There was a mutual hate that had been engendered by the fact that Samaritans were a half-breed people. That race of people came from the loins of Jews who intermarried with Gentiles, a despicable thing to most Jews in the ancient world. And so this was remarkable indeed, for here came a Samaritan, falling on his face at the feet of a Jew, and thanking Him.

"And Jesus answered and said, 'Were there not ten cleansed? But the nine, where are they? Was no one found who turned back to give glory to God except this foreigner?' And He said to him, 'Rise, go your way; your faith'" – literally in the Greek – "'your faith has saved you.'" Ten got healed, one got saved. It's a wonderful story for the one; it's a tragedy for the nine. It illustrates that how ugly ingratitude is, being unthankful – how hard to understand that these people could so quickly forget the very one who was the source of their cleansing. In Romans, chapter 1, as we think about this matter of gratitude, when the apostle Paul indicts society, sinful society, when he indicts the nations of the world, the indictment is very specific.

He says in verse 21, of Romans 1, "Even though they knew God." Everybody coming into the world knows God, they don't know Him personally, they don't know Him savingly, but they know Him. They know Him through reason; they can observe creation, and reason to a first cause, and know a lot about that first cause by the character and nature of creation, in all of its manifestations. And they can know God as judge, by the understanding of moral law that is written into the fabric of their life; Romans 2 talks about that. The Gentiles who have no law have a law written in their hearts, and a conscience to go with it, which activates the law in response to their behavior. So they know God through reason, and they know God through the moral law in their hearts.

But you notice in verse 21, "even though they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks." It is right at the top of God's list of damning sins – ingratitude – ingratitude. It so characterizes fallen men, it certainly shouldn't characterize God's people. We can understand that nine lepers who didn't know God could be thankless. We can understand a world of thankless people. I cannot understand a thankless Christian when we understand what the Lord has done for us. Nor can God understand a thankless Christian. Turn to 1 Thessalonians, again chapter 5, where we were this morning, and let's go back to another command there; verse 18, and again a very brief command.

Verse 18 says, "In everything give thanks." And that's all we need to look at. Obviously, "this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus." In everything give thanks. God desires this. That little phrase at the end of verse 18 actually follows all three commands, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks." All three of those sum up God's will for you in Christ Jesus. In the Old Testament sacrificial system there were sin offerings, and sin offerings were to be constant reminders to the people of their sinfulness. They would just go in and give them over, and over, and over, and over – it was not only the offering of the day of atonement, but all through the year there were necessary sin offerings being made, and the people of Israel were making them at all times.

There were actually twenty-four courses of priests who came down to Jerusalem, and each course of priests served for two weeks, and that made up the full year. And they spent those two weeks coming from their various towns and villages where they lived, coming to the temple, and they spent those two weeks with blood up to their elbows, butchering incessantly the animals that were coming in to be offered as sacrifice. None of those animals could take away sin but they were constant reminders to the people of their sinfulness, and the requirement of sinfulness which is death, the desperate need of forgiveness, atonement, cleansing, and righteousness before God. But there were another kind of offering that was given in the Old Testament; they were called thank offerings – you remember them – and also called in Leviticus peace offerings.

And those were designed not to remind the people of sin, but to remind the people of their need to be thankful to God for all of His merciful, gracious provisions for their needs. They would bring in a sheaf of grain as a thank offering. They would bring oil and wine as a thank offering. And those were symbols of all of God's provision, and reminders that they needed to be thankful to God, who supplied everything. Even today as a church, since our Lord Himself ordained it, we have a ceremony as Christians. We call it communion, or the Lord's Table, or the Lord's supper, and it combines both the elements of the sin offering, in terms of its memorial character, and elements of the thank offering into one.

We remember Christ, the sacrifice for our sins, and we offer up thanksgiving for all that that sacrifice has accomplished for us. So when you come to the Lord's Table, you come to what is a table of thanks. Now, let's go back to this text, even if it is so brief, and remind ourselves of this simple command: "In everything give thanks." It's a lot like "rejoice always," because it has that unlimited requirement – in everything, *en panti* in the Greek. It has the idea of being in connection with everything that occurs in life, no matter what it is, and as I noted this morning, with the exception of personal sin – with the exception of personal sin. In everything give thanks, no matter what the situation is, no matter what the difficulty, no matter what the trial, we are to find reason to thank the Lord.

