

## New Covenant Priesthood (Part Three)

### Humility, Gratitude, and Thanksgiving

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This week we joined with millions of other Americans in celebrating Thanksgiving as a national holiday. I want to take advantage of this and join together several thoughts in this sermon because they can be legitimately linked in a timely manner such as this.

At the conclusion of my last sermon I drew on Deuteronomy 8:2-3, 16 where God clearly states that He brings difficult trials that expose our weaknesses in order to humble us and to see what is in our hearts. That was the first thing I began to think about, and then a second thought came to mind, and that is the responsibility of a priest to offer sacrifices to God on behalf of the people, and of course for himself as well. A third element is the season here in the United States. We have just celebrated Thanksgiving as a national holiday. A fourth reason that came to mind is stated in Hebrews 13:15, and I do want to read this.

**Hebrews 13:15** By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

This verse links *praise* and *thanksgiving* as a sacrifice to God. Praise and thanksgiving are the fruit of our lips. They are a product that is produced by work.

In the weeks leading to this sermon I had been thinking on a sermon on thanksgiving as a subject. I have come to the conclusion that the celebration of Thanksgiving as a national holiday, while it is not wrong in principle, is nonetheless not celebrated in the United States with anywhere near the understanding that God intends. I think that the original intent of our forefathers may have had an establishing of this observance which has been lost through the years in the shuffle of the holiday atmosphere.

Think of this cliché: "Familiarity breeds contempt." That is, it breeds a disregard. Any activity, if not done with intention to safeguard its special value, will degenerate in appreciation. I have watched this phenomenon in the church with regard to the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles, and even regularly scheduled church potlucks. If one is not careful regarding the care and concern given the food one brings to a potluck, the food's quality degenerates, and the fellowship itself becomes ineffective.

I have watched the keeping of the Feast of Tabernacles degenerate for many until it is little more than a vacation during which one also happens to go to church services, and God and His purpose becomes merely an obligatory side issue one endures between the exciting vacation-escape events.

It is not my intent in this sermon to examine that aspect of finding fault with how Americans keep Thanksgiving; nonetheless, my statement regarding the principle of degeneration is true.

This sermon touches on a few aspects of a major responsibility of the priesthood: *prayer*. We are going to examine some of the basic elements it takes to truly give thanks to God in a way that He will accept as wholehearted worship of Him.

There is another cliché that states: "We only get out of things what we put into them." This is generally true to a very great degree because it is a variation of the biblical principle that "whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

I want you to turn to another very familiar scripture in Ecclesiastes 9. You will recognize this right away, because it is one that we have heard so very frequently.

**Ecclesiastes 9:10** Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might: for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither you go.

Solomon is teaching us that **now** is the time to work with care, with energy, and with purpose to get the most and the best from life and to prepare for the

hereafter. His basic reason is because the clock is ticking. Time is running out.

We let our requests for what we think we need from God be made known to God with ease. In other words, they are right at the forefront of our mind, and it is very likely that before we actually get down on our knees, or however or wherever we pray, that we have been thinking about what we are going to request of God for a long time. We have got a lot of things on our mind to give God reasons why we want or need what we are asking Him for.

But thanksgiving in prayer requires preparation beforehand, too, and I feel that thanksgiving is not something most of us tend to work at with all of our might. This is because of the human proclivity, along with the rest of humanity, to merely accept things—especially things that we might consider as blessings—as *due* us. In other words, in some cases we go to God with the thought that we *deserve* it. You might be surprised as to why this is so. It is there, and the one part of this is what makes so many of our prayers to be nothing more than the gimmees while other very important, vital aspects and elements that are really needed to make a prayer before God effective are overlooked, forgotten, neglected, and never given, or maybe they are just brushed over in the rush to get to whatever it is that we want to ask Him for.

**I Thessalonians 5:16-18** Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Any of us who have labored at prayer and have spent time in preparation for the prayers that we might want to give will know that what God has just commanded us through the apostle Paul is not an easy assignment to give thanks in *everything* .

The *Revised Standard Version* and other modern translations translate that this way: "Rejoice always." [That is a hard one too.] "Pray constantly." [Wow!] "Give thanks in every circumstance, for this is God's will." It is *God's will* that we rejoice always, pray constantly, and give thanks in every circumstance.

