

WHERE TO BE THANKFUL

A Thanksgiving Essay, Glenn Armstrong

Usually when I think about being thankful it has to do with *what* I should be thankful about. Actually, that is what being thankful is all about. Things, people, events, situations, family, friends, health, finances, freedom, redemption, forgiveness, etc., are some of the things connected with the Thanksgiving season.

However, when I take a longer look, the very action of being thankful has to start some place within me. It has to start with the head, move to the heart, reflect in my habit and develop in my home. Unless this process takes place, thanksgiving can be little more than greed and self-centeredness. It is not really thanksgiving at all! Happiness that is just about "me" and "mine" may be good, but not really gratitude. This is the happiness of the Pharisee which Jesus condemned with vengeance! The Pharisee was praying a prayer that publicly expressed his "spiritual" thankfulness that he was not like the "lesser" people. Jesus condemned him for his personal pride.

I. THANKSGIVING IN MY HEAD, Romans 1:21

"...when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were they thankful; but became vain in their imaginations..."

Thanksgiving must have some academic base. The Apostle Paul wrote to the Roman believers reminding them that God was anything but pleased with a generation of people who knew God, but did not glorify (ascribe honor to God), neither were they thankful. To be sure, Paul is making reference to the people who only knew God because of His creation, order, and sustaining power and not in any personal experience of faith and obedience. This is clear by their casting and carving idols to which they bowed down for blessings. They did this through "vain imaginations" and futile thinking. They used their heads wrong, and they were thankful for wrong things.

To really be thankful, I have to take time to evaluate what I am actually thankful for. Of course, this can include things; but it has to be more than things. If it only included things, I would have nothing to be thankful for if I

lost them. I have become very aware of this in the last two years. God has brought several hundred wonderful Christian leaders into our services from all over the third world. Many of them have almost nothing and, even more tragically, they have nothing to look forward to that will ever become better! Yet, they are some of the happiest believers who have been brought into my life! Well beyond being happy, they are excited about serving the Savior. I personally know that some of them have been excommunicated from their families and religions when they became believers. To be sure, their thanksgiving spirit is not limited to things. My head must evaluate my gratefulness. God, thank you for forgiveness, salvation, love and guidance.

II. THANKSGIVING IN MY HEART, Colossians 3:15

"Let the peace of God rule in your hearts...and be ye thankful."

The concept of the heart is a major subject in Holy Scriptures. Beside the physical organ, heart is used to speak of our seat of emotions, moral nature, spiritual life, grief, desires, affections, thoughts, understanding, reasoning powers, etc. One thing is clearly taught in God's Word – that as we think so we become. We will do in our lives what we desire in our hearts! Everyone thinks this is a rule of others, but the best proof that it is a universal truism is to keep thinking that way and wait as see – you will do what you desire. If my mind does not move right thinking into the emotional drive system of my soul, I will both think wrong and do wrong. Gratitude for the right things must move into my soul.

A grateful heart is the only way to a happy life, Colossians 3:16.

III. THANKSGIVING IN MY HABITS, Ephesians 6:6

"...as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart."

Habits are sneaky things, especially bad ones. They come into our lives often uninvited and seemingly harmless. They take up squatters rights and sometime never leave. Habits happen. Bad ones are like crab grass that will grow through asphalt; they come up overnight and immediately establish deep roots. But just try to change a bad habit and replace it with a good one! The good one has to be planted intentionally and watered daily, and still it will take weeks to mature and even then can be destroyed in a day or a deed. Healthy habits grow only in a thankful environment while bad ones grow very well in an environment of anger and self-centeredness.

A grateful heart with healthy habits is the only way to be happy.

IV. THANKSGIVING IN MY HOME, John 14:23

" If anyone love me, he will obey my teachings. My Father will love him and we will come to him and make our home with him"....Jesus

It is not hard to observe when a home is happy. It will be a home that expressed thanksgiving for each other. Evidence will be everywhere. You will be able to see it and hear it. What you see and hear will not be about things; not even about bigger or better things. It will be about each other, the people who make up the home.

I have been asked as a pastor to visit many homes through the years where everyone in the home is unhappy. On more than one occasion I have hardly been able to get into the house for all the plastic toys that had been brought home as bribes. (I almost wrote bribes for the brats, but that wouldn't be nice even though it would be a true description.) Many times the homes were costly and often exchanged for even higher priced ones with more exclusive neighbors. Yet, a better and bigger home does not hide unhappy lives any more than more toys satisfy a selfish child.

One family comes to my mind that I remember being very happy. The father, actually the stepfather, of five children worked hard to pay to have them in our Christian school. He wanted them to be in our school even though he was not a believer in Christ himself. What I remember about this family was that the father brought them to school, came into the building with them, came back to pick them up, attended every school activity that included his children, and they all talked together all the time. The kids looked forward to being with their stepdad just to talk together! I visited their home, and they were all thankful and happy – with very little things to enjoy. They enjoyed each other, and that was their happiness.

We will have happy homes when we have thankful people in them who can enjoy each other and talking together.

A grateful heart that develops healthy habits in a happy home will make for a really fine Thanksgiving.

God give us such homes, Amen

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