

## Cultivating Constant Thanksgiving – 2 Cor 4:15

**Introduction** – As our national celebration of Thanksgiving comes upon us I want to address the command for believers to “*give thanks in everything*” (1 Thess 5:16-18) and why this simple command is so hard to obey. It’s hard to give thanks in the midst of trials, as we are commanded (James 1:2, 2 Cor 12:10). But it can even be hard in the flesh to give thanks to God (and maintain a thankful heart) for the blessings – in the easy things. The following meditation in God’s Word is to cultivate constant thanksgiving.

**The Text and Context** – Paul, and all Christians, have the wonderful opportunity to give testimony to the light and life that are ours in Christ Jesus and be light to those around us (2 Cor 4:5-6). Paul is willing to do this even in the face of great lies about him along with real sufferings and sacrifice (vv7-11) because this “death” brings “life” to others (v12). He has the faith of the Psalmist in Psalm 116 (and so see Psalm 116:1-10, 17). The grace of God he has received and witnessed spread to others, Paul knows, is worth far more than any of his struggles, and so he rejoices “*that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God*” (v15).

**This High View of the Grace of God** – He sees the gospel as sheer gift, overwhelming grace, and overflowing kindness (1 Tim 1:16-17). We could not earn it, we didn’t deserve it, and even though we have done a great deal to forfeit it, God is at work in us for our good – always (Phil 1:6, Rom 8:28). This life-in-Christ now encompasses all of our life and the natural response to received and perceived grace is gratitude. Faith receives that grace and faith responds with thanksgiving and praise (Eph 3:20-21).

**Inexcusable Ingratitude** (Rom 1:20-21) – While creation reveals the glorious attributes of God, fallen man, even though he knew God at one level, refuses to glorify Him as God and refuses to be thankful to God. Therefore, it is only when we are redeemed by Christ and made new that we can begin learning and cultivating a constant life of thanksgiving.

**Put Off/Put On** – Ingratitude has several sources. Paul teaches the beloved of God that they are able now, in the new man to put off certain fleshly desires and put on Christ-like manners by means of the Spirit at work in us (Col 3:8, 12). With this pattern in mind, we learn how to put away those things which create ingratitude and instead put on those things which cultivate thanksgiving.

**Pride** – This first one is key. Pride is the belief that we deserve more than we have received. It may be shrouded in a dreaminess of envisioning a better situation than what is happening in the past or present. By faith, put off pride and put on humility (James 4:6, Eph 3:12).

**Greed** – Greed fosters ingratitude, never satisfied with what has been offered or given at present, it falsely promises that we will be satisfied if we have just “a little more.” By faith, put off greed and put on generosity and a delight in the riches of Christ that are yours (Eph 1:18-19, 2 Cor 9:5).

**Selfish Ambition** – This is a species of pride and greed, intent on the future, forgetful of the past and pursuing one’s own interests even if at the expense of others. By faith, put off selfish ambition and put on the pursuit of others’ interests (Phil 2:3-5).

**Anxiety** – Panic ensues the more and more we deny the existence of a kind, powerful, personal and present Lord while beginning to see that nothing here is promised to last. By faith, put off anxiety and put on faith in the God of Scripture (Matt 6:33, Phil 4:6-7).

**Envy** – This is the habit of comparing the benefits we enjoy to the benefits that others have received. It is a killjoy and brings forth a deep root of bitterness, ruining relationships and ruining souls. By faith, put off envy and put on contentment (James 3:14, Rom 13:13-14, Prov 14:30, Phil 4:11, 1 Tim 6:6-8).

**Forgetfulness** – This may be the most important sources of ingratitude. The ungrateful person is one who has forgotten all that God has done and given. Forgetfulness is a deep sin and moral failure that must be confessed and repented of. It is often the seed of all the other sins above – you simply forgot. By faith, repent of your forgetfulness and celebrate with many Thanksgivings (Deut 6:10-12).

**The Cultivator: A Fierce Faith in the Present Goodness of God** – What happens when a man believes that all things work together for good for those who love God, and he believes it down to the bone? What happens when a woman believes that the very trial before her is working in her an eternal weight of glory that cannot be compared? What happens when a people take pleasure in their infirmities and needs because of the strength that is theirs in Christ? What happens when we seek first the kingdom of God, refusing to be anxious about tomorrow and believing that all these things will be added to us? What happens when we believe that the Lord is our Shepherd and He is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for us and promises His presence as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death? What happens to a man who counts everything rubbish for the sake of gaining Christ? What happens when we count our blessings, bring them to mind, memorialize them, and set days aside to remember?

That man, that woman, those people, in the same circumstances as anyone else, are filled with thanksgiving, contentment, celebration, expectant hope – and they want to throw a party – thanksgiving abounding to the glory of God.

Put off. Put on. And find yourself giving thanks - - heartily.