

Thanksgiving

By John R. Gibson

Romans 1:16 proclaims the gospel to be God's power to save and to show the absolute necessity of the saving gospel, the entire world is charged with sin in Rom. 1:18—3:23. In this indictment the first section focuses on the degradation of the Gentile world where all manner of unrighteousness and immorality were being practiced. While there are a number of lessons to be learned from Rom. 1:18-32, let's focus on something said to have contributed to this departure from God.

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, **nor were thankful**, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened .” Romans 1:20-21 (Emphasis mine—JRG.)

It is easy for us to see the wickedness in where they ended up, but how often do we stop to think of how a lack of thankfulness can start us down a similar path? How are we doing in this regard? Do we view God as the source of all blessings? As we enjoy the bounties of this present age do we recognize them as gifts from the living God (1 Tim. 6:17)? Do we see our food as that which was “created to be received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:3)? Are we giving thanks or do we tend to think of the things we have earned as having been obtained by our own wit and hard work? It would behoove us all to read Daniel 4 and the story of how Nebuchadnezzar suffered a great humiliation when he boasted of his own great power and majesty while forgetting the Almighty is ultimately in charge. We may have worked hard for the things we have (and God does expect us to be workers—Eph. 4:28; 2 Thes. 3:10), but let's not forget we are only using the abilities and health He has given us in the world He created. We must not forget to stop and give thanks to the One who “gives us richly all things to enjoy” and “created [foods] to be received with thanksgiving.” 1 Tim. 6:17; 4:3

Yes, we need to give thanks for all our blessings, but even more than our material blessings such as food, clothing, shelter, and even the luxuries most enjoy, we need to appreciate the grace of God which brings hope to the vilest of sinners. Eph. 2:1-3 describes people who are dead in their sins and can only look forward to the wrath of God, but then in verse 4 things change. In the words “but God,” which contrast our sins with His grace, hope is found. Despite mankind's sins, God is rich in mercy, has a great love for us, and in His kindness bestows a grace that is exceeding in its riches.

“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” Eph. 2:4-7

Do we appreciate this saving grace of God as we ought? Do we understand what this free gift cost the Father and Son? Other verses in Ephesians make clear this grace is most clearly manifested in the cross and the shed blood of Jesus (1:7; 2:16; 5:2). Does this stir in us a spirit of thankfulness? Are we in the habit of “giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:20)? If we are not thankful for the grace of God, either we do not understand the magnitude of our

guilt before God or do we not appreciate the price which had to be paid for our forgiveness.

And while thanksgiving to God for His grace should be expressed in the words we speak and sing, it must also be demonstrated in our actions. 2 Cor. 6:1 warns against allowing the grace of God to be in vain and this immediately follows the plea in 2 Cor. 5:20 to be reconciled to God. The Lord wants us to be saved and will save even those whom we might think to be the worst of sinners (1 Cor. 6:9-11; 1 Tim. 1:15-16), but we must choose to come to Him in faith. We previously stopped our reading at verse 7 of Ephesians 2, but now consider the next three verses.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.” Eph. 2:8-10

If we truly comprehend the wonders of His grace, we are going to come to God in faith, obedient faith (James 2:14-26; Heb. 5:8-9), and our lives will be a daily demonstration of thankfulness as we seek to walk in the good works He has prepared for us.

Where are we in regards to the blessings of God? Do we regularly express our thanksgiving to God for His blessings, both physical and spiritual? Jesus once healed ten lepers and when only one returned to give thanks He asked, “Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine (Luke 17:17)? Would we have been that one who took time to give thanks and glorify God or would have been found among the nine who failed to return? Have we embraced the grace of God in obedient faith or has it to this point been in vain? If we have not gratefully taken hold of His grace, let’s change that and let’s change it now.

“We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For He says: ‘In an acceptable time I have heard you, And in the day of salvation I have helped you.’ Behold now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” 2 Cor. 6:1-2

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