And as I noted for you, thanklessness is a sin that characterizes the unregenerate, those who know not God. In fact, just to expand your understanding of that a little bit, remind yourself of 2 Timothy 3. In that text it says, "Realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy." And what Paul is saying there is that in the last days, ingratitude will characterize people. Down in that same chapter, in verse 13, he said that "evil men will get worse and worse." The closer we get to the coming of Christ, the more wicked men become; the more wicked they become, the more thankless they are.

Thus we are not surprised to see unsaved people going through life complaining, bitter, angry, thankless, without any gratitude, expecting everything good that comes their way, and a lot more. The unregenerate man in our culture, in our time, views life as moving along a path of manipulation and luck combined. He manipulates as much as he can, and hopes for luck to come in and help him. Or he may view life fatalistically, as some inevitable force which he must reluctantly accept, and he can't do anything about it. Or he may view life as the end product of his sheer genius, of his great effort, of his amazing skill. And we even hear people today be so brash as to thank themselves for what they are.

So there are those people who just complain and hope for some lucky break. There are those people

who fatalistically think they can't change anything, and so reluctantly accept what comes with a thankless heart, believing they are at the mercy of the fates that are purely random. Or there are those people, those unsavory and egotistical people, who think that everything good that comes their way in life is purely the product of their own human genius. But for believers, we know God is at work. And we know that God is unfolding a divine agenda, and a divine plan, and a divine purpose. Each component determined by Him for our benefit, and our good, and His glory.

He's leading us to a sovereignly designed goal. We quoted that wonderful verse this morning: "For we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." God is unfolding a purpose, and the end of that purpose is good for His own. In fact, 1 Peter 4, in verse 12, Peter says, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you." It's not strange to go through a fiery trial. It's not strange to go through testing when God knows the end result. So as we said this morning, whatever may come into life should be treated with joy, and now we want to add with gratitude – with gratitude.

As Christians, we sin often, I think, with our ingratitude. It's not just the lack of joy that is a sin; it's the lack of gratitude. We ought to be thanking God for every blessing, every small blessing, every small goodness, every large goodness, every little thing that God provides for us. And I think that's why, in 1 Timothy 4, the apostle Paul said that you can eat anything, as long as you receive it with thanksgiving. Sometimes, when I bow my head in some circles to thank the Lord for my meals, which I always do at every meal, somebody will say to me, "You know, that's a little bit legalistic." And my response to that is, "Nah, it's not legalistic, it just reminds me of where every single thing comes from."

And I need that – I need that so I don't take God's goodness for granted. The early church made thanksgiving an actual part of their fellowship, and that is not a bad idea, believe me. In 1 Corinthians, chapter 14 – by the way, a very interesting chapter, with a lot of interesting issues – but one of the things that gets passed over in this wonderful chapter is down in verses 16 and 17. He's talking about blessing. In verse 16, he says, "If you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the 'amen' at your giving of thanks?" He's talking here about speaking in tongues, or if you're praying with the spirit, that is, in a way that is not a language that can be understood, if you're singing with the spirit, people don't know what you're singing.

If you're blessing with the spirit, in verse 16, and they cannot understand what you're saying, how can they say "amen" at your giving of thanks? Now, the thing I want to point out here is it must have been a common part of worship when the people of the Corinthian assembly came together for public thanks. They were singing, they were praying, and we do that, and they were saying thanks. Verse 17, "You are giving thanks well enough, but when you do it in a way that people can't understand, the other person is not edified." So the point to draw there is that part of the church's celebration of worship involved a time of giving thanks.

I try to do that in the prayer that I pray. We try to do that in the hymns that we sing, but we want you to do that from the heart. It would be impossible, as you can imagine, in a church this large, for everybody to stand up and say thanks, but that attitude of thanks should be rising up within you. And how often this kind of attitude is missing in the discontent of this age, when we have so much, so much, but not enough to be thankful. It would be so much easier if we were deprived of almost everything, and we would be filled with exhilarating thanks with just the smallest morsel of bread. In 2

Corinthians, chapter 4 – again, this is such a wonderful verse, 2 Corinthians 4; we studied it some months ago, verse 15.

