

## The Spirit Of Gratitude

**We Have Much to Be Thankful For**  
**Charles Whitaker (1944-2021)**  
**Given 08-Aug-09; Sermon #951B**

I think that many of you remember on more than one occasion, that Mr. Armstrong commented about what he called the sin of ingratitude, and he called it one of the most dangerous and one of the most commonplace of all sins. He understood that the sincere act of thanksgiving to be vastly important. After all, thanksgiving has the word "giving" right there in it, and is by its nature part of the give way of life of which he so often spoke.

Proper thanksgiving is important. Notice the emphasis the apostle Paul places on thanksgiving:

1. In Ephesians 5:20, Paul admonishes us to give, "thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."
2. In I Thessalonians 5:18, the same apostle instructs us to give thanks "in everything. . . for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."
3. In Colossians 2:7, Paul says we are to abound, and to overflow with thanksgiving.

Paul practiced what he preached! Aside from the statements of thanksgiving that he makes in the bodies of his letters, as in Philippians 4:6, he opens no less than five letters by thanking God. You will find that in Romans 1:8, I Corinthians 1:4, Philippians 1:3, Colossians 1:3, and I Thessalonians 1:2.

In Colossians 3:17, Paul says that, "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." We will return to that important scripture later. I mention it now only to emphasize how important the spirit of thanksgiving is. It is not only important that we do all, and we do everything in Christ's name, but that we do so in a spirit of thanksgiving to the Father.

Today, brethren, I want to spend a few minutes talking about thanksgiving. The wellspring of our sincere and right-minded thanksgiving to God is our relationship with Jesus Christ and with the Father.

Let us begin in Daniel 4. Ingratitude stems, it seems, from that mother of all sins, pride, from the "I-did-it-myself" attitude of individualistic self-sufficiency. "We don't need God, so why should I give thanks to Him?" Nebuchadnezzar well exemplifies this proclivity of human nature to appropriate benefits and success to our own efforts, rather than to acknowledge the power and providence of the sovereign God—to give Him credit. This acknowledgement is absolutely essential if we are to give proper thanksgiving to God.

**Daniel 4:29-35** At the end of the twelve months he [that is, Nebuchadnezzar] was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws. And at the end of the time I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me; and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?"

By seven-years' long and painful experience, brethren, the king learned to acknowledge God. Thanksgiving starts with a mindset—a will—to see God. By that, I mean, a mindset that acknowledges His place in our lives. To acknowledge is to "express recognition of the presence and existence" of someone or something.

So, we could say that thanksgiving starts with a mindset that recognizes God's place in our lives. Like the word acknowledge, that word "recognize" has embedded in it the root "to know." By definition, the word "recognize" is to "be fully aware or cognizant of," or to "accept (someone) to be what is claimed, or to accept his power and authority." We cannot sincerely thank God until, and unless, we recognize God's role in our life.

Or, again, we could say that thanksgiving requires a mindset to appreciate God's role in our lives. I use the word appreciate in its dictionary sense of "to be fully aware of" God's role in our life.

So, a spirit of gratitude requires knowledge at the outset, but not the kind of knowledge that puffs up. Rather, sincere thanksgiving stems from knowledge that is connected at the hip with humility, our recognition that we need God. Thanksgiving starts there—with knowledge, coupled with humility—but does not end there.

This mindset—this desire or drive—to acknowledge God, is not commonplace; apparently only a rather small minority of humanity exhibits it. Christ Himself attests to this in Luke 17.

**Luke 17:11-18** Now it happened as He [Christ] went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten

cleansed? But where are the nine? Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?"

Apparently there was more than one Good Samaritan. The Israelites, who knew, or at least should have known better than most men the power of God to deliver, failed to regard their healing as the merciful gift of God that it was, and went their way. They did not take the time to acknowledge God. They probably figured they had been sick for a long time, and they had a lot of living to catch up on. Ingratitude is common, and indeed is part and parcel with human nature.

Notice Romans 1, as we continue probing into the nature of thanklessness. Here, we see that lack of appreciation, or ingratitude is profoundly entrenched in the spirits of ungodly men, and the apostle tells us just exactly where a spirit of thanklessness leads. We know the passage well.

**Romans 1:18-21** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 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 [did not acknowledge Him], nor were thankful . . .

What was the result of this refusal to glorify and to thank God? We know all too well.

**Romans 1:21-25** . . . but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature [namely, themselves] rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.

A thankless spirit leads, ultimately, to a darkened, corrupt mind, and it does so because in it is the spirit of idolatry, of worshipping the creature, not the Creator. Such a spirit incurs the wrath of God.

A few weeks ago, Martin Collins, looking at the first few verses of II Timothy 3, pointed out Paul's warning that, "in the last days"—these days—"men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful. . ." [see "Facing Times of Stress: Lovers of Self."] When people worship the creature, they love themselves, their interests, their purposes and goals—their life. That leads them to the point where they push God out of their lives, if that were possible, having no room for Him, and giving no place to Him. They do not thank God because they refuse to acknowledge His role in their life. They do not acknowledge God in nature. They do not acknowledge God in history in the affairs of men and nations. And, finally, they do not acknowledge God in their personal lives.

