

Sermon outline and notes:

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I Thessalonians 5:18 “Thanksgiving & Giving” (Topical message)

Intro. Have you noticed that there is a big problem with ingratitude today? When the pilgrims first came to America, they gave thanks. They had nothing but gratitude. Today Americans have so much more, but don't have gratitude.¹ What's the problem? As we have become less Christian in our society, our society is reverting back to patterns of pagan Gentile behavior. Romans 1:21 describes Gentile pagan society, “because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful....” In 2 Timothy 3:2 Paul says people in the last days will be “unthankful.”

President O’Bama gave the traditional presidential Thanksgiving proclamation on Thursday. Though he did call upon Americans to be thankful, this year he did not call upon us to thank *God* even one time! He didn’t even say “may God bless” at the end. I guess he was afraid the ACLU would be upset if he mentioned God! Thanksgiving was established, & became a national holiday, for the express purpose of giving thanks *to God*. George Washington’s brief Thanksgiving proclamation in 1789 had at least 14 references to God. Oh, how far we have turned away from the faith & practices of our founding fathers!

I’m calling upon us this morning to be different from the world, and conform our lives to the Word of God, which teaches us to be thankful, and rebukes us when we are not. How did you do this past Thanksgiving? Did your family & other invited guests express your appreciation to God in a meaningful way? After you had that big, delicious meal, did you thank God again for the bounty, at least in your prayers? It is so important that we give thanks to God, not just on Thanksgiving, but every day. So let’s look into the Word of God, and see what God has to say about the subject of giving thanks. I want to share with you first of all:

I. OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO GIVE THANKS TO GOD

Giving thanks to God is not an option for the Christian. It is commanded. Over ten times the Bible *commands* the people of God to give thanks. For example, 1 Chronicles 16:8 says, “Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.” So many of the Psalms call upon the people to give thanks to the Lord. For example, Psalm 100:4 says, “Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name.” Furthermore, Psalms 105-107, 118, and 136 all begin with appeals to give thanks to the Lord.

The New Testament is just as strong in its appeals to give thanks. 1 Thess. 5:18 explicitly says, “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (NIV). Col. 3:17 says, “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” Ephesians 5:4 describes the proper kind of speech for the Christian. It says, “Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not proper but rather giving of thanks.”

Are you obeying these commands to give thanks? Do you give thanks to God on a regular basis? If not, you are not doing God’s will, & it’s time to practice giving thanks on a regular basis!

¹ "Bulletin Inserts" in Pulpit Helps [Illus.#C-724].

II. THE REASONS WE SHOULD GIVE THANKS TO GOD

When parents give commands, their children often want to know why? Well God gives us a command to give thanks, and He also gives us plenty of reasons to give thanks. So let us reflect on some of the reasons why we should give thanks to God. First of all:

A. Because of His Wonderful Attributes – 1 Chronicles 16:34 says, “Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.” Psalm 107:8 says, “Oh, that men would give thanks to the LORD for His goodness....” This is repeated 3 more times in that Psalm! Psalm 7:17 says, “I will give thanks to the Lord because of His righteousness...” These verses mention just 3 of the wonderful attributes of God. There are many more. Let us give thanks for who He is.

Secondly, we should give thanks to God:

B. Because of What He Has Done for Us – Because God is good, He does good deeds for us. Psalm 107:8 also says that we should give thanks to God “for His wonderful works to the children of men!” Psalm 75:1 says, “...We give thanks to you, O God, we give thanks, for your Name is near; men tell of your wonderful deeds.”

Now what are some of the good things He has done for us? Psalm 119:62 says, “At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments.” God has given us righteous laws, which protect us from harm & promote wellbeing if we obey them. He has given us the Bible, the Word of God, which guides us in the right path.

He has also given us many wonderful gifts. 2 Corinthians 9:15 says, “Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!” James 1:17 says, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above....” The greatest of all was the gift of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Jn. 3:16). He has also given believers the Holy Spirit. In Luke 11:13 Jesus said, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!” (Cf. Acts 2:38b; 10:45). The Holy Spirit gives us spiritual gifts that enable us to serve God effectively (1 Cor. 12). He has given the gift of salvation. Romans 6:23 refers to the gift of eternal life, while Eph 2:8 refers to the gift of salvation. Thus, 1 Corinthians 1:4 says, “I always thank God for you because of His grace given you in Christ Jesus.” In Romans 1:8 Paul thanked God for the saving faith of believers in Rome. Yes, even the faith to believe is made possible by God.

