

The Christian Manner of Expressing Gratitude.

by Edward Payson

The Christian manner of expressing gratitude is to pray for the benefactor's salvation and to express gratitude in a manner that becomes a Christian, recognizing one's own sinfulness and the need for mercy.

Scripture: Proverbs 14:31, Matthew 25:31, John 3:16, Romans 3:23, 2 Timothy 1:16

Topics: "Gratitude And Mercy", "Seeking Repentance"

Description

Edward Payson preaches about the gratitude expressed by St. Paul towards his benefactor, Onesiphorus, highlighting the importance of showing gratitude and seeking mercy from the Lord. Payson emphasizes that Christianity does not extinguish noble feelings like patriotism, friendship, and gratitude, but rather modifies them with its own spirit. He explains that all individuals, including the most generous benefactors, will need mercy from the Lord on the judgment day, emphasizing the necessity of seeking mercy through belief in Jesus Christ. Payson urges the listeners to reflect on their treatment of Jesus Christ compared to earthly benefactors, emphasizing the need for repentance and seeking mercy now to avoid condemnation on the judgment day.

Transcript

"The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain. But when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day"

2 Timothy 1:16,17,18

enemies of Christianity, while stating its supposed defects, have asserted that it recognizes neither patriotism nor friendship as virtues; that it discountenances, or at least does not encourage, the exercise of gratitude to human benefactors; and that its spirit is unfriendly to many of the finer feelings and sensibilities of our nature. But these assertions prove only that those who make them are unacquainted with the religion, which they blindly assail. Nothing more is necessary to show that they are groundless, than a reference to the character of St.

Paul. This distinguished apostle of Jesus Christ was, in a degree which has seldom, if ever, been equaled, imbued with the spirit, and controlled by the influence of that religion, which he at once inculcated and exemplified. Yet we find in his writings the most touching expressions, and in his life the most striking exhibitions, of love to his countrymen, friendship, gratitude, and indeed of every sentiment and feeling,

which gives either nobleness or loveliness to human character.

We readily admit however, or rather we assert it as an important truth, that his religion, though it extinguished none of these feelings, modified them all. It infused into them its own spirit, regulated their exercises and expressions by its own views, and thus stamped upon them a new and distinctive character. It baptized them, if I may be allowed the expression, with the Holy Ghost, in the name of Jesus Christ. Hence, the apostle expressed neither his patriotism, nor his friendship, nor his gratitude, precisely as he would have done, before his conversion to Christianity.

These remarks, so far at least as they relate to gratitude, are illustrated and verified by the passage before us, in which he expresses his sense of obligation to a human benefactor. This benefactor was Onesiphorus, who appears to have been an Ephesian of wealth and distinction, and who had in various ways, and on different occasions, manifested a generous concern for the apostle's welfare. Especially had he manifested such a concern, when St. Paul, oppressed by powerful enemies, forsaken by those who ought to have assisted him, and struggling without success to regain his liberty, lay bound in fetters at Rome.

While he was in this destitute and friendless condition, borne down by a power which it seemed impossible for him to resist, Onesiphorus generously espoused his cause, sought him out very diligently and found him, supplied his wants from his own stores, and was not ashamed to be known as the friend and patron of a poor despised prisoner in chains. This unexpected kindness from a stranger, a foreigner, on whom he had no natural claims, --kindness, too, displayed at a time when cool friends prudently kept at a distance, and many of his own countrymen were among his bitterest enemies, made a deep impression upon the grateful heart of St.

Paul. The gratitude which he felt, it was natural that he should express; nor was there any thing in his religion, which forbade him to express it. But though his religion forbade neither the exercise nor the expression of gratitude, it taught him to express it in such a manner, as became a Christian, an apostle, a servant of that Master, whose kingdom is not of this world. He did not therefore idolize his benefactor; he did not load him with flattering applauses: but from the fullness of his heart he poured out a prayer for him to that God, who alone could reward him, as the apostle wished him to be rewarded.

In this prayer he asked for him and his family the same favor, which, as we learn from his life and writings, he supremely desired and sought for himself. This was an interest in God's pardoning mercy. The Lord, he cries, give mercy unto his house. The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day. It is more than possible, that to some persons this mode of expressing gratitude will appear frigid, unmeaning, and unsatisfactory. They will regard it as a very cheap and easy method of requiting a benefactor; and were the case their own, they would probably prefer a small pecuniary recompense, or an honorary reward, to all the prayers which even an apostle could offer on their behalf.

