

What Every Christian Needs To Know About Thankfulness Part 3



The last five years have seen a flurry of articles written on what has been called the “Me generations” or “millennials” – those born between 1980 and 2000. Social studies along with specific polling has revealed an acute deficiency among these generations not generally found in the preceding generations. They lack thankfulness. That being said, many millennials would disagree. Not that they lack thankfulness but that such should be viewed as a problem (or deficiency). The “new thinking” is that thankfulness is a hindrance – or mental obstacle that keeps people from truly being happy, successful or pursuing a more meaningful path in life. Ironically, suicide and depression has plagued these generations more than any prior. Equally so, the work ethic and perseverance necessary to upward movement in career or the business world has proven to be the worst among the Me generations. That being said, millennials are not the only ones affected. The predominance of such thinking has also influenced older generations. We are progressively becoming a “Me America”, a place where thankfulness no longer exists. Unfortunately, ignorance as to what constitutes and secures thankfulness as well as what God teaches to be the consequences of lacking thankfulness have caused not a few Christians to follow this destructive path. Hence the reason for this study on the subject of Thankfulness¹.

“As Christians we should be majoring on the majors of the Bible. Thankfulness is clearly a major message in the Bible given all the different ways and times it is communicated (rejoice, praise, blessed, worship, etc.; e.g. Psalms 138:1).” - RSJ

What (then) we (as Christians) need to know to about thankfulness:

1. Being thankful means possessing deep sense of gratitude toward God recognizing Him to be the primary cause of all grace/goodness shown to us. (1Ch 29:10-17; Jam 1:16-18; e.g. 1Ti 1:12-17)

2. Experiencing/feeling the deep sense of gratitude that accompanies/defines thankfulness doesn’t happen without regular and constant calling to mind what God has promised to/done for us. (Deu 4:9; Psalms 9:1, 103:1-19, 104:14, 24-34; 1Ch 16:8-17; Deu 7:9, 8:18; 2Co 1:20; Rom 8:28-32; Eph 1:15-23...Eph 2:1-9; contra - Jer 2:29-32)

We are self-programmed robots – you operate/ behave/become what you cultivate in your mind (“you are what you think *not* what you think you are” – Pro 23:7 [Fn] “As he calculates/thinks in his heart so is he [in his person]”; also Pro 27:19).

3. Where there is genuine thankfulness, there is also reciprocation, a giving back (to God) of faithful obedience. Our obedience is the return God expects for His gift of goodness/grace to us.² (Phi 2:12; Eph 2:10; Rom 6:15-18 w/23 w/8:12-14; also Rom 12:1-2)

4. All forms of unhappiness (depression, discontentment, unfulfilled living, feeling sorry for yourself, etc.) and poor performance (laziness, lack of productivity, etc.) can be (and often are) signs of lacking thankfulness/gratitude.

Numerous studies have concluded that thankfulness (or gratitude) determines a person’s happiness more than any other factor (Gen 4:3-5).

5. The consequences of not being thankful are serious and surprising.

They include:

5.1. False religion (Rom 1:21-23) = According to Paul, it is the lack of thankfulness which is the cause (or reason) many are duped into the darkness of false religions. It is b/c “they did not honor as God or give thanks to Him” that “they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened” (exchanging “the truth about God for a lie”). What then can be said about those running headlong into the false religions of this world – including the New Atheism or Theistic Evolution (i.e. God did not create everything in 6 literal days)? Not that they are more intellectually astute. Rather the problem is moral - they are (rebellious) people who refuse to be thankful (to God) for who they are and what they have. And (as a result) open themselves up to be deceived.