Now praise and thanksgiving are just as much a part of Christian life as joy and prayer. In fact, thanksgiving is an absolutely essential element for effective prayer. Thanksgiving, like an overall sense of joy, should not fluctuate with our circumstances or our feelings.

First, let us look at something that God is not saying. He is not saying that we should thank God for every thing that occurs to us. There is a reason for this. This is because sometimes painful and evil things occur to us, and God, though He creates calamity, is not the author of evil. What He does say is "*in every circumstance give thanks.*" It is important for us to understand God's sovereignty over our lives and willingly accept that He has *consciously* passed on what is going on. He thought it through. He made a decision, and He said "Yes." He has consciously passed on what is going on.

If we do understand this, we will thankfully, consciously, and energetically look for the good in that situation and begin to give ourselves over to working toward achieving it. But suppose you should get into a painful circumstance because you had sinned, or at least had been quite foolish? Should we thank God because we sinned? (That is part of the "everything.") No. But we can thank God because He loves us so much, and He disciplines us in order that we will be humbled and will not do that again. In other words, we will think things through a good deal better.

We can thank God that He is so patient and full of grace and that He did not just blast us out of existence. Instead, He gives us a chance to learn, to understand, and to turn things around. The thanks are given because of the good that can be gleaned even from a bad situation, and God's creation in us is moving on. We are commanded then to give thanks, but we are not commanded to give thanks because God is an egotistical monster who feeds off our adoring devotion. God is love, and what He commands we do, or permits us to go through, or creates for us to go through, is therefore for our good.

Christianity ought to be an exhilarating experience because of its awesome possibilities. But even Jesus admitted that "difficult is the way," yet the possibilities are awesome, and that ought to excite us, and stir us with

gratitude for what has been opened up to us, not because we deserved it in any way, but simply because God had mercy and opened up our minds to the revelation of Himself, as well as what He is doing with us. Therefore, whether life is exhilarating to us very much depends upon our perspective; that is, the way we look at the circumstances of our life. Our perspective is how we look at things from our point of view regarding God, circumstances, and other people.

Sometimes when you are reading, you will find perspective, or point of view called "our *world* view." That is, the way we look at the world. It encompasses the way we look at life, the way we look at spiritual things, the way we look at moral things, the way we look at national affairs, the way we look at local affairs. It is the way that we look at virtually everything. It is our world view, our point of view, our perspective on life. While we were in the world, before God called us, we had the same basic view as everybody else in our area of the world. We had an American point of view, or we had a Pennsylvanian point of view, or a Californian point of view, or whatever.

Our view was colored by the things that we knew, experienced, and understood, but when God came into the picture through His calling—something that we did not deserve, something that He did only because of **His** mercy, **His** reason for doing it—He inserted Himself and His purpose and His creation into our life, and it began to change the way we looked at things. It began to change our world view of the way we approached life.

There is a Chinese proverb that says: "If one looks at the sun, all shadows are behind." That is obviously true in a literal sense, but the metaphorical sense is not quite so obvious. We could say that the sun represents looking at the positive side of things, or it could represent keeping one's eye on the goal. The shadows represent problems and trials. They are the negative side of circumstances one encounters while heading toward one's goal.

We are realistic enough to know that **where** we go, regardless of which way we are looking, that the shadows are going to follow. The problems will follow. We come to understand that there is no such thing as a perfect solution to our problems. We come to understand that every solution that we get actually plays a large part in creating its own problems, and so

sometimes we feel like a ball that is bouncing from one set of problems to another. That is in a sense largely true, because that is the way life is.

But where is God in this picture when we feel that we are a ball in a pinball machine, bouncing from side to side, and object to object? Where are the shadows? Where is the sun? Are we turning ourselves toward the sun?

If we turn away from the sun by changing our perspective, by changing the way we look at things, and focus away from the sun toward the shadows, we begin to learn by experience that this has a way of keeping us from making any progress, even to the point of overwhelming us. We become discouraged. The way seems hopeless. We lose the incentive to accomplish.

We are going to make a little shift simply by changing the metaphors in this proverb. The sun is now the source of light, and light reveals the true shape and position of objects so that one is able to see them as they are. That is, one is able to see where they are, and what they consist of, and what their shape is, and the potential they have for creating some kind of a barrier or obstacle to us making progress toward the goal.