It is certain however, that such persons estimate the value of objects very erroneously, and that their religious views and feelings differ very widely from those which were entertained by St. Paul. But so far as any man's religious views differ from those which he entertained, they must differ from truth; for the apostle, it will be recollected, was guided by inspiration; his religious views were imparted to him by the unerring Spirit of God, they must therefore, have been in perfect accordance with truth.

It is surely then most important, that we should ascertain what they were, in order that we may make them our own. What they were respecting some most interesting subjects, we may learn from the passage

before us. From this passage we may also learn, in what manner it becomes the disciples and ministers of Christ to express their gratitude to human benefactors. And no one, who shall adopt the religious views by which St. Paul was influenced, can fail to perceive that the method which he employed for this purpose, was most worthy of himself and most wisely adapted to promote the best interests of the friend, to whom he felt himself indebted.

What these views were let us now endeavor to ascertain. In the petition which was offered by the apostle for his benefactor, mention is made of a day to which that petition has reference The Lord grant unto him, that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day. The mode of expression here employed is in some respects peculiar, and worthy of remark. It is a mode of expression which men never adopt, except when they speak of some subject, of which their hearts are full. While it seems intended to designate a particular day, it furnishes no mark or description, by which the day referred to can be ascertained.

The same expression is, however, frequently used in other parts of the inspired volume, and from the connection in which it is invariably found we may infer with certainty what day is intended by it. It is the great day, for which all other days were made, the last day of time and the first day of eternity, the day of general judgment and retribution, in which the mighty Maker, and Sovereign, and Judge of the universe, will summon all intelligent creatures before his tribunal, and subject them to a trial, on the result of which, their eternal destiny will depend.

This day is elsewhere styled, the day of the Lord, the great day of his wrath, and the great day of God Almighty. It is the day of the Lord, says an apostle, in which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth with all the works that are therein shall be burnt up. When that day shall arrive, the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God, and every eye shall see him coming in the clouds with power and great glory; and all that are in their graves shall hear his voice, and come forth; they that have done good to the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation.

Then shall be realized what St. John saw in vision. I saw, he says, a great white throne, and him who sat upon it, before whose face the heavens and the earth fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things that were written in the books, according to their works. Such, my hearers, is the day here intended, and such are some of its attending circumstances and events.

To the mind of St. Paul, who possessed that faith, which is the evidence of things not seen, this day, with all its infinitely glorious and tremendous realities, was in effect ever present and visible. His mental eye, aided by the light, and strengthened by the energies of inspiration, even then saw its dawn in the distant horizon. To that day his thoughts and affections were chained. With reference to that day he was constantly acting. To secure mercy for himself and for his fellow sinners in that day, was the great object for which he lived, and labored, and suffered, and for the sake of which he counted not even his life dear.

No wonder then, that when he had occasion to mention such a day as this, a day which thus occupied and engrossed his whole soul, he should style it simply, that day, and take it for granted that every hearer would perceive at once, what day he intended. No wonder, that the transcendent brightness of such a day should in his view, eclipse the light of other days, and that he should speak of it as if it were the only day which deserved the name. And no wonder, that with such a day in his eye, he did not pray that his

benefactor might be recompensed by the enjoyment of wealth, and honor, and prosperity, in the present world.

To his mind, engrossed as it was by far nobler objects, all these things, and indeed all which this world can afford, must have appeared worthless and empty indeed. And how could he ask for his friend a portion, with which he would not have satisfied himself; how could he ask for him a portion in this world only, when his inspired eye saw the flames, in which it is destined to be consumed, just ready to kindle around it, and wrap it in the blaze of a general conflagration! Might it not rather be expected, that he would ask for him a favor connected with the great day, which he saw approaching; a favor, the bestowal of which would secure his safety amidst all its perils, and his happiness forever?

Such a favor he did ask. And that he should ask it, was a natural consequence of the religious views, which he entertained. He knew that his friend was an accountable creature, in a state of probation for eternity, that he, in common with the rest of mankind, must appear at the bar of God in the judgment day; and that the sentence, which he should then receive, would either raise him to the enjoyment of happiness inconceivable, or plunge him into wretchedness inexpressible. Knowing these things, how could he do otherwise than breathe out a fervent prayer, that his benefactor might be prepared to receive a favorable sentence, and find mercy of the Lord, his judge, at that day.