We should thank God for other works & blessings. In 2 Corinthians 1:11 Paul thanked God in advance for answered prayer. 1 Corinthians 15:57 says, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” We are victorious over the world (1 Jn. 5:4), the devil (1 Jn. 2:13; Rom. 16:20), and even death (1 Cor. 15:54). We should thank Him for physical blessings like food, clothing, and shelter (cf. Rom. 14:6). Dt. 8:10 says, “When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you.”

We have so much to be thankful to God for, if we will give it some thought. I think we should rehearse in our minds these & other things God has done for us, and be thankful.

Finally, let us consider together:

III. THE RIGHT WAYS TO GIVE THANKS

We should do more than learn about giving thanks, and why we should give thanks. We should be doers of the Word, and not hearers only. So what should we do to give thanks to God? I believe the Bible teaches that there are 3 primary ways we should give thanks. The first is obvious:

A. With Words of Thanksgiving – Hebrews 13:15 says, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” Of course, every time we pray we ought to give thanks to God. Col. 4:2 says, “Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.” Another good way to give thanks is to share a testimony of God’s goodness to you. Three of our men will share their testimonies in January, & they should include thanksgiving to God for what He has done in their lives. Psa. 35:18 says, “I will give You thanks in the great assembly....”

So in a world of self-centered complainers, I encourage you to look for opportunities to give a word of thanks to God publicly.

We should also give thanks to God:

B. With Songs of Thanksgiving – Psalm 147:7 says, “Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving....” Psalm 69:30 says, “I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving.” Eph. 5:19-20 says that we should be “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” You can do that every time we gather for worship.

Do you sing praise and thanksgiving to God from your heart? Of course, you can do that in your home. But I think we should also gather with others to sing thanks to God in church. Do you do that on a regular basis?

Some in the church have a special responsibility to give thanks in song. Nehemiah 12:31 says, “...I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks.” 2 Chronicles 7:6 says, “The priests took their positions as did the Levites with the Lord’s musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the Lord and which were used when he gave thanks...” Some others of you could join our choir & sing thanksgiving to God even more!

Finally, we should give thanks to God:

C. By Our Giving – Many times in the Bible thanksgiving and giving unto God are linked together. First, it is done so:

1. As Expressed in the Thank Offering – In the Old Testament there were many different sacrificial offerings prescribed by God. One was a peace offering, & there were 3 different kinds of peace offerings. According to Lev. 7:11-14, the Israelite could make the peace offering as an offering of thanksgiving to God² by adding unleavened cakes, wafers, and bread, which would be given to the priest. Those items of sacrifice would be heaved up and waved before the Lord as an expression of thanksgiving to God who gave the meat and bread unto His people. Lev. 10:15 says, “The thigh of the heave offering and the breast of the wave offering they shall bring with the offerings of fat made by fire, to offer as a wave offering before the LORD....” There are later references to this practice in the Word of God. 2 Chron. 33:16 also

² The other 2 types of peace offerings were to fulfill a special vow (Lev. 7:16; 22:21; cf. Ps 50:14), and a freewill offering, though all the peace offerings were not required, but offered of one’s own free will.

mentions peace offerings and thank offerings under the reign of King Manasseh. King Hezekiah told the people in 2 Chron. 29:31, "...come near, and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of the Lord..." Psalm 50:14 says literally, "Sacrifice thank offerings to God..."

Likewise, Psalm 116:17 literally says, "I will sacrifice [or slaughter] to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving..." (See also Psalm 107:22). Jeremiah 33:11 speaks of "the voices of those who bring thank offerings to the house of the Lord, saying, 'Give thanks to the Lord Almighty, for the Lord is good; His love endures forever.'"

Then, in Lev. 22:29, God says, "And when you offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to the LORD, offer it of your own free will." To be acceptable to God, thanksgiving must be offered freely and willingly. We should not be like the little child that is made to say "thank you" to Grandma for that certain gift. God wants our thanksgiving to be freely expressed from the heart. So if you give to the Lord as an expression of thanksgiving, it must be freely given. That's why 2 Cor. 9:7 says, "So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver."