God uses light in the Bible to symbolize truth, and truth is God's Word. God's truth is going to give us a clear and true perspective and solutions to the events of life. If we turn our back on God's truth, we are soon going to begin bumping into painful problems for which there are no true solutions. We are not even going to see them. We will just run into them, and they will start hurting us. This circumstance is much like being able to see, but not being able to see well enough to truly negotiate a difficult path. The light of God's truth says that we are to be thankful in *every* circumstance.

If our perspective is one in which we are consciously relating our experiences to God, who is infinitely concerned for the outcome of our life, then we are going to see much to thank God for while still being aware of the difficulties we are going to face, or are even facing. This has interesting results because it will tend to produce a positive, realistic, and hopeful outlook on life that will not permit us to become discouraged for very long.

God is love, and we are His children, and *all things work together for good for those who love God, and are **the** called according to His purpose.* If our

perspective is such, we will begin to see that sickness and health, prosperity and adversity can all work to our advantage *if rightly used* . They will not be rightly used unless our perspective is right. Right use begins with having the right point of view within the circumstance. There is yet much more to having a thankful point of view than might readily meet the mind.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy 28. Every one of us knows that this is the "Blessings and Curses" chapter.

**Deuteronomy 28:45** Moreover all these curses shall come upon you, and shall pursue you, and overtake you till you be destroyed: because you hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which he commanded you.

Remember this as we get toward the end of the sermon because this is going to come back in. What does "hearken" mean? It means "to listen." I think that we are advanced enough to understand that "listen" does not merely mean "to hear." It means to hear and *process* , to meditate upon, to come to conclusions, to understand.

**Deuteronomy 28:46-47** And they shall be upon you for a sign and for a wonder, and upon your seed forever. Because you served not the LORD your God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things.

These verses are directly related first of all to verse 15 in this same chapter where it says,

**Deuteronomy 28:15** But it shall come to pass, if you will not hearken unto the voice of the LORD your God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day: that all these curses shall come upon you, and overtake you.

...and then all the curses are listed. Verse 45 is actually a continuation of the thought that ends with "and overtake you" in verse 15. But they are also directly related to much of the context of Deuteronomy 8 which we are going to get back to before we are done with this sermon.

The concern in this context right here is for the attitude of heart and mind in which the Israelites carried out their part in keeping the covenant. It is actually a prophecy of what they were going to do. What can we learn from this? The very fact that this warning—"because you served *not* the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart"—is in here, these things are going to come on us.

He is telling us that obeying in an obligatory fashion, while it is a great deal better than sinning, is not coming close to what God is seeking for in us. That kind of obedience does not produce an internalized character that permits one to live an abundant life, full of every good quality. Instead, it will produce joyless, hopeless, robotic automatons.

The word "gladness" is particularly interesting for the sake of this sermon. It literally means "good," or "goodness." But when it is taken with the intent of this and other contexts of the Bible, especially Deuteronomy 8, the word here indicates "gratitude." In fact, if you have an *Amplified Bible*, you will see that the *Amplified Bible* inserts that word "gratitude" in brackets right next to the word "gladness" as an explanation of what God is driving at.

In other words, God is saying that if one does not approach life with an understanding recognition of the awesome significance of His calling, one cannot serve Him satisfactorily. There are reasons for this. He wants people who understand what life is about, and do not merely meet life with a resigned—"Oh well. I have to do this"—attitude, but rather meet it with a rejoicing wholehearted understanding, gladly and gratefully yielding themselves to its completion in our lives.

We are going to add to this a reminder of what God is instructing us in Deuteronomy 8. We are not going to expound Deuteronomy 8 at this point to any great degree, but I mentioned it in relation to these verses here, and I want to go back to the warning God gives us here in Deuteronomy 8. We

will pick it up in verse 6. He is going to give reasons why He said what He did in the first five verses.

**Deuteronomy 8:6-7** Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to fear him. For the LORD your God brings you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills.

Let us think of this in its metaphorical, spiritual intent. When God comes into our lives, He is going to begin blessing us. He is going to bless us in ways that we have not been blessed before. The Israelites in this situation were not blessed with the liberties and the prosperity that liberty could bring. Their blessings and their prosperity were going to be physical, and so He is using physical examples of how blessings are going to come into their lives.

