

Prayer & Gratitude

This morning we continue on with our series on Gratitude and come now to the topic of Gratitude and Prayer. “What are these two God-given attributes of a believer’s life?” and “How do they relate to each other?” If I were to ask some of your closest friends or relatives (wife, husband, children) to give me a report on how grateful you are on a daily basis, what do you think they would say? Analyze the situations that occurred even this past week. Can you say that your heart reflected an attitude of gratefulness? My hope this morning is to encourage you by the power of the Spirit of Christ to seek His throne with a grateful heart in all circumstances and to reflect the joy of the Lord to those around you. Let us be not only hearers of the Word this morning but doers also.¹ Let us spur one another on to be zealous for God’s glory – ready to do every good work.

Definition of Gratitude

I was curious to know what the dictionary had to say about gratitude. I felt as though I could come up with a definition on my own, but wanted to see if there was aspect of it that I was missing. I went to the Merriam Webster Dictionary and found two definitions that I believe could be quite helpful for us this morning in interpreting God’s Word and gaining a better understanding of it. The first definition of “gratitude” is this: *a feeling of thankfulness*. This seems easy enough to understand and may have even been close to what I would have come up with on my own. It was the second definition, however, that caught my attention. The second definition of “gratitude” is *to be in a state (or position) of thankfulness, appreciation, or indebtedness*.

While one definition seems to allude that gratitude is some abstract feeling within you, the second definition seems to say that you have been moved into a position of thankfulness by some outside circumstance that has affected you. I like the second definition, first of all, because gratitude has to be more than something that is just based on my feelings. It must be more concrete than that. Secondly, I like this definition better because it implies having been moved from one state to another – from a state of ingratitude to a state of gratitude.

Now the Merriam Webster Dictionary is by far not inspired Scripture, but it can aid us in understanding God’s Word. This idea of being moved from ingratitude to gratitude by some outside affect is portrayed in Scripture. Scripture tells us that the unbeliever does not contain a heart of gratitude.

Romans 1:21-23

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

¹ The Holy Bible (ESV). James 1:22-25 “But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.”

Claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.²

They did not give thanks to God. Gratitude is not natural to man. All have sinned³ and have turned away. No one does good, not even one.⁴ This is why gratitude cannot be based on our feelings. We must be moved into a position of gratitude due to some outside circumstance that is not dependent on us. We cannot move ourselves into that position or else it would not be true gratitude. It would be a false gratitude. No, for the believer, we have been moved into a state or position of thankfulness by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. He has delivered us from the bondage of sin and death.

Psalm 86:12-13

I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever. For great is your steadfast love toward me; you have delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.

Gratitude with Prayer

As believers, we have been moved into a state of thankfulness because of what the Lord has done for us. Now that we have been affected by the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are to continually rejoice in Him with grateful hearts. It is interesting to note that gratitude is closely connected to prayer in Scripture. Throughout the Scripture, in the Psalms, priestly prayers, benedictions and greetings, prayer and gratitude are a common theme. Not only are they special gifts to the believer from God, but according to the Apostle Paul they are expected from every believer *all the time*. Here are just a few passages.

Philippians 4:4-7

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.

Ephesians 5:18-20

...but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,...

² The Holy Bible (ESV). Romans 1:21-23 – This passage is speaking directly of the unbeliever who although he recognizes the evidence for a higher power, choose to not worship God or give Him thanks as the One Who created all things. Because of this, the unbeliever's heart is darkened as he progressively falls into sin.

³ The Holy Bible (ESV). Romans 3:23

⁴ The Holy Bible (ESV). Romans 3:10-18

Colossians 3:16-17

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

The believer in Christ is to be in a state or position of thankfulness perpetually – always rejoicing in the Lord and seeking Him in prayer. According to Paul, this is God’s will for us. Now I don’t know about you, but this makes me feel pretty low. Am I really to be thankful all the time? To have a heart of gratitude in every circumstance?

I think what we tend to do is write-it-off. Paul doesn’t really mean “give thanks in *all* circumstances” because that would be insane. I am pretty sure that if Paul knew what I deal with or knew what I’ve been through, then he would allow for some variances in his statement. Ventura, do you really think Paul didn’t understand trials and suffering? He was imprisoned, beaten, betrayed, flogged and stoned.⁵ If anyone knew anything about suffering, it would have been Paul (who fades in comparison to our Lord Jesus Christ Who experienced the ultimate suffering on our behalf.) Yes, the statement remains “give thanks in *all* circumstances.”

Well how do we do that? When trials come and circumstances arise, how do I give thanks? By running to His throne and pleading for His grace. You have been moved by the power of Jesus Christ into a position of thankfulness. You have been given gratitude unlike the world around you and where will you find it? At the feet of Jesus. Whatever giant you are facing or whatever valley you are walking through, you can give thanks in it through the blood of Christ. He has already faced the same giant and passed through the same valley that you are experiencing right now.

Hebrews 4:14-16

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

⁵ The Holy Bible (ESV). 2 Corinthians 11:23-27 “...with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. Five times I received at the hand of the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.”

Hebrews 12:1-2

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

When we are struggling with finding gratitude in our hearts, we should be compelled to run to Jesus and seek Him with all our heart. The **picture** of prayer is a child approaching the throne of God pleading for help. The **foundation** for prayer is Christ's blood purchasing and purifying that child in God's presence. The **act** of prayer is the Spirit's work in sanctifying and growing that child to perfection. The **effect** of prayer is God's child responding in unending praise and gratitude.

Why is it that prayer leads us to gratitude?

Prayer should always lead a believer to gratitude because prayer should remind every believer of what they really deserve. Whenever we approach His throne of grace, we should always be reminded of the cost that was paid in order to buy us our access to His throne.

Prayer is the battleground for which every believer must fight. If prayer in Christ is our victory over circumstances and hardships, then why don't we run to Him? What is holding us back from seeking His face? Believer, take the necessary measures to get back into the practice of praying. It is not legalism to schedule time in your day to pray! It is not legalism to force yourself to pray even though you may not feel like it! Because prayer is not based on your efforts or abilities, but is based on the One Who is working in you.

Go to His throne and pray with a grateful heart. Recognize what we really deserve. The gifts that you have been given are His favor toward you and the punishment that you rightly deserve has passed to another. Even in trials and difficulties of this life, nothing compares to what we really deserve. Prayer allows us to see our Savior and kiss His feet. When you kiss His feet, notice the wounds in them. See His hands and His side and remember how those wounds came to be. They are His because He took my place and the punishment I deserved was laid on Him. Let those thoughts sink in and allow them to move you into a state of thankfulness, appreciation, and indebtedness.

I believe eternity will be a constant, unending time of thankfulness before our God where His wounds will never heal but will be a perpetual reminder to us of what He has done. Is it not enough that He died for me? But even more than that, because of His resurrection, we have an inheritance awaiting us in Heaven.

1 Peter 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and

unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Jesus is that inheritance! We will enter His gates with thanksgiving and we will sit at His feet forever.

Psalm 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth. Serve the Lord with gladness. Come into His presence with singing. Know that the Lord, He is God. It is He who made us and we are His. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him. Bless His name. For the Lord is good. His steadfast love endures forever and His faithfulness to all generations.