

## Thanksgiving Day – November 24, 2010

Knowing that I was to speak this morning, a passage that we had in our Tuesday class attracted my attention in a special way. The verses that especially were impressed upon my mind were Eph. 1:15-17:

- 15 Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints,
- 16 Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers;
- 17 That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you . . .

And then I remembered that the Apostle Paul wrote in a similar way to other churches. And so I began to look for those references. Now all of the references I am going to read to you have to do with the Apostle Paul's thanksgiving for the people of God in the churches. And I believe that this not only showed that he believed that the thanksgiving all belonged to God, but it showed, as his letters to the churches also indicate, how concerned he was for the people of God.

We live in difficult days. We are faced with a lot of uncertainties in our world today. But we can be thankful to God that we have some divine certainties to cling to and these have to do with God and what He is doing in our lives today. These are days when we need to give special attention to our relationship with the Lord as a church, and that means we all need to be concerned about each other and our personal, individual fellowship with the Lord.

Now I found the same kind of thanksgiving that Paul gave for the work in Ephesus expressed in several of Paul's other letters to the churches in his day. I found the first one in Romans 1:8-9:

- 8 First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.
- 9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers;

The next was in 1 Corinthians 1:4-5:

- 4 I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;
- 5 That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge . . .

I went on to Paul's letter to the church at Philippi, and discovered these words in Philippians 1:3-6:

- 3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,
- 4 Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,
- 5 For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;
- 6 Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

Colossians 1:3-9 gave me another instance of Paul's thanksgiving:

- 3 We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you,
- 4 Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,
- 5 For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;
- 6 Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth:
- 7 As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ;
- 8 Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.
- 9 For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you . . .

There were more references in 1 and 2 Thessalonians than in any of the other epistles. Listen to what he wrote

in 1 Thessalonians 1:2-4:

- 2 We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers;
- 3 Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;
- 4 Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

See also 1 Thessalonians 2:13:

13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Then 1 Thessalonians 3:9-10:

- 9 For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;
- 10 Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

And then on to 2 Thessalonians 1:3:

3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.

And finally, as far as the churches are concerned, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14:

- 13 But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:
- 14 Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible clearly teaches that, while we may be thankful for each other and the blessing we have been to each other, all thanksgiving needs to be directed, first of all, to the three members of the Godhead. We need to be careful about just being thankful; we need to express our thanksgiving to God! We hear a lot about just being thankful people, and that is good, but we miss the point if we don't see that God is the One to Whom we need to be thankful. All of our blessings spiritually, physically, and materially are expressions of His goodness to us. As the Doxology reminds us, we are to praise God from whom all blessings flow.

But we need to be thankful, like the Apostle was, and as he expressed himself in these verses that I have read to you, for each other. God gives many of His blessings to us through each other. That which gives us the greatest joy is to see the way our fellow-believers are walking in the Lord. And Paul's statements which I have read to you indicate that the people we know who are walking with the Lord are the people that we pray for, and should pray for. Paul knew that we all need prayer. He expressed in many places that he needed prayer. I believe that the Bible teaches us that the most important work that is going on in the world today, or in any generation, is what God is doing in the lives of His people. So as we see blessing, let us thank God. When people are growing in the Lord, pray for them. The more we are intent on pleasing the Lord, the more the Devil will be doing to hinder and discourage us. But greater is He Who is in us than he who is in the world. So let us thank the Lord today for what He has done in our lives, and then pray for each other, as the Apostle did, that the blessing we have seen will continue and increase for the glory of the Lord. And let us give our thanksgiving today, as many have this morning, to the God Who loved us, and continues to love us, as He expressed over 2,000 years ago, when in fulfillment of His promises, He sent His only begotten Son into the world to suffer and die for us that we might be saved from sin's penalty and sin's power. To Him belongs all of the glory. Thanksgiving Day is just one day out of the whole year in which we need to direct our thanksgiving to God. (If time permits tell about being with Mary, Barbara, and Beverly, the McCaleb daughters, yesterday.)