Now what about into our lives? Sometimes the blessings will be physical to some of us, and prosperity will come, but the main thing He is after with us is the relationship between us and Him, that it grows and develops until we be blessed spiritually by becoming like Him, allowing Him to create Himself in us so that we reveal to Him and to others His characteristics in our life. He is telling us that blessings are going to come.

**Deuteronomy 8:9-10** A land wherein you shall eat bread without scarceness, you shall not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you may dig brass. When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which he has given you.

Remember that. "You shall **bless**." Do you know what that means? It means to thank and praise.

**Deuteronomy 8:11-14** Beware that you forget not the LORD your God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command you this day. Lest when you have eaten and are full [that is, when we are prospered spiritually], and have built goodly houses and dwelt therein; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold is multiplied,

and all that you have is multiplied: Then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Why does He have to warn us, admonish us, of something like this? Because it is so easy for God to get lost in the shuffle of our lives. What results? What does "heart being lifted up" indicate? It indicates pride. Do not forget this.

**Deuteronomy 8:15** Who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water; who brought you forth water out of the rock of flint.

We forget the blessings. We forget the overcoming. We forget the miracles that took place in our life.

**Deuteronomy 8:16** Who fed you in the wilderness with manna which your fathers knew not [they had no experience with, and were not familiar with it], that he might humble you, and that he might prove you to do you good at your latter end.

God is admonishing us here that there is a very grave danger He is going to get lost in the mix of the events as our life unfolds. If we are not careful, we will eventually come to the place where we think that we did it all ourselves. It has happened before many times. God has had experience with this, and He makes an interesting record of it back in the book of Romans.

**Romans 1:21** Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

Here in this powerful section whose main subject is faith, we find ingratitude, or unthankfulness, mentioned, and bound together. It is an accurate saying that "where gratitude exists, true faith can exist and will be found." Paul is showing here that evils of this world are a direct spin-off of this combination of lack of faith and ingratitude. Paul is implying that gratitude is a major support of faith, that gratitude keeps faith alive, fresh,

and growing in the midst of the burdens of life. Where ingratitude flourishes, faith wanes, and sin, especially pride, flourishes. Notice the insertion of the words "they became vain in their imaginations." Vanity, futility, uselessness is the product of pride.

Let us understand a technicality regarding gratitude and thanksgiving. Gratitude and thanksgiving are closely related, but they are not exactly synonymous. Gratitude is a noun and is exactly synonymous with the noun *thankfulness*. Here is why: Gratitude is primarily internal. Gratitude is the internal condition of heart and mind that precedes and sets the stage for thanksgiving. Gratitude, according to my *Reader's Digest Oxford Complete Word Finder* means "readiness to show appreciation for, and return kindness." I am putting the emphasis on *readiness*. It is the readiness to show appreciation for, and return kindness. Gratitude is the predisposition necessary for *returning* kindness. Kindness is the act of returning. It is the actual outward literal expression of gratitude.

Why was there no gratitude in the people about whom Paul was writing? The answer is given just a couple of verses before:

**Romans 1:18** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who *suppress* the truth in unrighteousness." [Remember the sun—the light of God.] For that which may be known of God is manifest [is evident] in them; for God has showed it unto them.

There was no gratitude because truth regarding the Creator God was suppressed. Whether it was suppressed on a massive scale by governments, by false religions, or by individuals is really moot. Truth was suppressed. People turned away from it even though it was evident. Is it happening today? Are there large groups of people with fine scientific minds who turn away from the very clear evidence that this whole thing requires a Creator, and instead come up with some idea that we all evolved out of some kind of a strange soupy mix that was struck by lightning and started the whole process going? So whether it was methodically suppressed, or whether individuals suppressed it in their own minds, is really moot. It was suppressed.

Before you think you might not be guilty of the same general accusation, let me ask you this: How many times have you thought of doing good for someone and then never carried out the good thought that you had thought to do? What did you do? You suppressed the good. That is exactly what you did. I have done this time without number. It is just that in Romans 1, the principle involves something that is massive in scale.

