

FRIDAY NIGHT SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

THE DOCTRINE OF GRATITUDE

INTRODUCTION

- A.** Is gratitude actually a doctrine? Yes.
1. The word 'doctrine' means 'teaching'.
 2. Gratitude is something which must be taught.
- B.** In reformed theology the doctrine of sanctification (the holy life) is called the 'doctrine of gratitude'.
1. Why? Because a holy life is partly our way of saying 'thank you' to God for saving us.
 2. We are not saved by being sanctified.
 - a. If sanctification were either the cause or the precondition of salvation, salvation would ultimately be by works not by grace.
 - b. But if we are saved by grace not works, where does sanctification come in?
Answer:
 - (1) It is like a PS at the end of a letter.
 - (2) Sanctification is our way of saying:
`Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul,
Thank you, Lord, for making me whole;
Thank you, Lord, for giving to me
Thy great salvation so rich and free.'
- C.** Definitions:
1. Gratitude: Showing that one values the kindness of God in saving us.
 - a. It is a feeling, but it is more than a feeling.
 - b. Gratitude is what we *do*; it may be a sacrifice in that we don't have an overwhelming feeling.
 - (1) Sometimes we *feel* grateful, sometimes we do not.
 - (2) But we must always *be* grateful, whether or not we feel it.
 - c. Gratitude shows that we set a value on God's kindness.

The Doctrine of Gratitude

(1) 'In order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.' Eph. 2:7.

(2) 'But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Saviour, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.' Titus 3:4-7.

2. Sanctification: the process by which we are made holy.

a. It is a process not a crisis experience.

(1) There is a sense in which sanctification is something that happens to every Christian: 'To open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.' Acts 26:18.

(2) We are all sanctified in Christ. 'It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God - that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.' I Cor. 1:30.

b. It is progressive and is never completed until we are glorified.

(1) 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.' Rom. 12:1-2.

(2) 'Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenwards in Christ Jesus.' Phil. 3:12-14.

c. Sanctification is a life sentence.

(1) If we 'got it' completely along the way, we could forget about it from then on!

(2) But only glorification will mark the end of this life sentence. 'And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.' Rom. 8:30.

D. Why is this theological study important?

1. Gratitude must be taught; we must never assume that it comes automatically.

The Doctrine of Gratitude

2. Sanctification must be preached; that is why all Paul's epistles urge its acceptance and practice.
3. Many Christians are confused as to the place of sanctification in the Christian life; this lesson will put it in a sound theological and biblical framework.
4. It is sobering to realize how much God hates ingratitude; the warning may well be timely for many of us.
5. It is encouraging to know how much God loves our gratitude; this should spur us on to be more thankful than ever.

I SANCTIFICATION DOES NOT PRECEDE BUT FOLLOWS REGENERATION

A. Regeneration (def.): being born again.

1. Regeneration is an unconscious work of the Holy Spirit.
 - a. It is what produces faith. I Thess. 2:13.
 - (1) Faith does not produce regeneration.
 - (2) Faith shows that life was already there, or one could not have faith.
 - b. Many people can tell you the 'day and the hour' when they were born again.
 - (1) This is probably not always quite true, although one knows what such people mean by this.
 - (2) What is more likely true is that some people can tell you the day and hour when they were *conscious* of being saved; in other words, when they came to assurance of salvation.
2. Regeneration is the life of God in the soul of man. I John 5:11-12.
 - a. It is what awakened him or her from being 'dead'. Eph. 2:1.
 - (1) Until one was given life there was no way one could believe.
 - (2) Life came first; faith followed. Eph. 2:4-5.
 - b. It is called a 'new creation.' 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!' II Cor. 5:17.
 - (1) It is what God does and is as supernatural as when God initially said, 'Let there be light' and light came. Gen. 1:3.
 - (2) God's new creation is done by a Sovereign Redeemer. Eph. 1:7.