Paul is here defining his ministry as to its purpose, and he says, “For all things are for your sakes.” I mean he didn’t do what he did for himself; if he had his own way he’d go to heaven, he said that, “Far better to depart and be with Christ.” He didn’t do what he did because he enjoyed persecution, and suffering, and pain. It was all for their sakes. He endured it all, took the pain, took the suffering, for their sakes, “in order that the grace which is spreading,” that’s saving grace, “which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to redound to the glory of God.”

Christians today, fussing and fuming and stressed out, and disappointed, depressed about every little thing in their life that doesn’t go right, and that’s a really disgusting sin. Your heart ought to be so overflowing with thanks that it ought to redound, as it says at the end of the verse, or abound to the glory of God. That’s what happens, you see, when saving grace comes and spreads among people; it just causes more giving of thanks. Paul’s saying it’s like every time somebody is converted, we add them to the “Hallelujah Chorus.” It should be the normal pattern for Christians to be grateful, and thankful, and overwhelmed with thanks.

I’m very disappointed in people who are discontent, and unsatisfied, and unhappy, and don’t like their circumstances, and don’t like this, and don’t like that, and want to change their environment, and change this, instead of being overwhelmed with gratitude for God’s great grace. In the ninth chapter of 2 Corinthians, Paul reminds all of us about how great God is, and how rich He is, and how He pours out those riches on those who give. Remember, this section in chapter 8 and 9 is about giving, but pick it up in verse 11, where he says, “You will be enriched in everything for all liberality.” In other words, when you give, and you bring your money, and you give it to the Lord, and you give your resources, and you give all that you are and have to Him, it says you will be enriched.

In other words, you can’t out-give God. Remember, “Give and it shall be given unto you, pressed down, shaken together and running over,” it says in Luke? “Sow sparingly, reap sparingly; sow bountifully, reap bountifully,” it said earlier. “God” – in verse 8 – “is able to make all grace abound to you, so that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.” The whole principle here is that when you give God pours it back. You’re investing and He pours back a dividend. You’re sowing and He brings in the crop. You’re putting something in the cup and He fills it to overflowing. You’re investing with God and He pours it back. Why? Verse 11, “You will be enriched in everything for all liberality, which through us is producing” – what – “thanksgiving to God.”

God wants to be thanked. And when He indicts the whole of the fallen human race, He says, “They’re not thankful – they’re not thankful. They don’t acknowledge Me as the source of everything.” God is worthy to be thanked. And that’s one of the reasons He saved you, to add you to the “Hallelujah Chorus,” and you’re going to spend forever thanking Him for it – you ought to start now. And that’s the reason that when you give, He gives back, because He wants to hear your thanks. In fact, verse 12 follows it up. “For the ministry of this service” – in other words, when you give, when you give your money – “is not only fully supplying the needs of the saints” – it’s not just that you’re giving so that needs can be met and ministry can go on – “but is also overflowing through many thanksgivings to God.”

Now, look, this is a big picture. You give generously, God gives back, and you say thanks. The

church takes your money, translates it into ministry to other people, and they say thanks, and thanks is multiplied, and God is glorified. You see, in verse 13, he says – remember the scenario here. The Corinthians were giving money. The money would be taken to the poor saints in Jerusalem. It would be given to them to meet their needs. And, in verse 13, he says, "Because of the proof" – the proof of your love – "given by this ministry" – this money – "they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ." They're going to praise God that your salvation is real. They're going to praise God for how He's changed your life, as manifest in the liberality of your contribution.

And then, verse 14: "While they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you." And then everybody is going to say, "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!" God wants our thanks in everything. He wants it in everything. Turn to Ephesians, chapter 5. Thanks should be a part of our normal speech. I suppose if we get this new greeting "rejoice" going we talked about this morning, and somebody says, "Rejoice, good morning, good evening, rejoice," you might say, "I am, because I have so much" – what – "to be thankful for." Look at Ephesians 5: "Do not let immorality" – *porneia,* sexual sin – "or any impurity" – that's a word that would mean every other form of sexual sin – "or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints."

