

THANKS BE TO GOD

By Charles C. Ryrie

The author does not mean that we should not be thankful for every temporal good. He points out that there is a deeper, greater, and eternal cause for thanksgiving in God Himself. If we were stripped of every earthly good as Job was, we would still have God. But this is a hard lesson to learn. [ED.]

DIRECTING THE BELIEVER'S attention to things temporal is one of Satan's most successful devices. In these days of uncertainty man has to compensate for his own inability by clinging to something. The unsaved man knows nothing else but to grasp at things temporal, hoping to find in them security. The Christian who should know better is sometimes deceived in the same way.

The believer's best safeguard against such delusion is to examine his basis for thanksgiving. If he finds it in things of the earth, then he may safely put his confidence in those things. If he finds it in things eternal, then he should seek to strengthen faith in the eternal God whom he has come to know through the Lord Jesus Christ.

When we think of things for which we are thankful, we probably think first of life itself. Surely every person is thankful for life, but even apart from the consideration that life so quickly passes, is it not true that for the Christian death in the will of God is far better (Phil. 1:21)? Life, then, is not a sufficient basis for thanksgiving.

The older we grow the more grateful we are for health. But is not sickness often in the will of God (2 Cor. 12:7, 8)? We are thankful for strength, for we want to serve God with all of our strength, but sometimes God makes us weak in order that He may manifest His own strength through our lives (2 Cor. 12:9). Clearly health and strength are not a sufficient basis for thanksgiving.

Food is something for which we give thanks at least three times a day. But could we say as Paul did that we were ever thankful for being hungry for His sake (Phil. 4:12)? Some who

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have had homes destroyed by wind, war, or other means know especially what it means to be thankful for shelter, but our Lord had no place to lay His head (Matt. 8:20). Would we be just as thankful if God should allow us to follow Christ in that respect? We are learning more and more what it means to be thankful for freedom, yet should we not be equally thankful for imprisonment should it come (Acts 5:41)? We enjoy the ease and comfort of life even though we know that those who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution (2 Tim. 3:12). We are thankful for *some* men; God expects us to be thankful for *all* men (1 Tim. 2:1).

Plainly enough, temporal benefits, though an *important basis* for thanksgiving, are not an *all-sufficient* basis. All of these good things which we call blessings could well be removed in the will of God, and still the Christian would be exhorted to give thanks *always* for *all* things (Eph. 5:20). Contrariwise, the unsaved man is characterized as being unthankful (Rom. 1:21), for even his sincere attempts to be thankful for temporalities are worthless in God's sight without an appreciation of the gift of His Son. God forbid that any believer should fail to rise above the plane of the unsaved man and thus fail to enter into the fullness of thanksgiving.

Do not misunderstand—we are thankful for temporal things, and we would not want to seem to fail to appreciate the good hand of God upon us, but we realize perhaps more than ever these days that true and abiding thanksgiving has its basis in eternal things. Consequently, our interest, attention, and love for things eternal should be increasing day by day.

What are these eternal things which do form a sufficient basis for thanksgiving? Paul's cry "Thanks be to God" gives us the answer. Thanks be to God, he says, for the present victory, for He always causes us to triumph in Christ (2 Cor. 2:14). Whether in sickness or health, want or plenty, persecution or ease, imprisonment or freedom, we can and do count on

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the power of a risen, living Saviour to cause us to triumph. Where else can one turn in these days except to the One who is all-sufficient? Sufficient not only amid the temporal vicissitudes, but gloriously sufficient for every spiritual problem of these days. Is this not real cause for thanksgiving? The answer is evident—especially to the one who has tapped this spiritual resource.

Again Paul cries, "Thanks be to God," and this time it is for the promised victory for the future. This risen Saviour is not only sufficient for life, but because He is risen, He is sufficient for death. Therefore, because of the victory assured us in Christ, we can say, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Is this not real reason for thanksgiving especially in these days of gathering darkness?

But we never reach the culmination of thanksgiving until we can give thanks for the Person of the Lord Jesus Christ simply for who He is. To be thankful for what He has done is one thing; to be thankful for who He is is another. The contemplation of Him overshadows all other things, and when we do thus know Him, like Paul we find no word to describe Him. He is that unspeakable gift—the gift which—and here Paul had to coin a word—literally cannot be told throughout (2 Cor. 9:15). But this we do know, that He is the focal point of all the thanksgiving of our hearts, not only because God has with Him freely given us all things, but also because of the pure loveliness of His person. What a safeguard in these times of stress! May every believer's eye be turned to Him who alone is sufficient. "For which cause we faint not . . . While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16, 18).

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Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world (Matt. 28:20).