5.2. Homosexuality (Rom 1:24-27) = The lack of thankfulness that leads to idolatry/false religion can (from there) lead in the direction of sexual perversion. In this case, the sexual perversion of homosexuality. The connection between lacking thankfulness and homosexuality is more apparent than our depraved/wicked culture would like to admit. For example, Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psycho-analysis, taught narcissism or extreme self-love to be the underlying basis of all homosexual desire and behavior. Long-standing psycho-analytical research has also confirmed narcissistic tendencies to be far more commonplace among homosexuals than heterosexuals³⁴. The high number of brutal homicides among intimate partners within the homosexual community⁵ also bears witness to its narcissistic-unthankful roots as this has proven to be the basis of such violent crimes.⁶

5.3. Mental illness (Rom 1:28-32) = What Paul describes as a “debased mind” is true mental illness. And it is filled a list of things that “ought not to be done” (or as he says in verse 29) “all manner of unrighteousness and evil”. Their mental illness (or debased mind) also makes them “inventors of evil” and those who not only practice all kinds of wicked things but also “give approval” to others (“who practice them”). We might say they are crazy for evil” – that is their mental state. And it (too) is another consequence of lacking thankfulness (“since they did not see fit to acknowledge God” = To give thanks to Him for what they are and have, God gave them up to a “debased mind”).

5.4.

As discussed under homosexuality, lacking thankfulness is “at the heart” of all narcissism. What then more needs to be said about this particular consequence is at it relates to its symptoms or signs. It is common for narcissists to act as though they are concerned – or care for others, when in reality their motive for doing so is largely self-serving. Seemingly caring words used by the narcissist (“How are you?”) function more as the bait for drawing individuals into hearing the concerns - or satisfying the needs, of the narcissist. Such ploys are therefore also the epitome of hypocrisy and selfish manipulation of others. And once more, it is the result of lacking thankfulness. IOW: it happens b/c they are not taking the time to remind themselves – relish in, what God has already abundantly supplied to them – which includes everything needed (at that point in their life) for personal happiness and faithful obedience (2Pe 1:3 = As Christians, we always have everything we need for a happy life and holy/godly living; e.g. Gen 2:18 = God gave Eve – not Steve to satisfy Adam’s need for close friendship/companionship [a best friend] yet many husbands seek to have such relationships w/other men rather than their wives. As such they become guilty of lacking thankfulness for their wives.).

¹ An historical sampling as to how the world views thankfulness/gratitude -or the lack thereof: “Gratitude [Thankfulness] is the alpha, the point from which all virtues must begin...it is the heavyweight champion of virtues” –Jonathan Last (Author of The Seven Deadly Virtues); “Ingratitude is the most horrible and unnatural crime that a person is capable of committing.” – David Hume (18th century Scottish philosopher); “No other vice is so hostile to the harmony of the human race as ingratitude.” – Seneca (Ancient Roman philosopher)

² “[Grace] is best captured by the anthropological category of gift. This category is broad, but covers a sphere of voluntary, personal relations that are characterized by goodwill in giving of some benefit or favor and that elicit some form of reciprocal return that is both voluntary and necessary for the continuation of the relationship...A modern Western dictionary tells us that ‘gift’ means something handed over ‘gratuitously, for nothing.’ But even the slightest knowledge of antiquity would inform us that gifts were given with strong expectations of return – indeed, precisely in order to elicit a return and thus create or enhance social solidarity.” – John M.G. Barclay (*Paul And The Gift*); “A historical awareness makes it clear that equating gratitude to solely an inner feeling is insufficient. In the history of ideas, gratitude is considered an action (returning a favor) that is not only virtuous in and of itself, but valuable to society. To reciprocate is the right thing to do.” - Scott Kaufman (Dept of Psychology, University California Davis; “Is Gratitude Queen of the Virtues and Ingratitude King of the Vices?”); “There is no duty more indispensable than that of returning a kindness” – Cicero (Ancient Roman philosopher)