"And" – verse 4 – "there must be no filthiness" – dirty talk – "no coarse jesting" – that's a word for obscenities; no filthy talk, no foolish talk, no obscenities – "which are not fitting, but rather" – what – "giving of thanks." Boy, those two are far apart, aren't they? When you open your mouth, give thanks – give thanks. I was in the home of Pastor Constantine in Belarus, and he had been in prison for many years; and a godly, saintly man, pastor for many, many years. I have preached in his church many times, many, many hours. I taught the whole New Testament there. They invited me for six days. I said, "What do you want me to speak on?" They said, "We want you to teach the whole New Testament."

In six days, to 125 young pastors in training, in Minsk, in Belarus. I said, "That's very difficult, to cover the whole thing in six days, especially through translators." And they had to use three translators, 'cause it's tiring to do translation. And so they kept changing, and I just kept going, for six days. Look, I like potatoes better and they have those, so I don't know who told them that. And I felt terrible when this dear lady said she got rice, because she knew I liked rice. I mean who likes rice? Rice is rice, but that was – put something on it I like it, you know. But, I mean that's the kind of people they are.

And so we sat at the table, and we ate this lovely meal, and we talked about the things of Christ through the interpreter, and he's a great, great man of God. So I said to him, I said, "You know, Constantine," I said, "you've suffered, and you've gone through all this, and you went through the Communist regime, and the whole business. What was it like? I mean what kind of things did you suffer, and what do we need to know about that time? What do Christians need to know about that time?" And he looked at me, and he said, "Oh no," he said. "No, no," he said. "I will only thank the Lord. I will not speak of sudch things." He wouldn't speak of them. He would just thank the Lord. That's all he would speak about.

That is a marvelous thing, when you open your mouth and that's all that comes out is thanks. The Christian life is not nearly as complicated as some people think. It's just these attitudes that we've been talking about, practiced. In the fifth chapter of Ephesians, you have an extended command, that really says the same thing that 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says. It says in verse 18, "Do not get drunk with wine, that is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit." There was this ridiculous idea in the pagan

religions that if you got drunk, your drunken stupor induced a higher state of consciousness, in which you communed with the deities. It was that very same theory, by the way, that Timothy Leary borrowed from ancient religions, and translated it into the fifties drug culture.

If you really want to transcend and touch the infinite, get high. Remember? That was really out of the old pagan religions. And instead of that, Paul says, "You're not going to commune with God that way; just be filled with the Spirit." And the result of that is speaking to one another in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." We could sum that up in one small word, the theme of this morning; what is it? Joy. And then, verse 20, "Always giving thanks for all things, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God, even the Father." Constantly, always giving thanks – that's what a Spirit-filled person does; they're characterized by joy, and they're characterized by thanks.

Now, thanksgiving is the normal pattern, and we should be in the "Hallelujah Chorus" thanking the Lord for His mercy in saving us. We should be thanking Him for all the blessings He pours upon us; for the way in which we can give, and extend those gifts into the lives of others, and cause more thanks. Thanks should come out of our mouths every time we open it. We should be thankful in everything, constantly, unceasingly, because the Spirit is controlling our lives, and if He is, we will be. And when you're not thankful, the Spirit's not in control. You say, "Well, you mean to be thankful even for the difficulties?" Of course, because as we saw this morning, those are the things working together for good; those are the things that are perfecting.

"After you've suffered a while," 1 Peter 5:10, "the Lord make you perfect." As we saw from James 1:2, this morning, "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, because they have a perfecting work." Turn to Philippians, chapter 4, as we continue this little pilgrimage on this marvelous theme. It says in verse 6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your request be made known to God." Just be thankful, even when you're bringing up your petitions, even when you're praying, and your supplications are going before the Lord, it ought to be in an attitude of total thanks. I can't resist Colossians 2. "As you" – verse 6 – "have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" – be like Christ.