But what is the precise import of the petition that he might then find mercy, and what did it imply? An answer to these questions will throw much additional light on the views which were entertained by the apostle, when he uttered the prayer before us. Mercy, as exercised by a judge, or a sovereign, is the opposite of justice. It is shown only, when the guilty are spared, or when they are treated more favorably than they deserved. Its brightest display is made, when a criminal, justly condemned to die, is pardoned.

God, the universal Sovereign and Judge, shows mercy, when he pardons those who were justly doomed by his righteous law to the second death; that death, from which there is no resurrection. To pray that any one may find mercy of him at the judgment day, is to pray that he may then be pardoned, or saved from deserved punishment, and accepted and treated as if he were righteous. St. Paul, when he prayed that Onesiphorus might find mercy of his Judge at that day, must then have believed, that he would at that day need mercy or pardon.

And if so, he must have believed, that in the sight of God, he was guilty; for by the guilty alone can pardoning mercy be needed. The innocent need nothing but justice. They may stand boldly and safely on the ground of their own merits. But the apostle well knew, that on this ground, not a single individual of the human race can stand before God in judgment. He knew, for he often declared, that all, without a single exception, have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; and that in his sight no man living can be justified by any performances or merits of his own.

He knew, that however blameless or excellent any man's character may appear in the view of men, he has sinned against the statute book of heaven, against the Supreme Legislator's great law of love, that law which binds him to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and his neighbor as himself. He knew, that when tried by this law before an omniscient, heart-searching Judge, he must inevitably be found guilty, and receive a sentence of condemnation and that mercy alone could then save him.

Indeed these are among the fundamental truths of that gospel, which the apostle made it the great business of his life to proclaim. To these truths every fact and doctrine of that gospel bears testimony.

Why was a Savior provided for all men, if all men are not sinners? Why did that Savior command his gospel to be preached to all men, if all men do not need salvation? Why is mercy offered to all men, why are all men exhorted to seek it, if all do not need mercy? And these truths, which had been revealed to him and engraven upon his heart by the Spirit of God, the apostle could neither disbelieve nor forget; nor could he suffer himself to be so far blinded by admiration, or friendship, or gratitude, as to except even his benefactor from their universal application.

No; kind, and generous, and noble, as was the disposition which that benefactor had manifested, and disposed as the apostle must have been to view his character in the most favorable light, he knew it could not meet the demands of God's perfect law. He could not conceal from himself the unpleasant truth, that his friend was, like other men, a sinner, and that as such he would need mercy of the Lord at that day. And had Onesiphorus distinguished himself as a benefactor, not to himself only, but to his country; had he sacrificed much, and hazarded every thing to secure her liberty, the apostle would still have entertained the same views respecting his character and situation in the sight of God.

He entertained, and often expressed, the same views respecting himself. He knew, that notwithstanding the blamelessness of his external conduct, his zeal and fidelity in preaching the gospel, and all his unexampled sacrifices, labors and sufferings in the service of Christ, he should still need mercy at that day; that justice would condemn, and that mercy alone could save him. And were he now alive, were he a native of our country, and were he standing in the midst of us with all the feelings and partialities of his countrymen glowing in his bosom, he would believe, and would not hesitate to declare, that our own Washington, beloved, admired, and revered as he justly was, and is, will need the mercy of his Judge at that day.

Are there any present, whose feelings revolt at this assertion? Let them then select the most illustrious individual of our race; let that individual be, if they please, Washington himself; let them suppose him to approach, with a fearless air, the judgment seat of the Eternal, and say to him who sits upon it, --I demand to be exempted from every expression of thy displeasure, and to have everlasting life conferred on me as my due. I have earned it, I deserve it, justice awards it to me; give me but justice, and I ask no more.

Reserve thy mercy for such as need it. Would you not strongly reprobate language like this? Then must you acknowledge that no man can claim any thing on the ground of justice; that all, without exception, will need mercy at that day. A distinguished modern philosopher, Adam Smith, well known by his celebrated treatise on the Wealth of Nations, has some remarks relative to this subject, which are so just and apposite, that you will readily excuse me for quoting them. "Man," says this writer, "when about to appear before a being of infinite perfection, can feel but little confidence in his own merit, or in the imperfect propriety of his own conduct.

To such a being, he can scarce imagine that his littleness and weakness should ever seem to be the proper object either of esteem or regard. But he can easily conceive how the numberless violations of duty of which he has been guilty, should render him the object of aversion and punishment; nor can he see any reason why the divine indignation should not be let loose without any restraint, upon so vile an insect as he is sensible that he himself must appear to be. If he would still hope for happiness he is conscious that he cannot demand it from the justice, but that he must entreat it from the mercy of God.

