

Gratitude is an attitude

November 22, 2012

While we will stuff our faces with turkey, ham, sweet potato, mashed potato with a lot of artery clogging butter, and pumpkin pies, you might want to consider this fact: Some 18,000 children die every day because of hunger and malnutrition and 850 million people around the world go to bed every night with empty stomachs according to an UNICEF report in 2007. I am sure that the number of deaths is much higher now than ever before.

While I was cleaning up our grandson's leftover food from his high chair tray, I thanked the Lord for His kindness. For some grateful reasons, the Lord chose to put Micah into our care to feed him and take care of him while many thousands of children die in starvation and malnutrition. It is a heartbreaking thing to see and hear. The majority of people in the U.S.A. do not understand the poverty of the third world countries because the Lord rained His blessings to this nation.

Like the nine lepers who never thanked Jesus for healing them from leprosy in Luke 17, the majority of born-again Christians are not thankful to the Lord. One day a year, many of them utter a few words of gratitude and praise to Him out of obligation. This shouldn't be. We should be grateful to Him everyday.

A. ONE OUT OF TEN

Luke 17:11-19 Now it happened as He went to Jerusalem that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. 12 Then as He entered a certain village, there met Him ten men who were lepers, who stood afar off. 13 And they lifted up their voices and said, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" 14 So when He saw them, He said to them, "Go, show yourselves to the priests." And so it was that as they went, they were cleansed. 15 And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, returned, and with a loud voice glorified God, 16 and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks. And he was a Samaritan. 17 So Jesus answered and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the nine? 18 Were there not any found who returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?" 19 And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

Look at v14, please. As these ten lepers were walking in the direction of the temple, they'd noticed that they were healed. Nine of them went on to their past life – back to their homes, families, and social gatherings. They no longer had to yell out loud, "Unclean, unclean," as people were coming near. The untouchables were now the embraceables; the infected had become the respected; the isolated tomb-dwellers had become the center of their town's attention.

They quickly forgot about the Miracle Worker from Nazareth. Would these nine ungrateful lepers represent the majority of born-again Christians who often forget that our eternal destination has been changed from hell to heaven by the grace of God alone, nothing to do with our effort or social status?

Only one Samaritan came back to Jesus to thank Him for healing him. Please note what the Lord Jesus said here in v19:

Luke 17:19 And He said to him, "Arise, go your way. Your faith has made you well."

Though the other nine lepers had leprosy no longer, they were not “well” in God’s sight. But this one former leper showed his gratitude to Jesus in faith in Him; that made him “well.”

B. MILD ATHEISM

One of my favorite author C. S. Lewis wrote in one of his books, “The Four Loves”:
“The ancient man approached God (or even the gods) as the accused person approaches his judge. For the modern man, the roles are reversed. He is the judge: God is in the dock.” What a fitting commentary of our times! It is no wonder why many of us feel no reason or urgency to thank Him.

The culture we are living now encourages taking care of ourselves first before others. Actually, ourselves only. It is ‘all about me’ attitude.

There are two categories in the mindsets of believers of Christ. One of the categories is “the Thankful,” and the other “the Thankless.” The “Thankless” tend to act as though they and their circumstances and achievements are entirely self-made. By ignoring what the Lord has done for us and promoting ourselves into His throne, we are pretending that there is no God who helped us. That is “mild atheism”.

In the meanwhile, the “Thankful” see the providence of God in all they hold. The “Thankful” believe that it is not about how much we have or have not in life. The real issue of the “Thankful” is that they give thanks to the Lord for the salvation they receive freely through Jesus Christ. They believe that everything else is icing on the cake. It is no wonder why they are “thankful” to the Lord all the time while the “Thankless” grumble and complain and murmur like the Israelites who wandered around the desert for forty years.

Though the Israelites were set free from the bondage of slavery of Egypt; though they no longer had to endure painful beatings on their backs from their Egyptian slave masters, they were complaining against the Lord non-stop, as if they could not remember what it was like being slaves. To make the matter worse, they were even longing to go back to Egypt.

C. GRATITUDE IS AN ATTITUDE

Some of us tend to think that God is not doing enough for us just like these Israelites in the wilderness. With ungrateful hearts, we complain, we murmur, we gripe for what we don’t have; while we don’t care to remember the freedom from the bondage of our former slave master satan.

That is the reason apostle Paul and his sidekick Silas could sing in the middle of the night in the jail of Philippi while they were fastened on stocks.

Acts 16:24-25 Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks. 25 But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.

You see, gratitude has absolutely nothing to do with what we have but is a lifestyle. It not only gives the rightful acknowledgement to the One who deserves, but also reminds us that God is always the Giver, and we are saved by His free gift of salvation. In other words, gratitude is an attitude.

From time to time, I eat meals with the Sheriff's Department deputies when I do ride-along with them. Of course, I bow my head and pray before my meal. It is rather funny to see the facial expressions of my deputies who don't know what to do while I pray. They already took a big bite of their food, but they stop chewing while I pray. It is almost like someone used a remote control to pause their action.

Our thankfulness should not be limited with the prayer of mealtime, but in the complete and constant awareness of our own salvation. Those of us who have been redeemed by a living Lord Jesus cannot help but say, "Thank You, Jesus for eternal life and for our daily bread."

D. REMEMBERING TO SAY "THANK YOU, LORD"

Psalm 107:8 Oh, that men would give thanks to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!

In the Old Testament we find an interesting story of how King Jehoshaphat took an uncommon approach when his enemies waged war against him. Instead of sending in his army first, he sent in the choir and musicians. Imagine the scene: "All right, guys, here's the plan today. An army is out there, armed to the teeth. So, we are sending in the choir and the musicians." If I had been a choir member or musician, I might have wondered if the king didn't like our music. But God had directed Jehoshaphat in this unusual battle tactic.

We read that Jehoshaphat appointed people to sing to the Lord, praise the beauty of holiness, and go out in front of the army saying, "Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever," as it is written in 2 Chronicles 20:21. So that is exactly what they did. The Bible tells us that when they began to sing and praise, God sent an ambush against the enemy, and they were destroyed. God's people were able to go into this situation giving thanks, because He was in control.

In approaching God to ask for new blessings, we should never forget to thank Him for the blessings He has already given. Have you recently come to God for help and He came through for you? Did you come back to say "Thank You" to Him? If we would stop and think how many of the prayers we have offered to God have been answered and how seldom we come back to God to thank Him, it just might amaze us. We should be just as deliberate in giving thanks to God as we are in asking for His help.

Let's also thank our family members and friends more often. Let's not expect them to know that we appreciate them. Send a card, leave a note, give a quick call or drop a quick e-mail. Don't tell others at their funeral how much we appreciate them. Let's do it while they are still alive and enjoy our compliments.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) When you wake up in the morning, if you still have breath in your lungs and life to go on, thank God for the night you had and the day to face with His help.

2) When a seemingly-bad-thing happens, try to remember to thank God that it could have been worse.

Let's ask God to help us see a bigger picture out of that bad situation. Let's not forget that our mighty God can bring something good out from that bad situation.

Romans 8:28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

3) Before you go to sleep, thank God that His grace and mercy endures forever.

Sounds far fetched? No, we can discipline ourselves to look at the things and situations from God's point of view, if we let Him help us.

Philippians 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.