



# Light from the Word

## Walking with Thankfulness

*“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.”<sup>1</sup>*

A dictionary definition of “thankful” is feeling or expressing gratitude, appreciative.

The end of year holidays afford many opportunities to feel or express gratitude. Our country allows us the privilege of celebrating a holiday that has Thanksgiving as its central theme. But very little of the cultural focus of the Thanksgiving holiday is directed toward our Holy God and Savior. And this subject is not one to limit to a particular time of year.

Let’s reflect on what the scriptures say about thankfulness and thanksgiving. The purpose of this exercise is to further discern if the Bible portrays thanksgiving and thankfulness as an action, an event, a way of life, or a mix of each. Is there an underlying theme in the biblical discussion of thanksgiving? If so, how should it affect our daily walk of life?

*“And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.”<sup>2</sup>* Here the children of God gave praise and thanks unto the Lord by singing together. When Noah and his family left the Ark after the flood waters abated, he built an altar to the Lord.<sup>3</sup> This was an act of worship and thanksgiving to God for sparing them and giving them a new start. Deut. 8:10 makes it clear that when we have eaten and are full that we should bless (give thanks to) the Lord our God for the good land he has given us.

These scriptures and many others demonstrate that there are times when our thankfulness expresses itself in thanksgiving. This is usually true when we experience a wonderful event or very special time in our lives. It is also clear that we are called

to thanksgiving as an action and expression of our heart. Not only are we called to it, but in fact thanksgiving is the will of God. *“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”<sup>4</sup>* As we dig deeper, we see not only that God wills that we give thanks, but also that it is in fact our duty. *“But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you.”<sup>5</sup>* The word “bound” in this context is the same as “duty.”

A bigger challenge for us is giving thanks when things are not going well and when we are faced with great disappointment or discouragement.

How did Job respond when he experienced nearly total loss of all but his wife and life? *“Then Job arose, and rent his mantle, and shaved his head, and fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”<sup>6</sup>* We see that his thankfulness poured out even in his despair. James 1:2 calls us to count it all joy when we are tested and tried. Likewise, 1 Thess. 5:18 (*“in every thing give thanks”*) does not distinguish between “things,” which implies that we are to give thanks when life is good and when it is difficult.

Giving thanks when things are difficult is quite possibly the mark of whether we just give thanks on occasion, or whether we are truly *walking* in thankfulness. The Psalmist pleads for the Lord to lead him to the *“rock that is higher”* than himself.<sup>7</sup> If our eyes and heart are fixed on the things of life, we can more easily be thankful when good things occur. But such a focus makes it very difficult—if not impossible—to give thanks when we are faced with hard times. So how could Job worship even after losing everything? How can we *“count it all joy”* when facing all kinds of tests and temptations?<sup>8</sup> How can we *“give thanks in all things?”<sup>9</sup>*

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## Walking with Thankfulness

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One answer lies in the object of our thankfulness. When our hearts are thankful for who God is—the sovereign Creator, precious Redeemer, perfect loving Father, the great I AM—we are able to have a thankful heart even in the midst of very difficult things. Knowing that His desire is for us to be conformed to the image of Christ gives us the freedom to express thankfulness when there is no earthly reason to do so. This will lead us into a pattern of living where our hearts are filled with thankfulness. When we no longer depend on circumstances or things in order to be thankful, we are able to express sincere and genuine, “unfeigned,” thankfulness in our hearts, attitudes, and with our lips.

Another area for us to resist is the feeling or attitude that we are entitled to something. This is a battle that is raging in the world today. The world’s message is often that: you deserve the best, the good things in life. If they are not coming your way, go out and get them. If it feels good, do it—this mentality is a tremendous threat to thankfulness. It robs us of joy, leads us to envy and jealousy, and creates in us discontentment and an unthankful spirit.

It is little wonder that the Spirit moved the Apostle Paul to write that, “*Godliness with contentment is great gain.*”<sup>10</sup> That passage shows that having a discontented or entitled attitude is not new to our generation. And not only is it not new, the consequences are very much the same as they have always been. Two accounts in Deuteronomy reveal the heart of God on this matter. “*Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.*”<sup>11</sup> “*And it shall be, when the LORD thy God shall have brought thee into the land which he sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full; Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.*”<sup>12</sup> As evident from these accounts and

other scriptures, an attitude of entitlement brings us into a form of bondage that is not easily broken. In Luke 17, we read the account of the ten lepers who were healed. When one realized he was healed, he turned back and gave thanks. Jesus said “*but where are the nine?*”<sup>13</sup> Does He care if we have a thankful heart? He surely does.

Let’s each do an inventory of our lives to see if we are walking in thankfulness. Ask for honest feedback from a spouse or trusted friend: do they see us walking in thankfulness? Even more importantly, we should ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts.<sup>14</sup> If we have been truly redeemed and understand the great sacrifice Christ made for us by dying and shedding His innocent blood, it should lead us to a life of thankfulness. From the scriptures we can conclude there is a time to give thanks. However, it is also clear that our thankfulness should be a way of life and not just an event or time of year. Not for our glory, but for His.

(Footnotes)

- <sup>1</sup> Col. 3:15      <sup>8</sup> James 1:2  
<sup>2</sup> Ezra 3:11      <sup>9</sup> 1 Thess. 5:18  
<sup>3</sup> Gen. 8:20      <sup>10</sup> 1 Tim. 6:6  
<sup>4</sup> 1 Thess. 5:18      <sup>11</sup> Deut. 28:47-48  
<sup>5</sup> 2 Thess. 2:13      <sup>12</sup> Deut. 6:10-12  
<sup>6</sup> Job 1:20-21      <sup>13</sup> Luke 17:17  
<sup>7</sup> Psalm 61:2      <sup>14</sup> Psalm 139:23-24