We do the same thing in little areas. We quench the Spirit. Most of the time when we have done this it was because we found something else to do that usually centered on ourselves which we felt was more immediately important. We then forgot the good that we were going to do for the other person. So again, whether it was purposely suppressed, or carelessly suppressed through forgetfulness, (remember "forgetfulness" in Deuteronomy 8), it really does not matter in the end, because it was suppressed, and it never got done. The plain truth is that the good thought was suppressed.

Let us learn something else about the word "thank." Are you aware that both the words "thank" and "think" come from exactly the same root? The English language is a branch of the Indo-European language group, as are Greek, Latin, all the Romance languages, German, Celtic, Scandinavian, and a number of others besides. English began as one of the smaller branches, but because of the influence and power of the British and American nations, it has grown to be by far the largest and most expressive, because it continually keeps absorbing words from other languages into it and making them its own. I think that God is doing this because this process is gradually giving the whole world a common ground for hearing the gospel when it comes time for God to preach it to them.

I have a very helpful dictionary titled *The Origin of English Words* by Joseph Shipley. He shows that the words "thank" and "think" are derived from the Indo-European root word "*tong*." Tong means "to seem to one," or "it seems to me." Through the centuries the usage of "tong" evolved through several other Indo-European languages into the English "think," "thank," "thought," "thoughtfulness," "thankfulness," and other derivatives that are directly related to the words "think" and "thank."

Think and thank are so closely related that one reference work on the origin of English words related this to Matthew 15:19, which now reads: "For out of the heart proceeds evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies." But when the Bible was first translated into English, those early editions of the Bible translated that verse into this: "For out of the heart proceeds evil thanks."

Thanksgiving is the result of *thinking*, and carrying through on the foundation of *gratitude* that is produced. But that is right where the major problems lie. I actually heard Herbert Armstrong say at least twice that he felt that ingratitude is the most common of sins. It is not that it is the worst, but rather it is the sin that is most likely found in our life. We are just not thinking about things that we need to be grateful for.

The context of Romans 1, and especially verses 18 through 21 and beyond, is showing the perversity of human nature. Paul is saying the fact that there is a Creator God is evident. Every normal intelligent person, converted or unconverted, has enough capacity to be aware of this level of the knowledge of God. The natural outgrowth of this should be to glorify Him. That is what it says right in the context. "They glorified Him not." Why not? Because they were unthankful! The natural outgrowth of being aware of a Creator should be to glorify Him, to give Him praise and thanksgiving for the awesomeness of what He is and what He does. The perversity of human nature is that it *stuffs* it. It stuffs the knowledge. It suppresses this very natural inclination.

Sometimes we see things that man has produced. Let us say it is a fifty-thousand dollar Porsche, or a Corvette, or any other thing that you can think of that you are really impressed with. Do you suppress the natural reaction for something beautiful that man has made? You "Ooh!" and you "Ah!" and you begin to desire the object. You say, "Oh! I wish I had that!" That is what Paul is talking about here. There is nothing that even begins to compare with what God has created. If we really begin to think on it, the natural reaction should be that gratitude begins to grow, and praise and thanksgiving are the natural result of admiration for God and what He is and what He has done. But is it done? Why is it not done? Because it is suppressed.

For some reason we do not think to carry through on what we should do. There is even another peculiarity to this. There are people in the world who do not suppress this inclination to praise and honor God, and they frequently go on giving the praise and honor, but they give it to something that is not really God, but an idol.

Evelyn and I recently have come into possession of two wonderful films that were produced by Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. We showed these films to those people there in Chicago, and I am sure that by the time that they were done looking at those films they felt about as big as an ant compared to the wonders that they saw of what God has created. It is **awesome** even if all we are taking in is the scope of it, of how big it is, and how puny we are, and the power it takes to sustain this thing.

But do you know what happens? What do the Moody Bible Institute people do? It gets put into what I call *the Sunday morning niche* and all that it represents. On its own, the creation reveals the fact that there is a Creator God, but it does not reveal what He is doing. This is where the seriousness of what I am talking about comes into the picture for you and me, because we not only know that He is the Creator, but we know that His creation is going on in us.

What we see up in the heavens and elsewhere in God's creation is just a minor display of what is being produced in us. Are we thankful? Do we really stop to think about it? Right here is the nucleus of the problem, because far too often all we do when confronted with these things is **stuff it**, and we stuff it by simply not carrying through, meditating upon it, thinking about what it means to us in regard to what God is doing in us.