³ According to orthodox psychoanalytical theory, narcissism and homosexuality are strongly associated... The hypothesis, which is based on the Freudian connection between narcissism and homosexuality, is supported by the results, indicating that the homosexual students score higher in both measures of narcissism and lower on the self-esteem measure, compared to their heterosexual counterparts.” – Gibi Rubinstein, (“Narcissism and Self-Esteem Among Homosexual and Heterosexual Male Students”, School of Behavioral Sciences, Netanya Academic College, Netanya, Israel); “Scientific studies have revealed that gratitude is foundational to well-being and mental health throughout the life span. From childhood to old age, accumulating evidence documents the wide array of psychological, physical, and relational benefits associated with gratitude. In the past few years, there has been a tremendous increase in the accumulation of scientific evidence showing the contribution of gratitude to psychological and social well-being. Clinical trials indicate that the practice of gratitude can have dramatic and lasting positive effects in a person’s life. It can lower blood pressure, improve immune function, promote happiness and well-being, and spur acts of helpfulness, generosity, and cooperation. Additionally, gratitude reduces lifetime risk for depression, anxiety, and substance abuse disorders (Emmons, 2007, 2013; Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Given the range of benefits linked with gratitude, it has fittingly been referred to as the quintessential positive trait (Wood, 2010), the amplifier of goodness in oneself, the world, and others (Watkins, 2014) and as having unique power to heal, energize, and change lives (Emmons, 2013).” - Scott Kaufman

⁴ “Narcissists reject the ties that bind people into relationships of reciprocity. They expect special favors and feel no need to pay back or pay forward. Given this constellation of characteristics, being grateful in any meaningful way is beyond the capacity of most narcissists. Without empathy, they cannot appreciate an altruistic gift because they cannot identify with the mental state of the gift-giver. Narcissism is a spiritual blindness; it is a refusal to acknowledge [or be thankful] that one has been the recipient of benefits freely bestowed by others.” – Dr. Scott Kaufman

⁵ “Forensic pathologists often state that homosexual homicides are more violent than those with heterosexual victims...Homosexual homicides are more violent than heterosexual homicides when one compares the mean number of injuries (fatal sharp, blunt, and total)/case and the extent of injuries on the body” – M.D. Bell (“Homicide in homosexual victims: a study of 67 cases from the Broward County, Florida, Medical Examiner’s office (1982-1992), with special emphasis on ‘overkill.’”).

⁶ “If there is, from the standpoint of personality, one red thread running through the majority of violent crimes, this would be *narcissism*.” – Michael H. Stone (“Violent Crimes And Their Relationship To Personality Disorders”, Columbia College Of Physicians, New York)

5.5.

(Phi 4:6-7) = Gaining the “peace of God” that guards against “anxiousness” (or anxiety) only comes to those who possess thankfulness (since you can’t genuinely pray “w/thanksgiving” unless you genuinely possess it). Another sign (then) that a person is lacking thankfulness (or regularly cultivating thankfulness) is that they are anxious or suffering with anxiety. The unusual thing about these kinds of people (those struggling w/anxiety) is that they will (often) appear – or act as though they are very thankful people (but their thankful attitude is empty – i.e. not really based on spending time thinking/acknowledging all the ways God has been good to them). At the same time, when these people are reminded of God’s goodness – or how God is using all things – including the stressful thing they are going thru – when they see/believe that (or finally embrace that as truth) - then they experience the peace that Paul is talking about (as witnessed by the author many times). **The point not to miss:** the cause of anxiousness is not stress. The problem is lacking thankfulness (or not taking the time to truly cultivate thinking that reminds us of God’s goodness) so that we can have that deep sense of gratitude – and peace, no matter what we are going thru. As before, the science of our secular world also bears witness to this. A recent study found that when participants were told to write something down every day they were grateful for, those individuals reported having less stress/anxiety.

5.6.