"Having been firmly rooted" – verse 7 – "now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed" – and listen to this – "and overflowing with gratitude." Boy, I'm telling you, people, this is such an essential thing. You ought to be overflowing with gratitude. You know, Thomas Hardy was right. You know, he said, "There are some people who can find the manure pile in any meadow." I mean it doesn't matter what is going on, they can be negative. Why? You have nothing to be thankful for? You ought to be overflowing with gratitude all the time. It ought to be, for all of us, an absolutely constant way of life. Now, as if what we've read isn't already enough, go one more chapter in Colossians, chapter 3, and verse 15. And he says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts."

Don't be stressed, don't be anxious. "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful." Be thankful. Now, some of these Christians to whom Paul wrote were really stressed out. But I'll tell you, Paul himself was a prisoner when he wrote all of this. "Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you," he says, "with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to the Lord, to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." I mean it's getting pretty repetitious, isn't it? Just be thankful.

And as if that's not enough, go to chapter 4. "Masters, employers, grant to your employees, slaves, servants, justice and fairness" – be careful how you treat the people that work for you – "knowing that you too have a Master in heaven. Devote yourselves to prayer, keep alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." So marvelous – we are called to incessant thanksgiving, constant thanksgiving. We noted this morning, in Acts 16, how Paul and Silas were in jail, singing praise and thanks to God; the apostle Paul – always thankful. You say, "Well, there are a lot of things in life you can't be thankful about." Well, look, if I were Paul, there would be one thing I wouldn't be thankful about, and that would be a really messed up church that was a lot of trouble.

And the one that comes immediately to mind is Corinth, right? Listen to what he said: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always concerning you" – and that was just before he laid them out. See, I mean you've got to do what you've got to do, but it shouldn't mess with your thankfulness. You say, "What was he thankful about?" They were saved. They were God's own – much to be thankful for, even though they broke his heart. So this is very important, we are called to an inward, incessant joy and a constant thanks. The model for this – I can't resist taking a minute to just show you this. The outstanding model for this, who transcends all others, of course, is our Lord.

In Matthew 11:25, just listen: "Jesus answered and 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. Yes, Father, for thus it was well-pleasing in Thy sight. All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him. Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My load is light.'"

Jesus is approaching the cross, and this is what He says: "I praise You, O Father." Or actually, better translated: "I thank You, O Father. I thank You for the privilege of serving You." He had a thankful heart. It wasn't easy, obviously; He was going to go through agonies we would never be able to comprehend, but He had a thankful heart. You see it repeatedly, pouring out thanks to God. We can't look at all of those times, but just another one maybe, John 11. In John 11, you know, He's dealing with the death of Lazarus, and Mary and Martha, and Jesus says to Martha, who is worried because Lazarus has been dead four days, and as the King James says, "By now he stinketh."

So verse 40, "Jesus said to her, 'Did I not say to you, if you believe you will see the glory of God?' And so they removed the stone." And they were afraid this horrifying stench would come out. "Jesus raised His eyes, and said, 'Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me,'" and then He said, "Lazarus, come forth," and he came forth. You know, you wouldn't really think that Jesus would need to thank the Father for anything, since He was God, and since the plan was really equally His. But what a wonderful example it is. He thanked the Father for the privilege of ministry. He thanked the Father for hearing His prayer for power on behalf of Lazarus. He could even thank the Father for the death that He would die to redeem sinners. In fact, in all that was so terrible about His humiliation, He was thankful to the Father.

Paul tells us, then – back in our text – what we need to hear again and again. In everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you. This is His will. Now, as I said this morning, there are some things that come into our lives that tend to cause us to be hindered in these right attitudes. Let me

make some suggestions, and they'll be much like what I said this morning. If you have trouble being thankful, let me tell you perhaps why. And I'm going to start where I started this morning. Maybe you're not a Christian. Maybe you're deceived. Maybe you just think you've been regenerated. Maybe you had some emotional experience, and nothing more. If you can't find in your heart endless cause for thanksgiving, then maybe you don't have a new life. And maybe you ought to do as 2 Corinthians 13:5 says: examine yourself to see if you're in the faith.