If we are thinking of it, one of the things that we begin to learn is that none of us can really adequately praise and thank God unless we have the right perspective. That point of view not only includes the clear recognition of what God is, what He has shown us of Himself and His purpose, but what He has done and is doing on our behalf. It also includes a clear recognition of ourselves as compared to Him and to other people.

Pride is the greatest hindrance that exists to proper praise and thanksgiving because pride forces us to be focused on ourselves, and it makes it very

difficult to give truly effective praise. We are coming right back around to Deuteronomy 8. God says, "If you forget Me, your heart is going to be lifted up because you're going to think you're doing it yourself." Who is getting the credit? The Creator, or the created? Do you begin to see the seriousness of this? Here is the root of idolatry. We are beginning to see why thanksgiving is so important. Thanksgiving supports *true faith*, because thanksgiving makes us focus on the Creator, not the created. If we are not thankful, the chances are very great that we are only thinking of ourselves.

Let's look at a couple of familiar verses.

**Isaiah 66:1-2** Thus says the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that you build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things has my hand made, and all those things have been, says the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor [humble] and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word.

Everybody knows that humility is what is implied in this verse. Many modern Bibles insert the word "humble" there for the word "poor." Humility before God gets the attention of the Creator, because with it, it carries a much more true recognition of what is important and what is of less importance. It says very clearly in the book of James that "God resists the proud, but gives grace [gifts] to the humble."

Turn to Matthew 5. The first of the Beatitudes says:

**Matthew 5:3** Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

When the word "poor" is used this way, it means to be destitute, without resources; weak, powerless; spiritually bankrupt. Being poor in spirit is the platform upon which all of the other beautiful attitudes that please God and motivate Him to respond with spiritual and sometimes physical blessings is built. *Poor in spirit* is the recognition of our spiritual need that causes us to cry out to God for what *He* can and will supply. It is also this same recognition that motivates us to think about God from the proper perspective

that makes us give praise and thanksgiving. It makes us look at and to Him for what He is, and what He has. It makes us long to be the same way and in the same manner that the economically poor look at the economically rich.

I do not think that any of us can honestly say that we have never looked at those who are economically better off than we, and have not desired to be like them, to be in the same position that they are in, to be enabled to wear the same exquisite clothing, to live in the same fine large homes, to drive the nice expensive cars, to be recognized as a powerful influence in the community.

Being poor in spirit forces us to honestly evaluate ourselves against Him. He is the epitome of every good characteristic, the possessor of intelligence, of wisdom and power of such capacity that it is able to produce us and every other good and beautiful thing needed for a wonderful abundant life. In order for this point of view to be in us, a great deal of groundwork must be prepared by God, because human nature and its pride is always standing in the way to guard its territory, its place in our thinking and decision making.

Let us go back to Deuteronomy 8 and look at verses 2 and 3 once again.

**Deuteronomy 8:2-3** And you shall remember all the way which the LORD your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, [Why did He do this?] to humble you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled you, and suffered you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you knew not, neither did your fathers know: that he might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD does man live.

Remember the Chinese proverb. As we were going through that, we said the sun is light. God uses *light* as a symbol of His truth, of His Word. We are to live by every word of God. We need to ask ourselves a question. Are we listening?

God must work with great wisdom to expose our weaknesses, our poverty to us. That is what He is explaining here. It took Him forty years to expose the

weaknesses of the children of Israel so that they would really begin to cry out to Him to fill the vacuum in their lives. Always what God is doing is done to break pride's power over us and destroy our continual focus upon ourselves, thus allowing us to truly look at Him and compare ourselves with the true standard. It is pride's power which gives us perverted judgment of what reality is, thus making us unable to truly give praise and thanksgiving except on widely expressed occasions. It is pride's power that makes us think that we did it ourselves.

In Psalm 14 David makes an interesting statement that I want to relate something to.

**Psalm 14:1** The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God." ...

The fool is a man who is dominated by his pride. I do not have the time to go through this to show you the connection, and you will just have to take my word for it at this point.

**Psalm 14:1-3** ... They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that does good. The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that does good, no, not one.

