

Title: Give Thanks to God for God
Date: 11/17/24
Subject: Thanks for God's love, that there is a God.
Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4

Andrew Ripp song "For the Love of God" asks: "Where would I be if it wasn't for the love of God?" It's impossible to separate God from his love. Love comes from God and God is love (1 John 4:7,8). God's love is an extension of who he is in his nature and actions. One of the Bible passages that brings God and his love together is 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

Read 2 Corinthians 1:3, 4.

As in the case of the entire Bible, a proof for the existence of God isn't given. Rather, it's an assumed premise: In the beginning God. There is a God who has made himself known.

Paul gives praise to God, declaring the greatness and grandeur of the Almighty being from the universe. The phrasing of the verse is really intriguing. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." How is that possible? We believe Jesus Christ is fully God, so how is it that there's some God above him? A few translations tried to solve the conundrum by changing the wording and sentence structure so praise is given to God...who is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.

However, most versions agree with the sentence structure as presented in the NIV. Other books of the Bible like Ephesians and 1 Peter address God in the same manner. So does Jesus. He frequently referred to God as his Father (Matthew 11:27; John 8:49; 14:2). Twice he addressed God as "my God." While on the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). He told Mary after his resurrection, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God."

It's beyond our pay grade to completely understand the marvel and mystery of the Trinity - one God expressed in three persons - God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. These three share the same substance, nature and essence. The three are in harmonious interaction but are expressed in different ways to humanity. The Son of God submits to the Father who has ultimate authority. In this way Jesus can properly call God the Father "my God."

Jesus had told Mary that his Father would be her Father and his God would be her God. This is the promise for all who place their trust and confidence in Jesus Christ. "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

A second thing about the identity of God is his connection with love. He is the Father of compassion. He is the God of all comfort. This aspect of his character is a constant theme of Scripture, including the Old Testament.

"Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from

the pit and crowns you with love and compassion” (Psalm 103:1-4). “Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity” (Joel 2:13).

The prophet Jonah expressed the same sentiment, but he was mad because the love, compassion and gracious nature of God was being displayed towards people whom Jonah considered his enemies (Jonah 4:2). But isn't that the greatest way for grace, mercy, compassion and love to be shown? “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

God is the God of all comfort. He is the source of all comfort. None of it is engineered by humans or artificial intelligence. All of it can be traced back to God. God is a benevolent philanthropist who opens up his entire financial portfolio. He isn't a miser. He doesn't merely let a little comfort trickle our direction.

We claim God as our compassionate comforter. He is with us in our troubles and sufferings, when we're distressed, when we face hardships, when we're under great pressure, when we despair even of life.

More of the identity of God is revealed in V. 10. Read.

Paul felt like he was living under a death sentence and had been delivered from a deadly peril. He was in danger during his travels to spread the gospel. There was danger from people who viewed him as a traitorous heretic because he talked about Jesus. There were opportunistic thieves, raging rivers that needed to be crossed, vicious storms in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, being in prison.

Paul proclaimed that God had delivered him, just as he had when the apostle faced a riot in Thessalonica, when he was in prison in Philippi, when he had been stoned and dragged outside of the city of Lystra because his enemies thought they'd killed him, from the plot of the Gentiles and Jews who wanted to mistreat and stone Paul and his co-workers.

Paul was confident that God would continue to deliver him. He declared that he and those with him had set their hope on God. Paul based his hope on the attribute in v. 18: God is faithful. He also wrote in 1 Corinthians: “God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” (1:9).

Why would Paul say God was faithful? Here's what preceded it: “as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:7, 8). Paul was looking to the future to what God has in store.

If the roll call of faith in Hebrews 11 included New Testament people, Paul would have been there along with some of the things from which God delivered him. As it is, the chapter reviews some of the heroes of the faith of the Old Testament. Then Lord has the human author write:

And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah, about David and Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again.

Pretty impressive stuff, right? Kind of sends chills through the body. But there's more.

There were others who were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.

These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

All of them were delivered... in one way or another. They believed God was faithful and would do what he promised.

We claim God as our deliverer. We set our hope in and on him, that he will do what he has promised. We thank him for the way he has delivered us from troubles, through troubles and will ultimately deliver us from all of our troubles by taking us to a place called heaven... That's a subject for another Sunday.

Here's what Paul says God will do in the meantime. READ vv. 21, 22.

We affirm there is a God and he is knowable. We thank God for who he is and for his utterly amazing love that he has expressed and continues to express toward us. Therefore, we give him thanks.

That fits with our job description: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9, 10). We are to give praise to God. We are to thank him.

This brings up a question: what about those who don't know Jesus Christ as their Savior, can they give thanks to God, worship him, give him praise? Will God accept their thanks, praise and worship? Any prayer?

Certainly, the Lord extends the offer for people to come to him and will listen to prayer of those who turn to him for he says, “Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn, my mouth has uttered in all integrity a word that will not be revoked: Before me every knee will bow; by me every tongue will swear. They will say of me, ‘In the Lord alone are deliverance and strength.’ All who have raged against him will come to him and be put to shame” (Isaiah 45:22-24).

We are among those who responded to God's call to be saved. We join with people like Paul who had persecuted those were Christians (Acts 9:10, 11), Cornelius who was God-fearing and seeking God (Acts 10:4, 31) and all who confess their sins, believing that God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and will purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9). God hears the cry for salvation.

