



FEED MY SHEEP

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The misuse of gratefulness

The fruit of gratefulness, part 1

Giving thanks to God is a *duty* of every believer. Therefore, when we thank Him for all the *good* things He has given us, that fulfills our obligation, doesn't it? No, not at all, because the Scriptures state unequivocally that we are to thank Him for *all* things—even for our “negative blessings,” as I call them.

If you took your concordance and looked up the words “gratitude” or “gratefulness,” you would not find them in the King James Version. They are found in some other Bible versions on a few occasions. However, if you looked up the words “thanksgiving,” “thankful,” “thank,” etc. you would find that some form of the word “thank” appears 139 times in the KJV. Almost all of them refer to giving thanks to God, and so its importance as a duty of a Christian believer cannot be overemphasized.

The Psalms are replete with mentions of thanksgiving. I would recommend as a good spiritual exercise to take your concordance sometime and simply look up those occurrences of the various forms of the word thank, thanks, thanksgiving, etc. It would be very beneficial for us to reinforce in our minds the importance of giving thanks to God.

When the apostle Paul in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans was led to excoriate wicked men, notice in verse 21 that Paul condemns them for *two* things—not that these were the *only* two sins worthy of mention, but perhaps it goes to show the importance of these two things.

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.

In this case, to glorify God is to praise God. Praise is very closely related to giving thanks as we will see as we proceed. For example, turn to Hebrews 13. If the book of Romans is elementary school for Christians, then the book of Hebrews is Ph. D. graduate school.

In the course of our detailed study of the tabernacle in the wilderness, we made a number of references to this particular epistle because in it are found many of the explanations of the fulfillment of the types and shadows outlined in the tabernacle.

For example, the tabernacle in the wilderness involved the huge brazen altar at which animals were sacrificed to Yahweh-God. But we know that under the terms of the New Covenant, animal sacrifices are no longer necessary because Jesus' death fulfilled them all. However, as we as believers seek to follow Christ, we too are called upon to make sacrifices. And among them is this one mentioned in...

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.

Do you see how giving thanks to God is equated with the sacrifice of praise? Jesus said my yoke is easy and my burden is light. To offer God praise and thanksgiving is really a very simple task, isn't it? It's a lot easier than taking a heifer down to the tabernacle and butchering it for a sacrifice, don't you agree?

And yet, how do we measure up to this simple requirement of us as followers of Christ? Are we diligent in giving thanks and praise to God? The verse says we are to “offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually,” by which it means regularly and often.

We know that we are to be thankful both *in* all things and *for* all things. In other words, even when we find ourselves in harsh trials and tribulations, we are to thank Him for those opportunities for spiritual growth.

But more specifically then, what can we thank God for? Here are some suggestions which can help jog our memory. For each of these, I will give you one or two out of many verses which could apply. We can give thanks and praise...

For Christ and His salvation: Luke 1:68-70; 1 Corinthians 15:57.

For the fulfillment of God’s promises: Luke 1:71, Psalms 28:6

For the preservation of life: Psalms 30:3

For God’s holiness: Psalms 30:4

For the faith of believers: Romans 1:8

For deliverance from enemies: Exodus 18:10; Jeremiah 20:13

For the removal of God’s anger: Isaiah 12:1

For miscellaneous mercies: Psalms 13:6; 68:19

And the list could go on, “for His mercy endureth forever.”

Before we pursue a new line of thought, I want to refresh our memory with one last thought about giving thanks to God. It is a verse we have encountered a number of times before in other studies.

We cited it particularly in our message which was a primer on prayer, and also when we were studying one of the other fruits of the spirit, we noted how we are admonished in the first part of this verse not to let ourselves get stressed out, not to be burdened with anxiety. It says “be careful for nothing,” but in the modern vernacular, we would say “Don’t let yourself have anxiety about anything.” “Have anxiety for nothing.” Yet we all know that to put that into practice is sometimes hard to do, but I have found that the more I understand the sovereignty of God, the easier it becomes.