(e.g. Hezekiah – 2Chr 32:22-25 w/2Ki 20:1-11) (Psa 92) = The stupid/foolish person does not understand the “good” associated w/giving thanks and cultivating such thankfulness thru daily meditation/reflection on God’s faithfulness [in the “morning” and “evening”]. According to the Psalmist, it is not only what distinguishes the wicked from the righteous (as affirmed in Rom 1), but also why the righteous continue in good health [vv12-14]. In this light consider Paul’s admonition in (1Ti 4:1-5) = Those who preach abstinence from certain foods as though they could be the source of poor [spiritual/physical] health are listening to “deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons”. The key to food being safe (versus harmful) is rec’g it w/ “thanksgiving” (Paul makes a similar point in Rom 14:6 and 1Co 10:30). Unlike the foolish health gurus of today, never do we find the biblical authors (and therefore ultimately God) ever considering food as the reason for deadly diseases (e.g. cancer). Rather, all such things are relegated to the realm of morality. IOW: why people get seriously sick and die is due to sin – not their dietary choices. It is a person’s moral behavior that should therefore be our first focus when attempting to assess why a person is afflicted. How foolish then when Christians follow the folly of worldly wisdom in these things. And that especially when Jesus can go as far as to say that we can drink “poison” and be okay if we are being righteous (). **The point not to miss:** the sin of being unthankful is recorded in Scripture as a cause of poor health. This (iow) is a particular consequence associated w/ lacking thankfulness. Imagine how much better we might feel/be if we just focused on being thankful for all the incredibly good food choices we possess rather than being unthankful (for them) thru their condemnation/avoidance - believing the problem to be the food itself. Such arguments reveal the same poor logic as possessed by those blaming guns for violence in society. Like guns, food is nothing more than a neutral instrument/agent/tool bearing neither bad or good qualities in and of itself (Heb 13:9). It can be used to produce negative/destructive results – but is never the cause. According to God’s Word, the cause is always sin or the deviant moral behavior of the individual. And going back to Paul, the only way eating becomes a moral issue is when it is done w/o giving thanks - otherwise, it is to be treated as “good”. Hence the reason there are no distinctions made as to what kind of “food” Paul is referring to. Nor as to what he means by “good”. There are no caveats or qualifiers on either the word “food” or “good” since once more, the problem is not found in what we are eating but the moral state in which we are choosing to do it. We find a similar example in (1Co 11:27-30). People were not getting sick or dying because of the quality of their food, but b/c of their moral state at the time of ingesting. What 1Corinthians and 1Timothy also reveal is that taking this position (i.e. that certain types of foods should be avoided as the means to avoiding disease/death) is not a new issue in the history of the world. It existed in the early church among false teachers who took their eyes off where the real problem existed – a lack of thankfulness. If then you are a person condemning certain types of food, you are not a thankful person since according to Paul - as well as the rest of Scripture, all food is a gift from God – including Doritos! That’s the good/deep theology of the Bible. Lacking thankfulness/sin is the cause of our sicknesses/disease and why God can (and will) use all types of food (as well as other things) to bring suffering when we live in disobedience/lack thankfulness (Deu 28:58-63) ⁷.

5.7.

Scripture confirms that God gives to (or blesses) those who are thankful. The antithesis of that would also (therefore) be true – God withholds good from (makes life hard for) those who lack thankfulness/gratitude – Job 8:11-13; Psa 50:14-23; 1Ch 29:17; Phi 4:6; Eph 5:4, 20; Col 1:10-12 w/2:6-7 w/3:16-17 w/4:2). As before, even the unbelieving world seems to know this to be true (at least as it relates to life in this world)⁸. What God’s Word (however) confirms as also associated w/lacking thankfulness/gratitude is the ultimate consequence of Hell or eternal damnation. IOW: God will condemn (not save) those who fail to be characterized by an attitude of thankfulness (1Th 5:18 w/Heb 10:36-39; also 2Ti 3:1-8 – “ungrateful...disqualified in relation to the faith”). As further support, the three consequences of Rom 1 and Phi 3 – or sub-points 5.1, 2 and 3. (dogs, sexually perverse and idolaters), make up the list of those outside the gates of heaven in (Rev 22:15). **The point not to miss:** remaining a Christian requires that I be a thankful person. This includes even for the bad things I may witness in my life (e.g. those who have gone apostate in the church – 1Co 10; need to be thankful for the signs; “see the sign otherwise you will be the sign”). This understanding of thankfulness/gratitude was not lost on who many consider to be one of early American history’s greatest thinkers and theologians - Jonathan Edwards. In his *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* he wrote that thankfulness toward God is among the signs of true religion. As such, Edwards believed an attitude of thankfulness/gratitude was one of the most accurate ways of attesting to the presence of God in a person’s life.