Moving beyond that let me give you a second thing that can hinder your gratitude: doubt about God's sovereign power. Or let's say, doubt about God. If you don't think God is really in charge, if you're ignorant about that or don't believe it, if you're not sure God is really all-wise, if you're not sure He knows everything about everything, if you're not sure He really loves you as His own, if you're not sure He really has your best interest in mind, if you're not sure He's trying to perfect you into the image of His Son, if you don't understand your God and His purposes, then you may not be thankful. Or, I might add, if you do understand them, but you tend to forget them.

Why not be thankful for anything, if You know God's power is at work in it, God's wisdom is at work in it, God's purpose is at work in it, God's love is expressed through it? But if you doubt that, you're going to have a problem being thankful. There's a well-known counsellor in our country who tells people that there are times when you need to get angry at God. Shouldn't be a surprise to anybody that he comes from an Arminian background, where they're not too sure just exactly how involved God is. There are times when you need to get angry with God; it's good to vent that. It's a sin to do that, and it may rise out of ignorance of a sovereign God, always with a good purpose for your good and His glory, and always in control.

A third thing that may be the cause hindering gratitude is selfishness. And this links up so much with joy – that's why I wanted to them both today. It's that attitude that says, "No matter what I've got, I don't have what I really want; I don't have enough. I just – I want more – and my will is more important than God's will. I don't know what God has for me, but I know what I want for me, and God ought to deliver." Boy, that will really destroy gratitude. "I want my circumstances different. I want my children different. I want my life different. I want my ministry different. I want my spouse different. I want my job different. I want a lot of things different. I want more of this, and less of that."

If that's what drives you, and you've set your own agenda, then you're going to have trouble. On the other hand, if you say, "I only want what God wants, and I'll believe that God will give me what He wants me to have," then you can be thankful, right? Fourthly: worldliness – awfully hard to sort yourself out from that in this culture. If you're into the pleasures, and the people, and the places, and the possessions, and the pursuits, and the popularity, and the prestige, and you just want all the stuff that the world says makes people satisfied and happy, you're going to have trouble being thankful, 'cause you're never going to have all of that, and when you get some of it, you won't have enough of it.

A fifth thing that I might mention is a critical spirit. If you're bitter or negative, if you just kind of have a sour attitude on life – and you know how you get that? You get that by having unrealistic expectations of what you deserve. You get that because you think you ought to control everything, and there's some things you can't control, and that bothers you. And you get that – and, you know, this is the sad part – and then you feed it like a monster, until it gets as big as a dinosaur. And every time you speak – or most of the time – the dinosaur roars, because you've cultivated it. Don't let yourself be critical two days in a row, or two hours in a row, or two half-hours in a row. Don't build

that kind of habit.

If it's unchecked, it will just smash a thankful heart into bits. This attitude will corrode your love, it will corrode your joy, it will corrode your peace, it will corrode your spirituality – a critical spirit that always criticizes, sees what's wrong with everybody else, what's negative, what isn't the way you want it, what isn't under your control. Always looking at things from the negative side is a terrible, terrible thing to do. And when you cultivate that habit, you get so into it, it becomes a monster to slay. A sixth hindrance to gratitude is impatience – impatience. God isn't moving fast enough. It's not so much that they want this or that; it's that they want it now.

They've got their own timetable. And the perception is that God's not on their schedule – they've got it in their appointment book, and He's not keeping the appointments. They want God to work for them when they want Him to work – impatience. You need to learn to just be patient. Let God unfold His purposes in His time, and be thankful that He knows better the timing than you do. I'll give you two more – coldness. And by that what I mean is spiritual lukewarmness, lack of zeal for God, lack of diligence in the Scripture, lack of passion in prayer, lack of interest in worship, neglect of the Bible, wasting your time on trivia, spiritual lethargy, spiritual indifference – that produces a coldness and a lukewarmness that just kills gratitude.

When you spend your time in the Word, and you spend your time in prayer, and you spend your time in worship, and you spend your time in service to the King and the kingdom, it excites gratitude. And one last point – I guess this would be number eight if you're listing them – rebellion – rebellion. And this is the strongest attitude, I think, that mitigates against gratitude, and this is when you're in a settled state of outright anger toward God because things didn't go the way you wanted them, and it's become a settled state of rebellion. You are angry with God. I got a letter on e-mail – oh, e-mail. I'm telling you, it's not enough to get regular mail. Now it's this new thing, stacks and stacks of this stuff, that you have to answer.