When anxious moments arise from time to time, if I just remember to focus on God’s *complete* control of

all things, it helps to greatly alleviate any anxiety. So that’s a little refresher on the first part of that verse, but what we really want to focus on here is found later in the verse. Notice...

Philippians 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

In other words, don’t send up any prayer requests without giving thanks to the Father. Notice that Jesus himself models this for us. Here are two examples. When Jesus was—in my opinion—about to transmute energy from the zero point into matter in the form of bread and fish, we notice in...

Matthew 15:36 And he took the seven loaves and the fishes, and gave thanks, and brake *them*, and gave to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.

Likewise, when Jesus was praying to the Father for Lazarus to be resurrected from death, we notice that the prayer request was made with thanksgiving.

John 11:41 Then they took away the stone *from the place where the dead was laid*. And Jesus lifted up *his eyes*, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me.

Now, let us change horses. By that I mean that our focus is now going to be horizontal instead of vertical. Most of the 139 occurrences of giving thanks are “vertical;” they have to do with thanking God, but does that mean that we do not ever have to thank or be grateful to our neighbor. Not at all. *Of course*, we are to practice gratitude towards others.

Remember the two greatest commandments? Love God and love your neighbor. And really, when it comes right down to it, most of the time, *we demonstrate our love for God by loving our neighbor*.

Furthermore, even though gratefulness is not listed as one of the fruits of the spirit, if you think about it, giving thanks to others would certainly be included under the umbrella of the fruit of kindness. So I am going to leave off now for you to do the spiritual exercise of looking up some or all of the 139 occurrences of thanks in the Bible, and I want to focus now on gratefulness towards others. I will begin with a confession.

Some years ago, as I was looking for ways to save time and become more efficient in the work of the ministry, I decided that I would no longer send out thank-you letters for the tithes and offerings that people sent us. After all, I reasoned, I thank God for the support of this ministry and when people send their tithes, it's really not their money anyhow; it's God's portion. Anyhow, they know that I really appreciate it because we couldn't do a thing without it.

Well, of course, it did save some time; but after a couple of months I got a letter and then a phone call from a friend in Ohio. From a man who had been doing ministry work long before I began. So anyhow, with practical reasoning he persuaded me that I should indeed send out thank-you letters. First of all, it's just common courtesy. Secondly, if somebody sends a contribution other than by check, they want to know that you received it—that it's not lost in the mail.

Thirdly, some donors have a different view on tithing and believe that it's all free will gifts now; and so my thought that "it's God's money anyhow" carries no weight with those folks. I have always appreciated this man's advice and ever since then I have sent out thank-you letters for every contribution we receive.

I also use that monthly thank-you letter as a vehicle to set forth ideas and commentary about current events or whatever I am led to—things which I either have no room for in the *Feed My Sheep* cover letter or things which I do not necessarily want to share with the entire mailing list through the FMS cover letter.

Now, in keeping with the spirit of gratefulness, I want to acknowledge the significant benefits I have gained from the teaching and material of a man named Bill Gothard. I have used some of his material a couple of times in previous messages quite a few years ago now. But since the 1970's Bill has been teaching biblical principles of Christian character.

Over the years, I have attended several single-day Ministers' Seminars, three-day seminars, and up to full-week-long seminars designed for the whole family. I do joyfully attest that even though I have been a committed Christian since the 70's that it was a week-long seminar in Atlanta back in 1993 that was profoundly life-changing for me. It opened my eyes to acknowledge the fact that I actually hated my father and that it was incumbent upon me as a professing Christian to learn how to forgive him, and if possible

to have reconciliation with him.

Well, it took a while. Some of my readers know that in 1996 I gave the results of that progress in a pair of tapes called *Could You Forgive God? My Personal Testimony on Forgiveness*. The CDs are free for the asking, and of course, in my series of studies on forgiveness, I include the two CDs of my personal testimony in that album.

All this is to say that some of the material in the rest of what will be several issues of FMS is taken from Bill Gothard's material...with my spin on it. At the same time, it must be understood that I am in no way giving unqualified endorsement to each and every teaching of Mr. Gothard or his organization. I have not attended any of the seminars or meetings in over twenty years now—if memory serves correctly—so I cannot possibly be in a position to give unqualified endorsement.