The worker, the person of pride, also has desires, even as we have desires, but his thoughts are not related to God. "The fool has said in his heart, there is no God." He cannot relate his thoughts to God, and so his needs are not related to God and His purpose. God is not in all of his thoughts, and there is no gratitude and thanksgiving. He thinks with all his being that he did it himself, whereas someone like Paul said, "What do you have that you did not receive?" He challenges us to try to think of something that ultimately has not come from God.

It is pride that does this, and so pride forces a person and his world to think only about himself and what is important to him. It is pride's power that largely blinds us from the reality of God's intimate involvement in our individual lives. We tend to see God as only generally involved, and this inhibits us from more fully understanding much of what God has to reveal of

Himself to us. It is this revelation that God want to give to us that should lead to thanksgiving.

Go now to Psalm 19. Here is where "hearing" comes back into the picture, and here is where another thing that we mentioned also comes back into the picture.

**Psalm 19:1-2** The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament [the expanse of the heavens] shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge.

Think of Romans 1, that it is evident that there is God the Creator, but it is suppressed. David was a man who knew a great deal about God and had a good relationship with Him. Look at the difference in the way David looked at things.

**Psalm 19:3** There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.

There is multitude of evidence of a Creator God.

**Psalm 19:4** Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Listen now to these four verses from *The Living Bible*.

**Psalm 19:1-4** (The Living Bible) The heavens are telling the glory of God." [That right away tells you that it is a continuous process. It is "telling," not "told." It is ongoing.] They are a marvelous display of His craftsmanship. Day and night they keep on telling about God, but they do this without a sound or a word. Silent in the skies, their message reaches out to all the world.

In Psalm 19 we have the example of a man who is really tuned into God, and that resulted in him writing about one-half of the 150 Psalms. To David, the immense size, radiance, and regularity of the heavenly bodies spoke to him of wisdom, power, and the steadfast character of the God of creation, and he

was thankful because of his perspective which he knew that God, and God only, had given to him.

Remember, in Deuteronomy 8:2-3, the reason that He humbled the Israelites and us is because He wanted to humble them and test them so that they would know that "man does not live by bread alone, but by **every word** that proceeds out of the mouth of God." That was the ultimate reason. In other words, He did what He did so that they would listen to what He said. In this Psalm 19 David demonstrates that he was listening—and not a sound was heard! He heard the voice of God revealing Himself in the creation, and it resulted, among other things, in greater understanding and praise and thanksgiving.

All too often, brethren, we allow the events of life to camouflage the glory of God in what He has made and what He is doing, because we permit them to divert our attention from Him and His purpose through a lack of faith, and so we look away from the light, and focus our attention on the dark, and become unthankful.

Let us conclude in Psalm 34, another psalm of David.

**Psalm 34:1** I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

David means that he will give praise and thanksgiving to God, and honor and glorify Him. "His praise shall continually be in my mouth." See how this lines up with I Thessalonians 1:16-18.

**Psalm 34:2-4** My soul [my life] shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify [make big, great, with honor] the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together. I sought the LORD, . . .

David just did not take the creation for granted. "I sought the Lord." You can tell by Psalm 19 that he was seeking the Lord in the creation. He was looking for God and for things to glorify Him through.

**Psalm 34:4** . . . and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.

**Psalm 34:6-8** This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps round about them that fear him, and delivers them. O taste, [Now we are getting another sense in here—seeing, hearing, and tasting.] and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusts in him.

**Psalm 34:11** Come you children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the LORD.

Here was a man who related the events of his life to God, and it drove him, it motivated him to desire to be like God. It brought forth a torrent of thanksgiving. David was poor compared to God, who was rich beyond David's dreams. Brethren, thanksgiving requires the work of thinking, but it is thinking from a certain God-created perspective.

Let us summarize: Thanksgiving in prayer must be prepared for. God Himself sets the stage by humbling us in order that we will turn to Him with all of our hearts, not merely in order to get rid of painful and nagging problems, but so that we will *hear, see, taste, and feel* God in the events of our life. We will evaluate them in the light of the love, wisdom, and perfection of our great Creator God and bring forth a torrent of praise and thanksgiving for what He is doing, because we know, and we know that we know, that when He is done, we will be like Him. Those who do this meditate in order to make sure that their prayers are prepared for and liberally salted with periods of thoughtful and honest thanksgiving.