

TEXT: II Thessalonians 1:3

TITLE: Indebted to Thanksgiving by the Blessings of God

OCCASION: Westminster Presbyterian Ch. DATE: November 21, AD 2010  
PM Thanksgiving Worship Service

ευχαριστην οφειλομεν τω Θεω παντοτε περι υμων, αδελφοι, καθως  
Pres. Inf.-to thank iPlPresInd always inasmuchas  
bound/obliged by what is due or fitting/necessary

αξιον εστιν, οτι υπεραυξανει η πιστις υμων και πλεοναζει η αγαπη  
correspondent to, suitable 3SPresInd-increase 3SPresInd  
comparable, fitting exceedingly abounds

ενος εκαστου παντων υμων εις αλληλους

## Introduction

Of all people Christians have more to be thankful for than any other. Why? Because we have not only been the recipients of many great blessings and gifts from God which He showers upon all men, but Christians alone as God's own children are the recipients of His great special gift of grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our Lord exhorted His disciples to love even their enemies in Mt. 5:45, because their Father in heaven "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." The Apostle Paul reminded the crowds at Lystra, Acts 14:17, that God had not left "Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness." Now these are great gifts and the goodness of God should lead men to repentance; But far surpassing all these is the gift of God of Jesus Christ in salvation: Ro. 6:23, "But the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Lk. 12:32, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Mt. 11:25,26)

Now the Apostle writing to the Church of Thessalonica writes of thanksgiving for their perseverance and increase in grace. In v. 3, He thanks God and v. 4, he writes of how he has told other Churches of them in order to encourage and exhort them in such perseverance and increase.

### **I. What is the manner and matter of the Apostle's thanksgiving to God?**

#### **A. It is a very warmhearted and impassioned manner of giving thanks.**

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting." This is striking in a number of ways: First you get this double statement: "We are *bound* to thank God always for you, brethren, *as it is fitting*." We are *bound, obliged by what is due and fitting the case, correspondent, comparable*. 'I give thanks for you, brethren, but *I must. It is necessary that I give thanks*. The mercy

of God makes him indebted to God. And their condition and progress demands *as it is fitting* the response of thanks. “We are bound...as it is fitting” But also, you hear the further emphasis, “We are bound to thank God *always* for you, brethren.”

### **B. The matter of the Apostle’s thanksgiving to God for spiritual blessing and growth**

“Because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.”

### **II. Thinking of the debt of thanksgiving we owe to God.**

Listen to the two sides of this equation: Ps. 50:15, “Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me.” God gives to us the blessing and He is to receive the glory. The problem of course is that so very often we are earnest in asking for God’s blessing, but not so earnest in returning thanksgiving. What is it when we have a great desire for God’s help, but when we have received and experienced His mercy we make no mention of God or thanks to Him as if we had these things from ourselves? Surely it is a failure to pay the debt of gratitude. On our side it is debt, but on the other side it is God’s expectation. You hear that lesson from the Lord in the parable of the fig tree in Lk. 13:7, “Look, for three years I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree and find none. Cut it down; why does it use up the ground?”

This points to that children’s song: *The prayers go up and the blessings come down!* Of course it is only partially true, because God’s blessings have come to us even when we have failed. Yet it certainly true that prayer and praise or petition and thanksgiving go together. Heb. 13:15, “By Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” Some mercies are so general and so beneficial that we should remember to give thanks every day, even as God is giving us new mercies and new reason to thank Him. It is this very pattern which we should keep up: Ps. 67:5, “Let the peoples praise You, O God; Let all the peoples praise You. Then the earth shall yield her increase; God, our own God, shall bless us.”

### **III. Contrasting the spiritual graces exercised in thanksgiving with their opposites**

It is unbelief which does not credit God, but simply looks to one’s own resources or luck: Hos. 2:8, “For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold--which they prepared for Baal.” Isa. 1:3, “The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not consider.” But what is the response of faith? Faith knows: I Chron. 29:14, “For all things come from You, and of Your own we have given You.” Faith is exercised in returning thanks. This in turn produces hope. As God has given us promises, enabled us to trust Him and those promises, so we look forward in hope. As in Gen. 13:18, Abraham builds an altar in the land of Canaan to offer thanksgiving to God when he as yet did not own one acre of ground.