One thing I like about this particular offering is the fact that according to Lev. 7:15, it was one that the worshipper was permitted to eat of the sacrifice as well.³ This seems to be the origin of having a Thanksgiving feast. Surely partaking of the good meat that the Lord had provided would cause even more thanks to ascend to God. By the way, in the case of the Thanksgiving offering, none was to be leftover until the next day (Lev. 7:15). They had to eat it all, or throw it away. How about that! It was a thanksgiving feast with no leftovers! By the way, if someone is addicted to eating Thanksgiving leftovers, can he quit cold turkey? [Illus.#C-794].

Another example of thanksgiving to God being expressed through giving is:

2. The Offering of First Fruits – In Deut. 26:1-11, we have an important scripture text. There they were instructed to take some of the first produce that God had given them, put it in a basket, and carry it to the tabernacle (v.2). Then they were to declare before the priest God had made them into a mighty nation (v.5), delivered them from Egyptian bondage (vv.6-8), and had given them a good land, flowing with milk and honey (v.8). Then the basket of first fruits was placed on the altar, and given to God in thanksgiving to Him. And the Israelite was to worship and rejoice before the Lord.

Shouldn't we do something similar? We should take the first portion of what God gives unto us, and set it aside as dedicated to the Lord. Then, we should bring it in our offering envelope to the house of God, and then offer it to the Lord in thanksgiving for what God has done for us.

Finally, another example of thanksgiving to God being expressed through giving is:

3. Proportionate Giving – Both the Old Testament and the New Testament teaches proportionate giving. That is, the amount of our giving to God should be based on how much God has given to us. The more God blesses you financially, the more you should give in thanksgiving to God. Let me show you some of the examples of proportionate giving. Deuteronomy 16:17 says, "Every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the LORD your God which He has given you." (cf. v.10). Another example of proportionate giving in the Old Testament is the tithe. God's plan of giving was very simple and fair. Generally, God did not require the people to give the same *amount*. Instead, they were to give the same percentage, which was 10% of all that God had blessed them with. The more God gave them, the more they were to return to God in the form of a tithe. And in Number 18:24 we see the connection between tithing and giving thanks. There God refers to the tithes of the children of Israel "which they offer up as a heave offering to the Lord..." Remember the significance and

³ After the fat and blood were offered to God, and the breast and the right thigh given to the priest (Lev. 10:14).

symbolism of the heave offering? The tithe was lifted up and waved before the Lord as an expression of thanksgiving for the blessings of God. Some of you might not like it, but imagine if on one Sunday we lifted up our offering envelopes to the Lord right before the offering, and waved them before the Lord in gratitude to God!

As we move to the New Testament we also find proportionate giving taught. Jesus said in the last of Lk. 12:48, "...For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required..." Then 1 Corinthians 16:2 says, "On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income..." (NIV). I believe that the percentage of income that you give to the Lord can be a measure of your gratitude to God. If you are giving God hardly more than what you tip your server at the restaurant, then you must not be very grateful for what He has given you!

As you give to the Lord, you are not only doing so as an expression of thanksgiving, but your giving will cause additional thanksgiving to God. This truth is found in 2 Cor. 9:11-12, "while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God."

A king had saved the life of one of his subjects and every day afterwards she came to his gate with declarations of gratitude. "I can never begin to pay the debt I owe him," she bewailed. One day the king, in his chariot, passed her cottage. He saw in her garden a tree bearing some luscious fruit, and was seized with a desire to taste it. When he sent his servant with the request that he be given some of the fruit to take to the king, she replied that she only had enough fruit to meet her own needs. She thus laid bare the fact that her expressions of gratitude had been mere words. When she had the opportunity to show her gratitude by giving, she failed to do so.⁴

Let us not make the same mistake. King Jesus has saved our souls, & given us eternal life and so many other blessings. Let us give regularly to support His work from a willing & grateful heart.

Conclusion: So let us heed the command to give thanks on a regular basis. You will do that if you will rehearse in your mind all the reasons why you should be thankful. And then be sure to express your gratitude to God with words of thanksgiving, with songs of thanksgiving, and with various gifts that express your thanksgiving to God. Do your gifts to God adequately reflect your thanksgiving to God?

Sources: Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:10] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2011). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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⁴ *Practical Bible Illustrations from Yesterday and Today.*