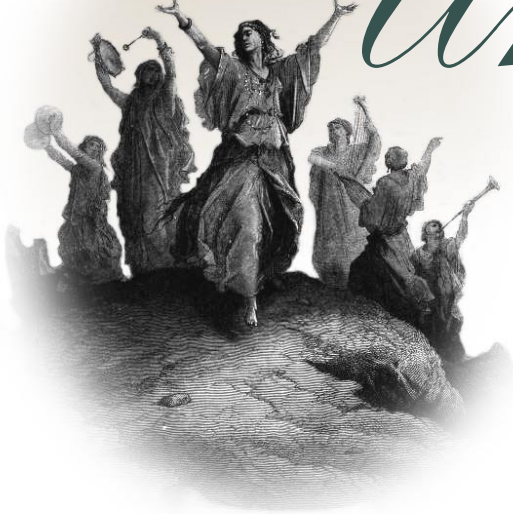


In Unison



The trumpeters and
singers joined in unison,
as with one voice, to
give praise and thanks
to the Lord.
2 Chronicles 5:13

Excellence: The Debt

Good Enough for Each Other

There are certain conventions of courtesy and decency we follow in our dealings with each other. When someone invites us over for dinner, we write or telephone our expression of appreciation, and very often reciprocate. When someone gives us a Christmas present, we thank them, and maybe give them a present in return. When someone does something nice for us, we generally like to do something nice for them in turn.

So where did we get the idea that nothing is owed our God for the gift He gave us?

God the Father—the one omnipotent, omniscient God of the universe—loved us so deeply, so intensely, that He chose to nail to a wooden cross His one and only Son as a final blood sacrifice for our sins. There had to be a sacrifice, and since He knew we couldn't do it ourselves, God had His Son take our place on the cross. His one and only, dearest Son.

It was the brother of Jesus who said

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. James 2:26 nasb

A Debt of Gratitude

What does it say about us—as people, and as Christians—when we show greater courtesy to the one who gave us a birthday present than to the one who gave us the death of His only Son? What does it say about us when we happily take possession of grace, yet turn our backs on gratitude?

We owe our heavenly Father the debt of our lives—our eternal lives. This is not a covenant debt, where if we fail on our side, He will retract His promise. No, what makes our payment of the debt so important, is that God the Father will love us no matter what, because our *salvation* debt has been paid by Christ.

But our debt of *gratitude* is still outstanding. We owe our Father the common courtesy of living for Him, out of a full and joyful heart of thanksgiving. We owe Him the very best of which we are capable, nothing less.

What are you doing for God, simply because you are grateful? How are you working in His name, simply because you love Him?

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”
John 3:16

Evangelical types love to talk about grace. They like to emphasize the doctrine of salvation by belief—that “whoever believes in him shall not perish.”

But many evangelicals get sick and nervous when you raise the issue of service or works—or worse, debt. It's almost as if they base their religion on the second half of John 3:16 without remembering the first.

“Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they must be free. If you ask why we should obey God, in the last resort the answer is, ‘I am.’ To know God is to know that our obedience is due Him.” (C.S. Lewis)



*Just what is this thing
Christ did for which we are to be
so grateful? Charles Haddon
Spurgeon gives us a helpful illus-
tration.*

“A man had been condemned in a Spanish court to be shot, but because he was an American citizen and also of English birth, the consuls of the two countries interposed, and declared that the Spanish authorities had no power to put him to death. What did they do to secure his life,

when their protest was insufficient? They wrapped him up in their flags; they covered him with the Stars and Stripes and the Union Jack and defied the executioners. ‘Now fire a shot if you dare, for if you do, you defy the nations represented by those flags, and you will bring the powers of those two great empires upon you.’ There stood the man, and before him the soldiers, and though a single shot might have ended his life, yet he was as invulnerable as though encased in triple steel.

“Even so Jesus Christ has taken my poor guilty soul ever since I believed in Him and has wrapped around me the blood-red flag of His atoning sacrifice, and before God can destroy me or any other soul that is wrapped

in the atonement, He must insult His Son and dishonor the sacrifice, and that He will never do, blessed be His name.”

What Jesus did He did perfectly. God requires blood sacrifice, and though it may offend our modern sensibilities, God’s word is clear: where there is sin, there is no communion with God; without death there is no life.

So Jesus paid God’s price for us. He said, “The Father cannot have a relationship with sin. Your sin must be paid for with blood. So I will pay the price. I will die in your place, and give you a relationship with the Father.”

So He died in our place. He wrapped us in His atoning blood, so that when the Father looks at us, instead of seeing our sin, He sees instead the righteousness of His Son.

Lord Jesus, thank you for dying in my place. Thank you for your perfectly planned and executed mission of salvation that resulted in my eternal communion with God the Father. And thank you for doing everything in my life perfectly: for listening when I call; for never turning me away, but always being the perfect advocate on my behalf; for your tenderness and compassion, and your loving me in spite of my unloveliness.

Thank you, Jesus, for your perfect sacrifice.

Scripture

Remember me for this, O my God, and do not blot out what I have so faithfully done for the house of my God and its services.
Nehemiah 13:14

For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.
Ecclesiastes 12:14

"Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'" Matthew 25:34-40

...and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God. So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those

entrusted with the secret things of God. Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful. 1 Corinthians 3:23-4:2

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. 2 Corinthians 5:10

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. Ephesians 6:5-8

Land that drinks in the rain often falling on it and that produces a crop useful to those for whom it is farmed receives the blessing of God. But land that produces thorns and thistles is worthless and is in danger of being cursed. In the end it will be burned. Even though we speak like this, dear friends, we are confident of better things in your case—things that accompany salvation. God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have

helped his people and continue to help them. We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised. Hebrews 6:7-12

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? James 2:14-20

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10

Hymns and Choruses

Alas! and Did My Savior Bleed (Watts)
But drops of grief can ne'er repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here, Lord, I give myself away—
'Tis all that I can do.

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling (Wesley)
Finish then Thy new creation,
Pure and spotless let us be;
Let us see Thy great salvation,
Perfectly restored in Thee:
Changed from glory into glory,
Till in heav'n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love and praise!

I Gave My Life for Thee (Havergal)
I gave my life for thee,
My precious blood I shed,
That thou might'st ransomed be,
And quickened from the dead;
I gave, I gave My life for thee,
What hast thou given for Me?

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