How does self-love respond? Love of self is just that, focused on self;

ready to ask and slow to thank. But when your heart is filled with a sense of the goodness of God then love is expressed toward God. Ps. 116:1, "I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my supplications. Because He has inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live." In just the same way is there a contrast between humility and pride. The humble man/woman is glad to praise God while the proud are like what Habakkuk said of the Chaldeans (Hab. 1:16, "they sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their dragnet."). What is the humble soul like in thanksgiving? Listen to Jacob, Gen. 32:10, "I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies and of all the truth which You have shown Your servant; for I crossed over this Jordan with my staff, and now I have become two companies." Or David, II Sa. 7:18, "Then King David went in and sat before the Lord; and he said: "Who am I, O Lord God? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far?"

#### **IV. When these spiritual graces are exercised in thanksgiving they keep us from many sins.**

What sins do they keep us from? (1) The graces of thanksgiving keep us from a kind of hard-hearted presumption as we enjoy the blessings of God. If we simply receive the gifts, but forget the Giver then as Ps. 69:22, "their table becomes a snare before them, and their well-being a trap." But when we savor every blessing and look up to its Author: I Ti.4:4, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving." We have the blessing when we acknowledge God the Giver. (2) The grace of thanksgiving keeps us from complaining, from the blue funk that aims against God and complains against Him and sours our whole lives. Complaining is the scum of discontent in which a person is angry in troubles and blessings are ignored as *of course that is the way it is supposed to be!* Like the spoiled child is likely to throw a tantrum when deprived of something he assumes must be his, so men deprived of what they think of as a right are likely to do the same thing. But the thankful heart guards us against these: In troubles - Job 2:10, "Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" The thankful heart is sensitive to all the good God has done even in the worst of conditions: Job 1:21, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; Blessed be the name of the Lord." The gracious heart is forever seeing reason to thank God and so submits to God. (3) The grace of thanksgiving keeps us from distrust. The Apostle prescribes just this very remedy in Phil. 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." When you *count your blessings* acknowledging God who gave them it prevents distrust. Listen how the Psalmist is kept in the midst of present trouble from distrust by counting his blessings, remembering what God had done: Ps. 77:10, "And I said, "This is my anguish; But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High. I will remember the works of the Lord; Surely I will remember Your wonders of old." Remembering God's goodness in the past is like money in the bank to spend looking toward His future goodness so that I can wait His timing. (4)

Finally, the grace of thanksgiving remembers who is to be thanked, praised, and acknowledged as the source of every blessing and so it is a cure to spiritual pride: I Cor. 4:7, "For who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" The greater the blessings of God upon us, the more we are indebted to His grace. And we must remember that we have all from God and for God so that we are not simply self-centered with everything for ourselves. And since we are the recipients of such great bounty from God, let us not rob God, not steal from God, by failing to give thanks to Him as if we were the idol from whom all blessings flow.

### **V. A Challenge: Let us return thanksgiving as bountiful as God's blessing!**

How about that for a challenge!! That is not simply the preacher's challenge, but that is God's will in Christ Jesus for you: I Thess. 5:18, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." How else can we be encouraged to return thanks to God? Remember....

(1.) It is good for you! It is good spiritually. The Christian giving thanks is an evidence of faith and love. It shows these graces active and growing in your life when you look to God in everything, both blessings and trials. We will sing Old Hundredth, Psalm 100, *All people that on earth do dwell, sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.* If all people had given thanks to God for His great merciful blessings then they would not have fallen into idolatry: [Acts 14:16, "Who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."] Ro. 1:20, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts..." The idol of good luck, chance, fate, or simply man's own ingenuity has been and is the great perverter of men. But the Christian is given this work, the work of the angels and of the church in heaven, to praise God for all His marvelous works and that is a good work to be called to do!

(2.) We are completely and always dependent on God. Because we are not idolaters whether that be luck, chance, or self, the Christian says, *I live every moment upon the mercy and goodness of God. It is not enough for me simply to have a few creature comforts from God and so then I will have nothing more to do with Him. I must return thanks because far beyond these He has given me the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus my Lord.* My friends, many have been far more thankful for far less than we enjoy. It should not be that those that receive the most should return the least to God, but far more often has it been the case that the most humble with little have returned the most in thanksgiving.

I want to leave you with this from the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonian Church. That which he was most especially, most particularly

filled with thanksgiving to God - He was *bound, always, as is fitting* - was for spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus. God gives too all day to day blessings, but His salvation, the riches of His grace in Jesus Christ, He gives to His own. Mt. 13:11, "it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given." Phil. 1:29, "For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe, but to suffer..." Think about that! *It has been granted to you to believe.*

As you enjoy the blessings of family, friends, feasting on Thanksgiving Day, Oh remember, *I am indebted to Thanksgiving by the Blessings of God!* And what a joyful and pleasant and good duty it is to give thanks to the Lord our God. AMEN.