

Some Examples of Thanksgiving in the New Testament

There are over sixty references to the giving of thanks in the New Testament. Christ, Paul, John, Luke and the author of Hebrews are portrayed as giving thanks.

Christ thanked His heavenly Father for answering His prayers. In the performance of the two miracles of multiplication of bread and fishes, the feeding of the 5,000 and the 4,000 respectively, Jesus is depicted as thanking God for the food before giving orders for its distribution (John 6:11; Matthew 16:36). When Jesus stood before the tomb of Lazarus, He said: "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me..." (John 11:42). We heard today of the healing miracle of Christ in regard to ten lepers, and Jesus was disappointed that only one man returned to give thanks to our Lord for His gift of new life (Luke 17:18). In connection with the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus took bread and wine and thanked His Heavenly Father for them before giving them to His disciples (Luke 22:14-20).

Paul on Thanksgiving

A study of the passages in most of the epistles of Paul is very instructive in showing us to Whom thanks should be rendered.

Who Is to Be Thanked?

The true God is the object of all of Paul's thanksgivings. The God to whom Paul addresses his thanksgivings is the Father and is associated with Jesus Christ.

In writing to the Roman congregation, Paul declared: "*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you...*" (1:8) In communicating with Timothy, his spiritual son, Paul said: "*I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has made me strong. For He has considered me to be trustworthy and has appointed me into the ministry, ¹³ although I used to be a blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent man. However, I have received mercy, because I acted ignorantly in unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord has also been exceedingly abundant, along with faith and love that are in Christ Jesus*" (1 Timothy 1:12-14). Only those who acknowledge Christ as Saviour and Redeemer, can pray to the Father of our Lord Jesus.

For Whom Should Thanksgiving Be Made?

Prominent in Paul's letters are statements thanking God for the churches he had founded or had been organised by others. In expressing gratitude to God through Jesus Christ, the apostle especially was grateful to God for the spiritual blessings bestowed upon them. In some cases he thanked the Giver of all good things for their election, in others he expressed gratitude for their faith in Christ, in yet others for his convert's missionary zeal. The following passages in the Pauline epistles demonstrate these points: Roman 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:1, 3-4; Ephesians 1:16; Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2; 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

Not only entire congregations are the subject of Paul's thanksgivings but individuals such as Philemon (v. 3-4) or Timothy (2 Tim. 1:3). Paul was grateful to God for the help and support that Aquila and Priscilla had given to him and other Christians (Romans 16:4). Paul likewise thanked God for Titus for the care he had given to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 8:16). Paul thanked God for himself. The things for which gratitude are expressed are grace bestowed upon him that although he had once been a persecutor of Christ's followers, the Lord had forgiven him and called him to proclaim the good news to both Jews and Gentiles (1 Timothy 1:12-14).

For What Paul Thanked God Through Jesus

Paul was thankful for spiritual and earthly blessings, but the greatest of all spiritual gifts was that God had sent His only Son into the world. Just as Paul wanted to proclaim no one other than Christ crucified, so Paul held the gift of God's Son as unfathomable, so that he cried out: *"Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!"* (2 Cor. 9:15).

Prominent in the list of blessings God had bestowed on Paul were those that spoke of a spiritual nature. Thus he was grateful for being freed from the bondage of the Law (Romans 8:25). He thanked God for the victory over the fear of the Law and the sting of death (1 Cor. 15:55). Paul thanked God who, as he declared, *"always leads us in a triumphal procession in Christ and through us makes the fragrant knowledge of Him known in every place"* (2 Cor. 2:14).

Another cause for thanksgiving was the liberality of the Corinthians for the suffering brethren in Judea, (2 Cor. 9:11-12). On his trip to Rome by ship which was shipwrecked in the Mediterranean, Luke reports in his church history book Acts, that Paul encouraged the people who had not partaken of food for fourteen days to eat: He took bread and gave thanks to God in the presence of them all, and when he had broken it he began to eat (Acts 27:35).

In his instructions to Timothy Paul told him to teach people to pray for all men and for those in authority, *"that we may live a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and reverence"* (1 Tim. 2:1-3). In the concluding verses of 1 Thessalonians Paul gives a number of final counsels and says: *"Pray without ceasing! Give thanks in everything!"* (5:17-18).

For us, we too, must in all matters, give thanks to God. not only does He continue to take care of our bodies, but also our souls. He has redeemed and saved us from our sins, and eternal life now waits all who put their faith and trust in Him. To Him be all glory!