Ultimately, everyone will recognize Jesus as Lord and bow down to worship (Philippians 2:9-11; Romans 14:11). It may be willingly or it may be forced.

We can reword the earlier question: what about those who in the future will be forced to worship, those who now rage against the Lord whether demonstrably or quietly, those who don't have a relationship with God -- will he accept their expressions of thanks and praise?

Here's some of what the Bible says: "The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry; but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth" (Psalm 34:15,16. Cf. 33:18, 147:11). "To the wicked person, God says: "What right have you to recite my laws or take my covenant on your lips? You hate my instruction and cast my words behind you" (Psalm 50:16,17). "The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him" (Proverbs 15:8). "The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous" (Proverbs 15:29). "If anyone turns a deaf ear to my instruction, even their prayers are detestable" (Proverbs 28:9). "He does not answer when people cry out because of the arrogance of the wicked. Indeed, God does not listen to their empty plea; the Almighty pays no attention to it" (Job 35:12,13). The man who had been born blind and was healed by Jesus: "We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will" (John 9:31).

Doesn't sound like he accepts their expressions of thanks and praise. The only communication he listens to from those who don't know him is the cry to be saved.

There's a cautionary note for those who have placed their trust in Christ as our Savior but are living in sin, are rebellious, callous, insincere.

Hear the Bible: "I cried out to him with my mouth; his praise was on my tongue. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Psalm 66:17,18). Isaiah wrote to those who play-acted like they were God's people: "When you spread out your hands in prayer, I hide my eyes from you; even when you offer many prayers, I am not listening" (Isaiah 1:15).

Freedom comes when we confess and acknowledge our sins to God. Then we come under this blessing: "Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit" (Psalm 32:1,2).

Another question. But what if there isn't any God? Where would we be?

It's like what Paul said about what would be true if there wasn't any resurrection: "we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Corinthians 15:19). We are worse off because we've been tricked, deluded and fooled by some grand conspiracy theory Ponzi scheme. That's if there is no God.

But, if there is... It's a matter of reasoned belief based on the evidence as presented in the Bible. In the beginning God.

Katara Patton's friend firmly told her son to "Get down!" The child wasn't standing on the dining room table and mom wasn't calling on her son to bust a dance move. The boy had climbed up on the church pew and waved his hands. After getting down, he innocently told his mom, "I want the pastor to see me. If I don't stand up, he won't see me" (Our Daily Bread 11/10/24).

Sometimes we may feel like we have to take extreme measures to make sure God sees us. We can take encouragement from the life of Hagar, the Egyptian slave belonging to Sarah, Abraham's wife. The couple violated God's command when Sarah gave Hagar to Abraham as another wife so she could have a child through which God might fulfill his promises. Hagar became pregnant and began to despise Sarah. The situation grew

uglier as Abraham allowed Sarah to mistreat Hagar. The young woman ran away. She was pregnant, alone, confused, frustrated and miserable.

The angel of the Lord came to her to reassure and comfort her. The result? Hagar “gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me” (Genesis 16:13). The Lord was paying attention. He saw her. He knew her situation. He cared.

The Lord is paying attention. He sees us. He knows us. He cares about us.

This fits in with the back page for the October 20th bulletin Reuel and Jennifer composed. We appreciate them taking on that role while we were gone. It’s an insight from J. I. Packer’s book Knowing God. I trust you read it. Hopefully it sounds familiar. And even if you memorized it...it will be good to hear it again.

“What matters supremely, therefore, is not, in the last analysis, the fact that I know God, but the larger fact which underlies it - that He knows me.

“I am graven on the palm of His hands. I am never out of His mind. All my knowledge of HIM depends on His sustained initiative in knowing me. I know Him because He first knew me, and continues to know me. He is a friend, one who loves me; and there is no moment when His eye is off me, or His attention distracted from me, and no moment, therefore, when His care falters.

“This is momentous knowledge. There is unspeakable comfort...in knowing that God is constantly taking knowledge of me in love and watching over me for my good. There is tremendous relief in knowing that His love is utterly realistic, based at every point on prior knowledge of the worst about me, so that no discovery now can disillusion Him about me, in the way I am so often disillusioned about myself, and quench His determination to bless me.”

Saturday, October 9, 2021. Texas A&M University’s stadium Kyle Field was jammed to capacity of 102,733...though many more probably said they were there for the game. A&M, an unranked team, faced #1 Alabama who had a streak of 100 straight wins against unranked teams. The game was hotly contested and tied at 38-38 with two seconds left in the game.

A&M kicker Seth Small walked on to the field to attempt the game-winning field goal. The magnitude of the moment wasn't lost on him - A&M would take down #1, it would be a huge step forward in their football program, he'd be immortalized, fans would rush the field to celebrate...that is, if the ball went through the uprights.

Small lined up for the kick. The ball was snapped. He put his foot into the ball which headed for the left upright and then curved back in for the winning three points. Jubilation. Pandemonium. Exhilaration.

After the game he was questioned by reporters about how it felt, what he did to compose himself for the big kick. Small responded, “I was just repeating Psalm 23:1 to myself all night, which is “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not be in want.”

“Where would we be if it wasn't for the love of God?” Let’s give him thanks He is and he loves.