Walking in that kind of darkness, they do not see God, *cannot* see Him. And, it is at this point that whatever thanksgiving they do express becomes totally out of whack, utterly perverse. They actually come to the point where their every expression of thanks is by rote, that is, it is automatic, unthinking, and by that token, it is insincere. It is usually offered for selfish reasons, or is simply driven by social necessity.

Notice please, Luke 18. Here, a self-righteous Pharisee, failing to see himself as he is, and God as He is, condescendingly thanks God, and at the same time becomes history's biggest and blindest bigot.

**Luke 18:11** God, I thank You that I am not like other men—  
extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.

This blind leader of the blind was thankful, but he was thankful for the wrong thing, for the wrong reason. His thankfulness was not God-oriented. Rather, his thankfulness took its shape, its form, from himself, as he compared himself with others, failing to compare himself with the standard established by God.

Right thanksgiving is God-oriented. Proper thanksgiving gets its bearings from our relationship with Christ—our seeing what He has done for us and what He is doing for us. If thanksgiving springs from oneself, it is wrongheaded—being only a veiled manifestation of pride.

The prophet well spoke, as recorded in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked [exceedingly perverse and corrupt and severely, mortally sick]; who can know it [perceive, understand, be acquainted with his own heart and mind]?"

That is a remarkable verse! We can become so blind that we fail to recognize our own mind, to grasp the source of our own motivations and cravings. Human nature can become that deceitful. And at least one reason for that blindness is, as Paul put it there in Romans 1, people's unyielding disinclination to glorify God, their determination not to offer Him thanks.

Many of us have been deep in a cavern when someone turns out the lights for a minute, or less. That is okay. You hear a few gasps; young children naturally grab hold of a parent's hand. There are some oohs and aahs. You are there in a group, and you know that someone is going to turn a light on, that light will dispel the impenetrable darkness very soon. But what if it did not? People would soon panic, becoming totally disoriented in terms of space and time. Disorder would soon reign. Some would become catatonic, too frightened to move—just sitting down in fear. Others would, in terror, start moving about, hurting themselves as they collide with others, or crash into the structures of the cave—eventually falling headlong, screaming, precipitously into crevasses. The group would eventually disband, as people separated from the leader. Ultimately, if the lights did not come on, and if there was no help at all, they would perish in unspeakable terror.

It is in that tragic darkness ("pitch past pitch" of darkness, as the poet Gerald Manley Hopkins put it) that our leaders walk today, whether they be political, educational, economic, military, religious, or scientific leaders—all utterly, profoundly blind, and leading the blind into a pit.

Indeed, Mr. Armstrong was right: Ingratitude is a mighty dangerous and common sin, stemming as it does from the blinding pride of men, their dogged conviction that they can lead their lives successfully without God,

without the direction, the teachings that He so graciously gives, directions which, if observed, would serve as a light to their feet, a lamp to the path that God has ordained that mankind should properly walk. Such faith in self-sufficiency leads to God's wrath ultimately.

What about us, brethren? Cognitively, we know better than the nine lepers; we know better than the wrong-headed Pharisee. We, like Nebuchadnezzar, have come to understand that we are not self-sufficient. But do we take the time, do we make the effort to acknowledge God on a daily basis? Or like the nine lepers, do we heedlessly go our way, leading our lives as if oblivious to Him, forgetful of His gracious kindnesses? Or like the Pharisee, do we come to the point where we thank Him that we—the elect of God—are somehow better than everybody else?

What should drive our thanksgiving to God? A spirit of thanksgiving is a spirit of sacrifice. Dwight Armstrong put Psalm 107 to music for today's church:

**Psalm 107:21-22** Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men! Let them sacrifice [or offer] the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with rejoicing.

1. Thanksgiving is a sacrifice of our time and of our energy.
2. Thanksgiving takes thought, as well. The nine lepers did not think about God's dramatic, extraordinary intervention in their lives. Leaving the spectacular aside, what about the more mundane, routine blessings God provides us every day? It takes thought, even insight, to identify the multitude of so-called "little" blessings that are in reality so important to us. Do we take the time to identify them and to think about them, and then to thank God? It is so easy for us to complain about not having enough rain, but do we thank God that we can turn on a tap and get some water to drink, or to bathe?
3. More than time, effort, and thought in thanksgiving, we sacrifice our ego, our self, admitting to God that we are not of ourselves self-sufficient. As I mentioned earlier, God-oriented thanksgiving involves a sacrifice of self. Gratitude demonstrates our appreciation, our knowledge, that God occupies the prime part of our lives. For this

reason, brethren, we should be the last people to make Nebuchadnezzar's mistake of referring to what "I have made," and what "I have done." The new creation is created by God. What do we have which God has not given us? Proper thanksgiving, as I said, springs from our relationship with Christ, and with the Father.

