

## VOC-September 2014: Living in Thankfulness

### 1. *Why* do you show it?

Dear Listeners,

This month we are going to speak about *thankfulness*. No, not just about being thankful in general for all sorts of good things and special blessings. Our thankfulness will be focussed especially at the work of salvation by Jesus Christ! *Why* and *how* do you show yourselves thankful for the deliverance from sin and guilt, from sin and death, from slavery and Satan, which Christ obtained for us by His death on the cross? Well, how do we usually show how thankful we are?

Quite often we find it rather cheap when a person *says* 'thank you' only. Especially when someone has done something great for us, we feel we have to *give* him something for it, a present or so. At other times we feel obliged to return a favour, to do something back. Is this how we are going to show our thankfulness to God? Some have thought so. Rome for example has determined that certain compulsory, prescribed, good works are demanded besides believing the work Christ did. Perhaps you also know the story of Count Von Zinzendorf, the leader of the Bohemian Brethren (or Herrnhütter). He saw a painting portraying the Lord Jesus on the cross and underneath the painting it said, "I have done this for you, what are you doing for me?" Count Von Zinzendorf was motivated by this to show his thankfulness in great missionary efforts. Similar responses could be added to this list; think for instance of the Salvation Army. Is this how the Bible prescribes our response in thankfulness?

It is important to note that in the OT not the sacrifices *as such* convey man's thankfulness, but the condition of the *heart*. The way the OT worshipper expresses his gratitude is also seen in the many *songs* of thankfulness. Besides, the *main* expression is found in hands uplifted to the LORD. So, in the OT the believer '*says*' thank-you or '*sings*' thank-you in worship and prayer! The instruction of the apostles in the NT isn't any different. There, too, it is by *song* and *prayer* that man conveys his thankfulness. Even when we glance into *heaven* by means of the visions of John at Patmos, we see and hear 'Hallelujahs' around the throne and 'hands uplifted' under the altar. Then what

about showing our thankfulness in our *deeds*? Yes, in our life of thankfulness we also show it in our deeds: a walk of life in obedience to the *law* of God, a life in which we fight against sin and live in newness of life! These are the things we wish to explore further this month!

First and foremost in our desire to show thankfulness for Christ's deliverance must be our awareness that this renewal, this obedience, this life of praise and prayer, *also* is part and parcel of *Christ's work of salvation*! By His Holy Spirit Christ renews us, so that we are going to live a thankful life, a prayerful life, and an obedient life! Christ's work of salvation continues in order that God may be glorified! By His Holy Spirit He transforms us by the renewal of our mind, the apostle Paul writes in Romans 12. He gives us a *new heart*; He changes our *mind*, so that we are going to live to the praise of Him who calls us out of the darkness of sin and guilt and death and slavery, to walk in the light of God's Word! In short, by His Holy Spirit Christ restores us in the *image of God* in which He created us! Thus we desire again to praise God, to do His will, to lead a holy and blameless life. Christ doesn't leave a single part of our life in the darkness of corruption, but moves us to ask, "What do you want me to do!"

So why do you show your thankfulness for God's work of salvation in Christ? It is because we are living and governed by one and the same *Spirit*. As the apostle Paul puts it in Galatians 2, "It's no longer I who live but *Christ who lives in me!*" Thus by His Spirit we want what He wants, we do what He does: we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice of thankfulness to God! Then God becomes the *centre* of my life, for He gave Christ for that purpose. He wants to be the centre of my life. All the goals and objectives of my life are united in God. I have my marriage *in the Lord*, my family *in the Lord*, my work *in the Lord*, my friends, relaxation, eating and drinking, yes all things belong to Christ and in Him I receive them all for a life *in the Lord* to glorify God! Does that mean that such a life is without sin, without misery? No, in this life we will never enjoy such a complete salvation and renewal of life yet. In the power of Christ's Spirit, however, I am going to *seek* that life, *fight* for it, *work* on it, and *pray* for it!

Why, you say is it so difficult to show this life in thankfulness? Why are there those temptations to sin? Well, Paul shows, that's not to make you waver or doubt but in order that "the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perisha-

ble is tested by fire, may redound to praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ." It is by *grace* that we rely on Christ all the time, the *grace* that makes us go back to Him in all our doings! Thus we show that our faith is *genuine*; it *assures* us that our faith is *alive*! We have to *learn* how we are to be thankful for our salvation in Christ. God has to *teach* us! He uses Christ for that too: in our struggle against *strife* we go to Christ that His Spirit may give us *patience*; in the struggle against *anger* we go to Christ who by His Spirit works *kindness*; in the struggle against *indifference*, Christ's Spirit teaches us *faithfulness*; in the struggle against an *addiction* to drugs, or drunkenness, or pornography, Christ's Spirit trains me in *self-control*, etc.

And you know what the effect is of such a change in life, of such a renewal of heart and mind? It *assures* you of your faith! It also shows to *others* what great powers have come into your life by your faith in Jesus Christ; powers of God's Spirit that renew your life, that restore your life, and that make you live in *thankfulness* to the glory of God! That's how the Lord Jesus encouraged His listeners when He exhorted them, saying, "Let your light shine before men, that *they* may see your good works and *glorify* your Father who is in heaven!" The Lord Jesus also prayed for this (John 17) "in order that the world may believe that the Father has sent Christ." The work of God must be seen in a life of thankfulness, to His honour and glory! How? Yes, that's what I would like to address in next week's message. So, please stay tuned and listen again next time!