

# I Thank God For You...

*by Bryan Gibson*

When the apostle Paul saw good qualities in his fellow Christians, he didn't thank them, at least not directly. He thanked God. "I thank God upon every remembrance of you...for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now" (Philippians 1:3, 5). Why did he thank God for what **they** had done? Because he knew that his brethren were ultimately the work of God. "Being confident of this very thing, that **He who has begun a good work in you** will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). His prayer was that these brethren would be "filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are **by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God**" (Philippians 1:11). My intention in this article is to follow Paul's example. I want to thank God for my brethren—in particular, those in the church here at Prattmont. I'll warn you—this is a little longer article than most, but please indulge me—it takes a while to properly thank God.

Hopefully, this will accomplish several things. I get to do something that I've been remiss in doing—at least, as often as I should. It will bring glory and praise to God, to see just how much He has accomplished in the lives of my brethren. It will encourage these brethren (and hopefully others) to keep doing good, to not grow weary in well-doing (Galatians 6:9). It will help all our readers to better appreciate the Lord's design for the church, and in particular, the fellowship followers of Christ can have with one another.

I thank God that my brethren here have determined to follow the example set by the Lord, who while on this earth, did not align Himself with the divisive religious parties of his day (Pharisees, Sadducees, etc); who instead just simply went about doing God's will (John 5:30; 6:38), free from all the traditions that had become a part of these religious parties (Mark 7:1-13). These brethren have no desire to be part of any denomination, which would separate or divide them from others, and would make them feel bound to follow the teachings of that particular group. They are content to simply be Christians, taking directions from Christ and from Christ alone (Ephesians 1:22-23; 4:15-16; 5:23-24; Colossians 1:18).

I thank God for their faithful attendance at the assemblies of the church. There's simply no way to measure the encouragement this has given to me—and to my fellow-members. Some of our older members have continued to attend, when it would have been so much easier for them to stay at home. I thank God for them. Some of our young people have been at services when they could have been elsewhere—a school function, a ball game, or maybe even at home doing their homework. I thank God that they have learned at an early age to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Hebrews 10:24-25; Matthew 6:33).

I thank God for the good, solid teaching that various members (men and women) have given the young people here—the fruits of which have become very obvious with so many of them turning to the Lord. They've taught them both by word and by example, and I thank God for them—especially when I consider that my own children are included among the young people here (2 Timothy 2:2; 1 Timothy 4:16).

I thank God for the efforts they've made in reaching the lost—the names they've given me for the bulletin and for correspondence courses, the tapes of sermons they've sent to others, the outlines they've sent, the people they've invited to services, the times they have spoken up for the truth in conversations with others, the people they've asked me to contact, the prayers they've offered to God on behalf of the lost. I thank God for what they've done. May God help us all to do even more (Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 8:4; John 4:35; Matthew 9:37-38).

I thank God for their willingness to forgive their brothers and sisters in Christ. When their fellow-Christians have confessed their sins, they've embraced them, shed tears with them, and prayed with them and for them. I thank God for the mercy they've extended time and time again (Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:12-13).

I thank God for their love for the truth—for the times they've corrected me when I was wrong, the times they've spoken up in Bible class when error was taught, for the support they've given the elders when a strong stance had to be made against error. They do not claim to be perfect, in their lives, or in their understanding of God's word, but they do believe a perfect plan has been provided, and they intend to follow that plan as closely as they can (Jude 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13).

I thank God for the various ways they have ministered to the needs of others—visiting the sick, comforting those who've lost loved ones, consoling those whose loved ones have gone astray, even digging into their pockets to assist those in financial need. They have shown a great capacity to “weep with those who weep.” I thank God, because over and over again, they have demonstrated the love of God (Matthew 25:31-46; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; Romans 12:15).

I thank God for the way they have separated themselves from the world—in their speech, their dress, their behavior, and the forms of entertainment they choose. Presented with the choice of conforming to the world or conforming to Christ, they found Him to be more attractive. May God help us to more fully separate (sanctify) ourselves from the ways of this world (Romans 12:1-2; 8:29; 1 John 2:15-17).

I thank God for the young people here who have decided to serve the Lord at an early age. At last count, we have 23 Christians here from age 18 and below. I thank God for every one of them, for the decision they made, for the hope of eternal salvation they now have, for the potential good they can do in their lifetime, because they started so early (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

I thank God for those who had the courage to turn to the Lord in their later years. Some, by their own admission, spent too many years in sin, before finally the goodness and severity of God led them to repentance. I thank God—for His longsuffering, for His grace in saving these individuals, and for their response to His grace, a response that came before it was too late (2 Peter 3:9-10; Romans 2:5-10; 6:17; 11:22).

I thank God for those who obeyed the word under very difficult circumstances. Despite ridicule and scorn, and in some cases, alienation from their families, they did what they knew was right, and they continue faithful till this day. I thank God for their courage and conviction (1 Thessalonians 1:5-10; 2:13).

I thank God for the **lack** of envy and jealousy that they've shown in working together with each other. They've gone about doing their part, not with concern for their own glory, but for the glory of God. I thank God, because this **selflessness** could only have been learned from Him (1 Corinthians 12:14-27; 1 Peter 4:10-11).

I thank God for our elders. Along with watching for our souls, they've had to make many tough decisions, and those decisions have been influenced by two major factors: their love for the truth, and their love for the souls of this flock. I thank God, because after all, He's the one who taught them to be shepherds. Could there be a better model than the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ? (Acts 20:28; Hebrews 13:17; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

I thank God for our deacons, because in addition to their many family and work responsibilities, they've been given many other responsibilities within the church. I thank God, because He gave these servants the mind of a servant—exemplified in the life of Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 3:8-13; Philippians 2:1-11).

I thank God for the encouragement they've given me—the words they've said, the notes they've written, the prayers they've offered, the examples they've set, the financial support they've given, etc. (2 Timothy 1:18).

I thank God that I can still see the good in my brethren—that the unfaithfulness of some has not blinded me to the faithfulness of many.

Thank you God, from the depths of my heart!