Let us look a little deeper into Colossians 3:3.

**Colossians 3:3-4** (Holman Translation) For you have died, and your life is hidden with the Messiah in God. When the Messiah, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

Our life is hidden in Christ. He is the Head, but we become part of His Body. I do not have time to review them, but there are a large number of Old Testament scriptures that say the same. For example, in Psalm 83:3, "They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones."

The image is one of a hidden, protected treasure. The true church is the *ekklesia*, it is called out of this world, and is separated from the world.

Consider the metaphor involved in calling out. As a boy, when my mother called me to dinner, I went out of the living room, or out of the den. But that was not the end of it. Where did I go? I went into the dining room. When we leave one room, we go into another. When the *ekklesia* leaves this world, it goes into Christ's body, spiritually speaking of course, protected in that sanctuary. If you understand what I am saying by that word sanctuary, we are separated into that Temple.

Of course, I am speaking on a spiritual level. We are hidden in Christ, sheltered inside Him. What better protection could we have, than to be inside the spiritual body of the Logos? As we will see later, who or what can harm us there?

What is the result, or the consequence, of our being hidden in Christ? Paul continues:

**Colossians 3:5** (Holman Translation) Therefore [as a result of God's provision for and protection of us], put to death whatever in you is worldly [come out of this world]: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.

Idolatry is worshipping the creature rather than the Creator. That is what Paul, in Romans 1, said leads to God's wrath. Here he says much the same thing:

**Colossians 3:6-8** (Holman Translation) Because of these, God's wrath comes on the disobedient, and you once walked in these things when you were living in them [before you started living in Christ, before you came out of the world]. But now you must also put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth.

Paul is talking about the way the new man lives, the way we must live as people hidden in Christ. He is talking about practical areas of Christian living.

**Colossians 3:9-11** (Holman Translation) Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his practices and have put on the new man, who is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of his Creator. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.

What Paul is saying is that Christ is the center of the relationship, the focus of the relationship. Now, Paul inserts yet another 'therefore,' another consequence of what he has been saying:

**Colossians 3:12-14** (Holman Translation) Therefore, God's chosen ones [he addresses the *ekklesia*], holy [separated] and loved, put on heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, accepting one another and forgiving one another if anyone has a

complaint against another. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so also you must forgive. Above all, put on love—the perfect bond of unity.

Perhaps it is for the sake of emphasis that Paul here inserts one of his shortest sentences. I wonder if you knew that Paul was able to write such a short sentence; two words that express what attitude a person hidden in Christ should have. **Be thankful!**

**Colossians 3:15-16** (Holman Translation) And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the message about the Messiah [the message that Paul has been talking about, that we are hidden, protected, in Christ] dwell richly among you [talk about it; this is good news, more important than about anything else], teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, and singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with gratitude in your hearts to God.

Paul does not let it drop there. Yet again he emphasizes the concept of thanksgiving:

**Colossians 3:17** (Holman Translation) And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

It is our relationship with Christ, the fact that we are hidden in Him, which should drive our spirit of thanksgiving. We have a lot to be thankful for.

There is a powerful scripture, in Galatians 2, where we see just how much we are a part of the body of Christ.

Breaking into verse 20:

**Galatians 2:20** (The Amplified Bible) I have been crucified with Christ [in Him I have shared His crucifixion].

The way God sees us, brethren, we were part of Christ's body when He was crucified.

**Galatians 2:20** (The Amplified Bible) I have been crucified with Christ [in Him I have shared His crucifixion]; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Both Revelation 13:8 and Revelation 17:8, provide a witness that our names were written in a book before the foundation of the world, that our election and justification was determined way back then. When, in fullness of time, Christ died, God knew all about us way before then. In the sense that God sees it, we died in that crucifixion.

There are a number of scriptures about this.

**II Corinthians 4:10** We always carry the death of Jesus in our body, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.

**II Timothy 2:11** This saying is trustworthy: For if we have died with Him, we will also live with Him.

**Romans 6:5-8** For if we have been joined with Him in the likeness of His death, we will certainly also be joined with Him in the likeness of His resurrection. For we know that our old self [the old man] was crucified with Him in order that sin's dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin, since a person who has died is freed from sin's claims. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him.

Hidden in Christ, we died. When He is revealed, we too will be revealed. Do we have a lot to be thankful for or what? Being hidden in Christ has some tremendous benefits and advantages.

**Romans 8:28-36** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose. For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers.

And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For Your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

You see, the people in the world hate God, and think of us as vulnerable, easy pickings who can be plundered and destroyed with impunity. Paul answers that mistaken idea very clearly:

**Romans 8:37-39** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We are indeed locked away, sheltered and protected, in the spiritual body of Christ. Our relationship with Him is very deep indeed, and that close relationship should be the wellhead of our sincere Spirit of God-oriented thanksgiving.