Repentance, sorrow, humiliation, contrition at the thought of his past conduct, are, upon this account, the sentiments which become him, and seem to be the only means, which he has left, of appeasing that wrath

which he has justly provoked. He even distrusts the efficacy of all these, and naturally fears, lest the wisdom of God should not, like the weakness of man, be prevailed upon to spare the crime, by the most importunate lamentations of the criminal. Some other intercession, some other sacrifice, some other atonement, he imagines, must be made for him, beyond what he himself is capable of making, before the purity of the divine justice can be reconciled to his manifold offences."

Such, my hearers, is the language of a writer, whom no one, that is acquainted with his character, can suspect of superstition, or weakness, or of entertaining too favorable views of Christianity. But to return. It may perhaps be said, if the apostle's views were such as have now been described, if he believed that justice must pronounce a sentence of condemnation on all without exception, on what could he found a hope, that either himself, or his benefactor, or any other man, will find mercy of the Lord at that day?

Indeed, how could he, while he entertained such views, ask mercy either for himself or for others, without being guilty of irreverent presumption? How could he, a sinful worm of the dust, dare request the inflexibly just and holy Sovereign of the universe, to pronounce from his judgment seat, a sentence more favorable than impartial justice required, or than it would seem to allow? And when he presented such a request, did he not appear to ask, in effect, that the Judge of all the earth would cease to do right; that he would deviate from the path of equity, sacrifice his justice, and sully his yet unspotted character, for the sake of sparing guilty creatures, whom law and justice condemned?

These questions are perfectly reasonable and proper, and it would be impossible to answer them in such a manner as to justify the apostle, were not a satisfactory answer furnished by the gospel of Jesus Christ. That gospel reveals to us a glorious plan, devised by infinite wisdom, in which the apparently conflicting claims of justice and mercy are perfectly reconciled. It informs us that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; that God so loved the world, as to give his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

It informs us, that in consequence of the atonement, which this Son of his love has made, he can be just, and yet justify, or show mercy to him, that believeth in Jesus. And it assures us, that to every one, who truly believes in him, abundant mercy shall be shown. On this ground alone the apostle rested all his own hopes of finding mercy at that day. On this ground alone did he found a hope, that his benefactor might then find mercy. On this ground alone, did he dare ask that mercy might be granted him.

And his petition, that he might find mercy, involves a request, that he might be induced to become, if he were not already such, a sincere disciple of Jesus Christ, and be found among his faithful followers at that day; for well did the apostle know, that unless he were so he must inevitably perish without mercy. He knew, that as all the light and warmth which we receive from the sun, come to us through the medium of its beams, so all the mercy which God will ever dispense to men, must come to them through the medium of his Son Jesus Christ, who is the brightness, the effulgence, or shining forth of his glory.

Take away the beams of the sun, and you cut us off from all the benefits which we derive from that luminary. Take away Jesus Christ the Savior, and you cut us off from all participation of God's mercy, and from all the benefits which that mercy bestows upon a guilty world. And the man, who shuts out Jesus Christ from his heart, shuts out the sunshine of God's mercy from himself, and, to use the language of an apostle, has neither part nor lot in the matter. This leads us to remark farther, that though the apostle believed all men will need mercy of the Lord at that day, he did not believe that all will then find mercy.

This is evidently and strongly implied in the petition, which we are considering. Would he have thought it necessary to pray that Onesiphorus might find mercy, had he believed that all will find mercy? Would he have asked for his friend, his benefactor, a favor which he believed will be conferred indiscriminately upon all? This would have been worse than idle. It would have been unworthy of himself, and a mockery of his friend. It would have been like praying that he might have a portion of the air, and the light, which are common to all.

When he prayed that his benefactor might find mercy, he intimated that it was at least possible, that he might fail of finding it. And when he prayed that the Lord would grant unto him that he might find mercy, he evidently prayed for a favor, which he did not suppose would be granted to all. Indeed he knew, for he asserts that all do not believe. And he knew that those who do not believe, shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on them. My hearers, I have given you a brief sketch of the apostle's religious views, so far as they are expressed or implied in the passage under consideration.

And now let me ask, could he, with such views, have expressed his gratitude in a manner more worthy of himself or more indicative of a wise and affectionate concern for the welfare of his benefactor, than by offering for him this petition? Would not the favor which it requests, have been cheaply purchased by Onesiphorus at the expense of all his earthly possessions? And can any man whose religious views resemble those of St. Paul, express affection for his children, or concern for his friends, or gratitude to his benefactors, more clearly and consistently, than by beseeching God to grant unto them that they might find mercy of the Lord in the great day?