CLOSING CONTEMPLATION/CHALLENGE = If thankfulness were the character trait your entire salvation was dependent upon (obviously it is not- God requires more out of our obedience than just being thankful) – but (hypothetically speaking) if that were the case, how would you fair on Judgment Day? Again, though that Day will prove to be about more than just thankfulness – it will (at the same time) not be anything less (than that) – which means IT MUST BE there also if I am to be approved for heaven. Or to put it in Paul’s words (Col 2:6-7), thanksgiving must be “abounding” if I am to be found as walking in Christ. So again, the question to contemplate/consider, is that you? Remember, it won’t be unless you commit daily to cultivating thankful thoughts and giving praise.

⁷ Like defective genes which still have to be switched on before they become a problem, “junk food” is not always harmful to its recipients indicating that the source of the problem lies elsewhere – in our morality. It is our moral actions which most determine how our body functions including how food is processed (whether it is feeding health or facilitating disease). In other words, we (the human race) are what we do, not what we eat (e.g. Joh 9:1-2). Similar consideration of this issue can be found in “Illness, Disease and Sin: The Connection Between Genetics and Spirituality” by Matthias Beck (Journal Of Bioethics, Non-Ecumenical Studies in Medical Morality): “Today geneticists know a lot about background conditions of diseases. Many of them have genetic origins as do, for instance, all types of cancer. Few are inherited (about 5%), most are acquired (95%). But even inherited genetic defects don’t necessarily lead to disease. A ‘sick’ gene does not necessarily result in people getting sick. Genes must be activated or deactivated, meaning they must be switched on or off. Psycho-neuro-immunologic research has proven direct involvement of the human brain... and relationships on the immune system and on genetic switching. [This switching] or in-formation (of the cell) is complementary to the ontological concept of the soul...[In other words] the soul expresses itself in the morphology [of the human body which houses it]. Man is a being that is ‘constructed’ from the inside out: his spirit and his soul in-form the body’s matter [and health] from within. Because there is a connection between the brain—which represents the thinking and feeling of a human being-and the genes, the entire inner life of the person influences these genetic switching mechanisms. The interpersonal relationships and the environment influence the genes. Thus, both the inner and outer worlds are closely connected to what happens on the genetic level...Stress and depression [for example] change the activity of genes not only in numerous immune messenger substances (cytokines), but also within the cells of the immune system (T-cells and natural-killer cells). Psychic stress and depression can lead to turning off of certain genes of the immune system... Within an organism, cancer cells for instance slowly lose their ability for regular communication. Thus communication becomes disrupted [and] genes are switched wrongly, the cancer cells no longer integrate themselves into the organism of the whole and thus destroy it. The psychosomatic physician Thure von Uexkull considered diseases as expressive of a dysfunctional framework of (human) relationships [i.e. treating others in an unrighteous way]...If psychosomatic theory interprets disease processes in terms of bio-psycho-social events and thus understands illness as resulting from the disruption of relationships (i.e. sin), then it becomes possible to deepen this model to the dimension of the spirit and thus toward God. Disrupted communication [or relationship with our fellow man creates disrupted relationship with God, again sin]. This disrupted communication [between man and God then extends] to the genetic plane... [Since] disease rests on disrupted human relationships (i.e. sin), then the relationship between man and God is highly relevant to medicine.

⁸The ungrateful, complaining man...cripples himself. He is focused on what he has not, particularly on that which somebody else has or seems to have, and by that he tends to poison his world” - Balduin Schwarz (German moral philosopher)