The Doctrine of Gratitude

- B.** As faith follows regeneration, so too sanctification.
1. We cannot enter into the process of being made holy until life, made possible by the Spirit, is there to make this possible.
 - a. It is like making the horse follow the cart by making a person holy before he has faith.
 - b. It is asking a person to manifest good works when he really needs to know he is saved by Christ's work.
 2. We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone.
 - a. God's righteousness is given 'through faith in Jesus Christ'. Rom. 3:22.
 - b. The object of that faith is Christ's blood. Rom. 3:25.
- C.** The gospel of Christ is the good news that we are saved without works.
1. It is not given to the man who works for it but to the one who does not work for it.
 - a. 'However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.' Rom. 4:5.
 - b. Where is boasting then? 'It is excluded.' Rom. 3:27.
 2. It is absolutely free - upon the condition of faith. 'For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no-one can boast.' Eph. 2:8-9.
- D.** If we have understood the nature of the gospel (that we are saved unconditionally) we are going to ask, 'What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning, so that grace may increase?' Rom. 6:1.
1. If we don't ask that question, chances are, we haven't understood the gospel!
 2. And yet if we think that we must go on sinning it shows we still haven't understood it!
 - a. This is the reason for Romans 6, which shows that the old self 'was crucified'. Rom. 6:6.
 - b. Not that we are unable to sin but because we are able not to sin! St Augustine's four stages of man:
 - (1) Able to sin (before the Fall).
 - (2) Not able not to sin (after the Fall).
 - (3) Able not to sin (after regeneration).

The Doctrine of Gratitude

(4) Not able to sin (glorification).

c. Paul therefore says to the regenerated person, 'Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.' Rom. 6:11.

(1) 'Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.' Rom. 6:12.

(2) 'It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.' I Thess. 4:3.

E. Sanctification must be preached and taught; this is why we have the epistles of Paul. I Cor. 6:9-11.

1. Sanctification is not a condition of salvation; otherwise we would look to our sanctification to be sure we are saved, which would be a gospel of works. Gal. 1:6ff.

2. Sanctification is obedience to God as evidence of our gratitude to him for graciously saving us. II Pet. 1:10.

a. It is obedience, but obedience that must be taught.

b. It is gratitude, gratitude that must be taught. 'This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.' Titus 3:8.

II GOD HATES INGRATITUDE AND LOVES OUR BEING THANKFUL

A. In Romans 1 Paul demonstrates the justice of God's wrath on men.

1. They suppress the truth by their wickedness. Rom. 1:18.

2. What is known about God is made plain to them so that they are without excuse. Rom. 1:19-20.

3. Such people 'neither glorified him as God *nor gave thanks to him.*' Rom. 1:21.

B. Paul lists conditions of wickedness in the last days. 'People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy.' II Tim. 3:2.

1. In a generation that did as they 'saw fit' (Judges 21:25), their backsliding was rooted in ingratitude. 'The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the LORD; they forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asherahs.' Judges 3:7.

2. 'But they forgot the LORD their God; so he sold them into the hands of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hands of the Philistines and the king of Moab, who fought against them.' I Sam. 12:9.

The Doctrine of Gratitude

- a. 'They forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them.' Ps. 78:11.
 - b. 'But they soon forgot what he had done and did not wait for his counsel.' Ps. 106:13.
3. Ingratitude is so serious that Moses warned: 'If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods, and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.' Deut. 8:19-20. Cf. Lev. 26.
- C. Jesus healed ten lepers, but only one came back to thank him.
1. The one who expressed gratitude 'threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him.' Luke 17:15-16.
 2. Jesus asked, "Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?" Luke 17:17.
- D. God has made it abundantly clear how he appreciates gratitude.
1. 'I will praise God's name in song and glorify him with thanksgiving.' Ps. 69:30.
 2. 'Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song.' Ps. 95:2.
 3. 'Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.' Ps. 100:4.
 4. 'Sing to the LORD with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp.' Ps. 147:7.
 5. 'Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.' Phil. 4:6.
 6. 'Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.' Col. 4:2.
- E. One reason that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper is that we would never forget. 'And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'" Luke 22:19.
1. An essential ingredient in gratitude is *remembering* what God has done.
 2. We are put on our honour to remember to be thankful.

III HOW DO WE SHOW OUR GRATITUDE?

A. By a holy life.

1. We are not saved by being holy; we are holy because we have been saved.
2. But because we are still sinners - 'prone to wander, Lord, I feel it' - we easily forget and become careless.
 - a. Sanctification is not only possible but inevitable if we are saved.
 - b. But the depth of our holiness is determined by how grateful we are.