It would be improper to conclude this discourse without reminding you, that if Onesiphorus, notwithstanding all his generous disposition and beneficent actions, will need mercy of the Lord at that day, then each of you my hearers will certainly need it. Yes, mortal, accountable, sinful creature, That awful day will surely come, The appointed hour makes haste, When thou must stand before thy Judge, And pass the solemn test.

And O, how greatly wilt thou then need mercy, when, stripped of all thy possessions, of all thy friends, thou shalt stand a naked, trembling, helpless creature, before the tribunal of thy God! How wilt thou need mercy at that great and terrible day, in which, as inspiration declares, the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, and the stars shall fall from heaven; and the heaven shall depart as a scroll, and every mountain be moved out of its place; and the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and the bond and the free, shall attempt to hide themselves in the dens and rocks of the mountains, and shall say unto the mountains and to the rocks, fall on us and hide us from the face of him that sitteth upon the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?

He, he alone, who finds mercy. And he alone will find mercy then, who seeks it now, and who seeks it in the only way, in which it can ever be found--by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are not then found to have believed in him, you will find no mercy; and unless you find mercy, it were far better for you, that you had never been born. Do you ask for what shall we need mercy? I answer, if for nothing else, yet for the neglect with which you have treated the Savior, to whom you are so deeply indebted.

In former ages, God found reason to say to his creatures, A son honoreth his father and a servant his master: if then I be a Father, where is mine honor? and if I be a Master, where is my fear? saith the Lord of Hosts. With at least equal force and propriety may our Savior now say, Men are grateful to their

benefactors and deliverers; but if I am such, where are the proofs of that gratitude which they owe to me? I see triumphal arches raised, and costly preparations made, and loud acclamations poured forth, to welcome a human benefactor.

But where are the grateful returns which I had reason to expect from those, for whom I descended from heaven, and suffered and died? My hearers, contrast your obligations to the Savior with those which you owe the man who has recently visited us; compare the proof of gratitude, which the latter has received, (La Fayette--this sermon was preached on the occasion of his visit to Portland) with those which have been shown to Jesus Christ, and then say, whether our Savior has not reason to complain; whether we have not reason to feel guilty and ashamed.

Is it not, O is it not but too evident that our God and Redeemer hold at most, but the second place in our estimation, and that we honor the creature more than the Creator? If you think, that we have not rewarded our earthly benefactor more than he deserves--and that we have, I am not disposed to assert--you must surely allow, that we reward our heavenly Benefactor infinitely less than he deserves. There is not, probably, a habitation or a heart in our country, which would not be thrown open to welcome the former.

But, O, how many hearts are shut against the latter, even when he comes and knocks for admission. Thousands, and tens of thousands flock to see the former; but how few, comparatively, wish for an acquaintance with the latter. To sit at table with the former, is regarded as an honor and a privilege, for which men are willing to pay dear; while the table of Jesus Christ, though spread with a banquet of God's own providing is comparatively forsaken. My hearers, can these things be otherwise than highly displeasing to God?

Can he see the son of his love treated with such neglect and ingratitude by creatures whom he died to save, and not be greatly offended? And will not such conduct appear even to us, to need pardoning mercy, when he whom we have thus requited, shall be seen coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory? Then our triumphal arches, our expensive preparations, and all our expressions of gratitude to a human benefactor will rise up in judgment against us, to condemn us, if we shall be found to have neglected the infinitely great, and generous, and condescending Benefactor of our race.

My hearers, in this respect we are all in a greater or less degree guilty, and have all cause for repentance. Who can say, with truth, in this respect I have made my heart clean? Who can impartially review the manner, in which he has requited his Savior, and then dare to say that he shall not need mercy? My hearers, let me entreat you to seek that mercy now. Let me charge you, by all that is glorious and terrible, and awful in the solemnities of that day, to seek that mercy now; for he who neglects to seek it now, will not find it then.

To him who rejects it now, it will not be offered then; for him who refuses to ask it now, even an apostle might then plead in vain. Let us then send many humble and urgent invitations to our Savior to bless us with a gracious visit. And should he deign to favor us with his presence, let every heart be ready to receive him; let every voice be prepared to greet him; and let old age, and manhood, and youth emulate each other in shouting him welcome, and bringing to him the tribute, which is due to our greatest and best Benefactor.

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