All I am saying is that the seminars I took, and the material I have from him in my library from over two decades ago has been very helpful in my own spiritual growth, in building my own Christian character, such as it is...; i.e., I have a long way to go.

Speaking in general about character qualities, Gothard taught that one can discern potential *positive* qualities about a person through the *negative* traits which they manifest. The reason for that is because every negative trait is a positive quality misused. So, for example, a person who is careless with money is misusing the quality of generosity. A person who is critical and judgmental is misusing the quality of discernment.

Please note that negative evidences are not necessarily the opposites of the given character quality. They are behaviors observed when the positive quality is misused or carried to excess. So the point is that when we see negative qualities in people, we have a choice. We can either use that information to condemn that person, and we can be very self-righteous in our smugness. Or we can use the knowledge of their flaw as a guide in how we can deal with that person to encourage the development of the positive aspect.

This all presumes, of course, that we have some legitimate reason to be dealing with the person in the first place. This is not meant as a guide for you and me to go out and begin correcting strangers on the

sidewalk, so to speak. But we might find this useful in dealing with people who are in our circle of relatives, friends and acquaintances.

So in keeping with our topic, when the virtue of gratitude is misused, we find the negative traits of flattery, gushiness, and extravagant generosity. Let's look at these. What is flattery? It is excessive or insincere praise. It is almost always given out of a motive of selfishness.

For an example of flattery, we can imagine any number of scenes involving an individual who has the opportunity to meet a rock star, or a movie star, or a sports star or a multi-gazillionaire businessman. Flattery is usually uttered by a person who is in some way in a lower station in life and it is spoken to a person who is in a perceived higher station in life.

And so when John Doe-Flatterer meets such a person, he might say, "Gosh Mr. Gates, you are one awesome entrepreneur. I've heard from some friends who have the beta version of your new Windows 10 operating system that it's flat-out cool, man, and I have to tell you—you are a genius! I can't wait to get a copy of your new product."

Well, the underlying selfish motive there is that John Doe is probably hoping Bill Gates will give him a coupon or something so John Doe can get a *complimentary* copy of the new software.

Movie actress Andie MacDowell lives in Asheville and I have seen her on a couple of occasions, just going about her day-to-day business. One time, I saw her in the local post office where she stood in line just like everybody else, and I was four or five people behind her. I was amused however, when she got through the line, finished mailing her package and left the post office. Suddenly, obviously perfect strangers to each other who were still in line, began to turn to one another with remarks like—"Did you see who that was? That was Andie MacDowell. She sure is pretty, isn't she?"

The foregoing was not an example of flattery there because no one spoke to her in line—only the postal clerk to transact her business—but the reaction after she left was an example of *gushiness*, which we could define as an effusive display of sentimentality or over-exuberant enthusiasm—with the implication that there is an air of phoniness or falsehood to it. A

better example of gushiness might be when someone has a new baby and, of course, we can all appreciate the blessing of a new baby. They're all cute and such little treasures, but sometimes a person with a gushiness problem might be way over the top.

"Well, Mildred, look at the little feller. He is absolutely thee most beautiful baby I have ever seen, and that's saying something because I work in the neonatal wing at the hospital. Look at those eyes! They're just as bright as the moon! ...And that little nose. Why, he's cuter than a chipmunk! Oh, and look at those little, teeny-tiny bingers. You can already see how he's going to grow up to be a very strong and handsome man. Why...he'll probably be as strong as Arnold Schwarzenegger and as handsome as Brad Pitt and..., oh look his ears..." And she goes on for another ten minutes. Alright, already! Give it a break!

Well, those of us old enough to have been adults or young adults in the 60s and 70s know what "groupies" were. Certainly, those pitiable young women must have all had problems of being gushy and full of flattery—to say the least—not to mention idolatry. As flattery and gushiness are misuses of the commendable quality of gratitude, there is one more we should consider and that is excessive generosity. *(To be continued.)*

The Tabernacle in the Wilderness

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