And I got this letter in e-mail, and it starts out – I just read through the stack today – this letter from a sweet lady from back in somewhere on the east. And she says, "Thank you for your ministry in radio, and my husband and I listen, and we love *Grace To You.* And my husband had a job, and he felt through listening to you, and the development of ministry began to well up in his heart, and he decided God wanted him to preach, and so he went off and got into a small church," and, you know, I'm reading and I'm saying, "This is wonderful, and this is a great story. And then, "Something didn't go the way he wanted it to go," she said, "in the small church, and it turned him bitter at God, and for fourteen years he has not entered a church."

Fourteen years – he is angry. And she said, "As a loving wife, I have prayed for him fourteen years." She said, "I'm at the end of my rope. Would you please pray for him, and if it's in your heart, write him a letter?" Well, I will – fourteen years of rebellion against God? Would you like to live with a thankless person like that, in a constant state of rebellion? That woman must be some woman. She's patient. It took her fourteen years to write me. I thought the second half of the – some of you would rattle off that letter three days after the rebellion started. Now, all of that stuff, all of that doubt, selfishness, worldliness, critical spirit, impatience, coldness, rebellion – all of that is sin – sin.

That man should have said, "What was God saying to me? What was He trying to show me? What could I have learned, and how can I praise Him and thank Him?" And the reason he's been in that condition for fourteen years is the reason he'll stay there; it's because he's got such a bitter attitude

toward God, until he deals with that sin, he can't be used. All this kind of stuff, ingratitude, just destroys the church. You want to have a church full of joy, and blessing, and happiness, and peace where people love each other, and the church grows and flourishes, then have a church full of thankful people. And if you want to really mess up a party, just bring in somebody who is negative and unthankful. Watch out for those hindrances. Don't let them get cultivated in your life.

We have so much to be thankful for, beloved. God's holiness that makes Him perfect, and He never makes a mistake. God's goodness and mercy, which is always available; which is overflowing and abounding toward us the gift of Jesus Christ; that unspeakable gift, for which we are thankful. All good gifts that flow down from the Father of lights: the victory over sin and death, divine guidance, complete provision for all our needs, the hope of heaven, the power of the Word, and on, and on, and on, and on we go. Lots of reasons to give thanks, and if the church is to be the church of Jesus Christ, and His life is the flow through that church, it will be people who are filled with gratitude, even for the trials, even for the pain, even for the suffering.

And my prayer is that God will fill your heart with joy no matter what, and that you'll rejoice always and in everything give thanks; that's crucial to the life of the church. And you can do on the basis of this one little verse in Philippians 2:13: "It is God who is at work in you." Isn't that great? And what's He doing? "To will and to work for His good pleasure." And since He's at work in you, using all this stuff to work for His own good pleasure, the next verse says, "You can do all things without grumbling." You can all things with joy and gratitude. Father, we thank You so much for Your mercy and kindness toward us. We thank You for the way in which You have consistently demonstrated Your goodness.

And, Lord, fill us with thanksgiving. We have so much to be thankful for, even the difficulties, for those we thank You – it's easy in the good times. Should be easy in the hard times, if we understand the purpose. Lord, we pray that You'll even use the strength of Your Spirit to break patterns of critical spirit, rebellion, worldliness, selfishness, impatience, all those things that hinder gratitude. And may we begin every day, no matter how challenging it might be, by thanking You for being faithful in making your mercies new every morning. Great is Your faithfulness. By thanking You for all that is ours in Christ, by thanking You for eternal life, the hope of heaven, guidance, direction, truth, trials which humble us, trials which shape us.

Give us thankful hearts. You are worthy to be praised. You are worthy to be thanked. It is a sin not to do so; forgive us for that sin, and put us in a path of righteousness where we are, in everything, thankful. And may it be infectious to those around us, that the thanks may redound to Your glory, in Christ's name. Amen.

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