

II Corinthians 4:15
“More at the Table for Thanksgiving”

I. THE GRACE THAT MOTIVATES THANKFULNESS

- A. The connection of grace to gratitude
- B. The correctness of gratitude to grace

II. THE GOD THAT MERITS THANKFULNESS

- A. Our thanks must be directed to God
- B. Our thanks must be deflected to God

III. THE GOAL THAT MULTIPLIES THANKFULNESS

- A. The price of this goal
- B. The product of this goal

1. The USDA recommends that adults over the age of 18 consume somewhere between 1,600 and 3,000 calories a day.
2. On Thanksgiving Day, the average American will eat those 3,000 calories in one, single meal. If you add in the rest of the day’s munching and gorging, the number climbs to over 4,500 calories.
3. An average sized person would have to run for four hours, swim for five hours, or walk 30 miles to burn off that 3,000 calorie meal.¹
4. Needless to say, we certainly do not need more *on* the Thanksgiving table. Yet, there should be a desire in all of our hearts to see more people who will give thanks to God, not just at Thanksgiving, but for all eternity.
5. That is the idea behind what Paul said to the Corinthian church in our text.
6. Toward the close of a chapter in which Paul talks at length about his own ministry for Jesus Christ and the gospel, he says in verse 15, *“For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.”*
7. This wonderful, little verse speaks to us about grace, gratitude, the glory of God, and the importance of getting the gospel to as many people as we possibly can.
8. Thanksgiving should be more than just a holiday in the fall; it should be part of the walk and witness of our faith in Jesus.
9. Consider with me what we learn from this verse of Scripture. First of all, we see here:

I. THE GRACE THAT MOTIVATES THANKFULNESS

1. Thankfulness is not an action, but a reaction. Thankfulness is a response to something else. Whenever thankfulness comes *from* us it is because something has first come *to* us.
2. Verse 15 indicates that the motivation for thankfulness is grace. Grace is the action, and thankfulness is the reaction.
3. Paul's heart in this verse was for more grace to be received by men so that more gratitude could be rendered to God.
4. Notice with me how grace motivates our thankfulness. First of all, consider:

A. The connection of grace to gratitude

1. Though we don't see it in our English Bibles, there is an interesting link between the words "grace" and "thanksgiving" in this verse.
2. The word translated "grace" is *charis*. The word translated "thanksgiving" is *eucharistia*.
3. When you look at those two Greek words you see that the word *charis* is contained in the word *eucharistia*.
4. The point is that you cannot have gratitude without grace. Wherever there is true thankfulness, you can be sure that grace is somewhere involved.
5. Once again we are reminded of the absolute necessity of the grace of God. Nothing of any spiritual value would be possible in our lives were it not for the grace of God.
6. You can't be saved from your sin apart from the grace of God. You can't even be thankful for salvation apart from the grace of God.
7. Grace is to spiritual life what oxygen is to physical life. If God withheld His grace from us, there would be no living, and there would certainly be no thanksgiving.
8. Charles Dickens once suggested that instead of one day for Thanksgiving, we should have 364 days of Thanksgiving, and use the one day for griping and complaining.
9. When we understand the connection between grace and gratitude, we realize that there would be *no* days for giving thanks if God had not first given grace.
10. Consider not only the connection of grace to gratitude, but think with me also about:

B. The correctness of gratitude to grace

1. In our culture, the words “Thank you,” have become more of a common courtesy than a genuine expression of gratitude.
2. For instance, if we sat down to a meal in a restaurant, chances are that as our waitress brought us our food, we would say, “Thank you.”
3. In reality, that gratitude is not necessary. She is merely doing her job. Before we leave that restaurant we will pay for the food we have eaten, and chances are that we will “tip” her as well for her service.
4. If you think about it, she is the one who should say “thanks”. Though it is courteous to do so, and we should, our gratitude to her is not required or necessary.
5. When it comes to the grace of God, however, gratitude is absolutely the correct response. His grace in our lives is completely undeserved, unearned, and unwarranted.
6. What we deserve is hell and judgment. What we receive is Jesus, forgiveness, and heaven. That kind of grace can only be met with genuine gratitude.
7. The great preacher, George W. Truett once said that while ingratitude toward other men is wrong and rude, he described ingratitude toward God as “treason”.
8. For those of us who know fully the grace of God in Jesus Christ, ingratitude is not just a misdemeanor; it’s a felony! It is not just rude; it is out right rebellion against God’s goodness and glory.
9. We should not need a special holiday to prompt us to give thanks to God! The grace of God is more than enough motivation to give thanks to the glory of God.
10. As we look closer at this verse, we see not only *the grace that motivates thankfulness*, but we see also further:

II. THE GOD THAT MERITS THANKFULNESS

1. Around the Thanksgiving holiday, even people who do not know and worship God will talk about things for which they are thankful.
2. I found an interesting “Op Ed” article on the internet by a young man named David Swanson. The article is entitled, “I’m thankful for Occupy”, and the opening line states:

“I'm thankful that a growing number of us reject the idea of a mysterious being to which we should be thankful...”ⁱⁱ

3. An atheist celebrating thanksgiving is really a strange idea. It is something like Fidel Castro celebrating the Fourth of July.

4. Paul could not envision gratitude disconnected from God. He labored so that the God who was worthy of thanks would receive it from as many people as possible.

5. Think with me about the God who merits our thankfulness. First of all, we realize that:

A. Our thanks must be directed to Him

1. Again, in our text, Paul said that all he did was for the sake of introducing more people to the grace of God, with the end hope in mind that, “*..the thanksgiving of many [would] redound to the glory of God.*”

2. Paul was interested in men giving thanks to God and glorifying Him for what He had done.

3. Preaching on this text back in 1981, Pastor John Piper said, “...by its very nature, gratitude glorifies the giver.”

4. When I read that, my mind went back to what Brother James said in James 1:17. “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights...*”

5. While it is true that we should be thankful and grateful toward one another, in the end all our gratitude must ultimately be directed toward God, who is the source of all that we have to be grateful for.

6. Do you realize that I could not be thankful to anyone else were it not for what God has first done?

7. I am thankful to my wife for her love, devotion, and companionship. However, were it not for God's grace and blessings, I would have no wife to thank!

8. I am thankful to you as my church family. However, were it not for God's blessings and goodness, I would have no church family to thank.

9. When it comes to thankfulness, we must go ultimately to the source! God is the source of all that for which we are truly grateful, and our thankfulness must be directed to Him.

10. When we think of God as the One who merits our thankfulness, consider not only that our thanks must be directed to Him, but consider also that:

B. Our thanks must be deflected to Him

1. Notice again what Paul says in verse 15. He begins with the statement, “*For all things are for your sakes...*”

2. In other words, Paul said, “Everything I have been through, and all that I have done in the ministry, I have done on your behalf and for your sakes.”

3. Yet, the verse does not end with a hope that thanksgiving would redound to the glory of Paul. No, he wasn’t looking for gratitude towards himself.

4. Like Paul, those of us who live for and serve the Lord Jesus ought to desire gratitude and glory for Him, and not for ourselves.

5. We must be willing to deflect praise and thankfulness back to Him because He is ultimately the One who deserves all the gratitude and glory!

6. Someone once said, “The ax cannot boast of the trees it has cut down. It could do nothing but for the woodsmen. He made it, he sharpened it, he used it. The moment he throws it aside it becomes only old iron.”ⁱⁱⁱ

7. If God is ever pleased to use us to minister in the lives of other people, we have no right to take the credit for what God has done.

8. Johann Sebastian Bach used to sign each of his musical compositions with the letters S.D.G. It stands for the Latin phrase, “Sola De Gloria”, which means “glory to God alone.”

9. God alone merits all the glory and gratitude. May we see that He gets it *from* us, even if it originally comes *to* us!

10. There is a third truth we draw from this verse, and it is really the heart of what the apostle was saying. Notice not only *the grace that motivates thankfulness*, and *the God that merits thankfulness*, but notice with me also:

III. THE GOAL THAT MULTIPLIES THANKFULNESS

1. Look again at this verse. It says, “*For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.*”

2. Listen to how this verse is translated elsewhere. It reads, “It is all for your sake, so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God.”^{iv}
3. Do you get that? Paul’s whole ministry was aimed at reaching more and more people so that more and more thanksgiving would be given to God.
4. There is a challenge here for us. When we stop to give thanks to God for Jesus and for our salvation, there ought to be a burning desire in our hearts for more people to experience that same gratitude.
5. Even as we praise the Lord Jesus for His grace and for the gospel that has saved us, there are as many as 6 billion people on the face of the earth that cannot give that same praise.
6. Like the Apostle Paul almost 2,000 years ago, our passion ought to be to see more and more people experience the grace of God in Christ, and then share in the gratitude we feel towards Him.
7. We should want more at the table of thanksgiving; more people who will spend eternity with us worshipping the Lamb and glorifying Him for what He has done.
8. Consider this goal with me. Consider first of all:

A. The price of this goal

1. Once again, Paul said to the Corinthians, “...*all things are for your sakes...*” The “things” Paul is referring to there are the things he has been describing in this chapter.
2. He talks about *his selflessness*. In verse 5 He said, “*For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord...*”
3. Selfish people have no concern for those who do not have what they have and know what they know. So long as Christians think only of themselves, the gospel will go no further than their hearts and lives.
4. Paul talks also about *his suffering*. In verses 8 and 9, Paul refers to being troubled, distressed, perplexed, and persecuted, all for the sake of the gospel he was preaching.
5. Ours is a culture of comfort where suffering is a bad word. However, the Word of God says, “...*all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*”
6. If you never suffer for Jesus’ sake, you can be assured that you are doing very little service for His name.

7. Paul also speaks of *his submission*. He says in verse 11, *“For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.”*

8. Paul was willing to submit to the cross in his own life and die to himself that the life of Jesus could be visible and powerful in him.

9. Those who are not willing to submit themselves over to the power of Christ by dying to themselves will never make an impact on the lostness of the world around them.

10. The point I want you to see is that we have no hope of winning people to Jesus so long as we are unwilling to give ourselves completely to Him and sacrifice our comforts and convenience so that others can hear about His grace and glory.

11. There is a price to be paid for those who want to see others come to know Christ. The call of the gospel comes with a cost to those who carry it.

12. With that being said, I ask you, what price have you paid so that someone else might one day sing the praises of Jesus and give thanks to God? What has carrying the gospel cost you in your life?

13. Consider not only the price of this goal, but consider also further:

B. The product of this goal

1. Paul said that all he did and all he had experienced was for the sake of others. And his hope was that one day, *“...the thanksgiving of many [would] redound to the glory of God.”*

2. One old commentator imagines Paul saying, “When we and you stand forth glorified on resurrection day, a great symphony of thanksgiving will rise from our lips.”^v

3. The book of Revelation describes a coming day when the praises of God will be sung by His people. John describes it in Revelation 7:9-10.

4. He said, *“After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.”*

5. When Paul wrote our text verse to the Corinthians, I believe he was looking ahead to this day. He was saying, "I want as many in the multitude as can be. I want more and more people to stand with us on that day and sing thanks and praise to the Lord for what He has done!"

6. I wonder; will there be anybody in that multitude of thankful souls as a result of your life and witness?

7. What are you doing to bring more to the table of thanksgiving to God? Even while you are grateful yourself, are you also hopeful that more and more will join you in your thanks and praise to God?

8. Vance Havner once said, "When anything good comes our way we usually tell it. Strange that the greatest good tidings of all should find us holding our peace."

9. As we approach this Thanksgiving season, and our hearts are prompted to give thanks to Jesus for what He has done for us, it is strange that so few are interested in telling others what it is they are so grateful and thankful for.

1. The preacher and author, A.B. Simpson once wrote a poem entitled "Thanksgiving". The last stanza says:

*While we love to count the blessings,
Grateful for the year that's gone,
Faith would sweep a wider vision,
Hope would gaze yet farther on,
Seem with one accord to say,
"Christ is coming soon to bring us,
Earth's last, best, Thanksgiving Day!"^{vi}*

2. It is in view of the last Thanksgiving Day that our hearts should burn to tell others what it is we are most thankful for!

3. Be thankful for the grace of God, and give glory to God for what He has done. Don't be selfish, though. Do something this week, and tell someone else there is room at the table of thanksgiving for them as well.

ⁱ Varni, Mary Lovee, "How Many Calories Does the Average American Consume on Thanksgiving?", 11/5/10, *livestrong.com*, accessed 11/18/11, <http://www.livestrong.com/article/297375-how-many-calories-does-the-average-american-consume-on-thanksgiving/>

ⁱⁱ Swanson, David, "I'm thankful for Occupy", 11/18/11, *OpEdNews.com*, accessed 11/18/11, <http://www.opednews.com/articles/I-m-Thankful-for-Occupy-by-David-Swanson-111118-846.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Brengle, Samuel Logan, quoted by Swindoll, Charles, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, (Word Publishing, Nashville, 1998), p. 280

^{iv} ESV

^v Lenski, R.C.H., Interpretation of I and II Corinthians, (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, MN, 1963), p. 988

^{vi} Hutson, Curtis, Great Preaching on Thanksgiving, (Sword of the Lord Publishers, Murfreesboro, TN, 1987), p. 251