B. By our worship. 'Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name.' Heb. 13:15.

1. This does not merely refer to our public worship - singing hymns and choruses etc. - though this is important.
 - a. The public worship encouraged by King David centred on instrumental music and singing.
 - (1) 'David told the leaders of the Levites to appoint their brothers as singers to sing joyful songs, accompanied by musical instruments: lyres, harps and cymbals.' I Chron. 15:16.
 - (2) On the day the Ark was brought to Jerusalem David committed to Asaph and his associates a 'psalm of thanks to the LORD: Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.' I Chron. 16:7ff. Cf. Ps. 105.
 - b. Public worship to God honours him; he inhabits our praises.
 - (1) Like the mist that rises to the heavens and forms clouds that make rain, so our praise brings down blessing.
 - (2) 'May the peoples praise you, O God; may all the peoples praise you. Then the land will yield its harvest, and God, our God, will bless us.' Ps. 67:5-6.
2. This is done by each of us individually in our time alone with God.
 - a. 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.' Col. 3:16.
 - b. We can learn to praise God and sing *just to him* when we are alone.

C. By giving him one tenth of our income.

1. Tithing was made legal under the Law. Lev. 27:30.

The Doctrine of Gratitude

- a. This means it was required.
 - b. Under Abraham it emerged as a principle when Abraham, and Jacob after him, gave one tenth voluntarily. Gen. 14:20. Cf. Gen. 28:22.
2. We are not under Law but under grace.
- a. We are not required to tithe as a condition of salvation.
 - b. But God promises to bless those who do (he didn't have to): "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." Mal. 3:10.
- (1) This principle continues in the New Testament. I Cor. 16:2.
- (2) The principle of receiving is also continued: 'Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.' II Cor. 9:6.
- D. By sharing our faith. 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.' John 20:21.
1. We show our gratitude to God for saving us by our sharing our faith with others.
 2. What if our gratitude to God were summed up entirely by our witnessing to others - what gratitude to God would *you* have manifested until now?
 3. There is a glorious fringe benefit in sharing our faith: 'I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.' Philemon 6.
- E. By the amount of time we spend alone with God.
1. We reveal how important another person is to us by the actual amount of time we give to them.
 2. How much time do you give solely to God by being utterly alone with him and talking only to him?
 - a. There will be no praying like this in heaven.
 - b. Are you happy about your personal prayer life? If not, do something about it now - starting today!
- F. By discovering what pleases the Lord.
1. This comes by experiencing two things:

The Doctrine of Gratitude

- a. Walking in the light. I John 1:7.
- b. Becoming acquainted with the ungrieved Spirit of God. Eph. 4:30.
- 2. When we discern what pleases him we know better how to please him!
- G.** By disciplined church attendance.
 - 1. It is no small insult to God's name when his people are not found regularly meeting together.
 - 2. 'Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching.' Heb. 10:25.
- H.** By respecting those God has put over you.
 - 1. 'Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.' I Thess. 5:13.
 - 2. 'Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.' Heb. 13:7.
- I.** By doing good works such as helping when it is needed.
 - 1. The AV refers to the gift of 'helps' ('those able to help others' - NIV). I Cor. 12:28.
 - 2. This can include:
 - a. Visiting the sick, the widow, the helpless. James 1:27.
 - b. Feeding the poor. James 2:6,14ff.
 - c. Giving someone a ride to church.
 - d. Doing things in your church that nobody wants to do: cleaning up, help with flowers, or whatever needs to be done.
 - e. Whatever makes your pastors's job easier so that 10% of the people won't be doing nearly all the work.

IV FOR WHAT ARE YOU GRATEFUL?

- A.** Salvation: God sending his Son to die on a cross.
- B.** That he gave you faith.
- C.** Your church - that person who had a hand in leading you to Christ.

The Doctrine of Gratitude

- D.** Your Minister whose preaching and pastoring feeds your soul.
- E.** Your job - your income.
- F.** Your health.
- G.** The Bible.
- H.** What God did for you yesterday.

CONCLUSION

- A.** There is no end to the list by which we can demonstrate our gratitude to God.
- B.** The highest level of gratitude however: not expecting thanks from God who has enabled you to obey. `So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, "We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty." Luke 17:10.