

# Thanksgiving Through Regeneration

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*“What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord”* (Psalm 116:12, 13).

There are three basic ideas implicit in our text: (1) That all the good things which we enjoy are gifts from the Lord; (2) An acknowledgment that we should make some voluntary return to Him; (3) That the appropriate return that we should make is to avail ourselves of those means which the Lord has provided for our eternal salvation and happiness. The idea expressed in the text is that we show genuine gratitude to the Lord for the countless blessings He bestows on us when we “take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord.”

In regard to the first point, namely, the acknowledgment that all the good things we enjoy are gifts from the Lord, we need to understand that the Lord never gives things to us in such a way that we are *compelled* to acknowledge Him as the source. This is clearly evident from the fact that relatively few people do acknowledge, from the heart, that they receive all good things from the Lord. To be sure, many people confess this orally, but, as the Lord said while on earth: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me” (Matthew 15:8).

It might be asked: If this acknowledgment is so essential to true happiness, why doesn't the Lord give us His gifts in such a way that it is clearly evident that we receive them from Him? Surely this would simplify matters and eliminate a disastrous pitfall for the majority of humanity. Perhaps it would simplify matters, but it would also defeat the Lord's purpose in creating us.

The Lord created us because He is infinite love, and love, by its very nature, desires to give of itself to others and thereby make them happy. Stated differently, love is in its delight when it is communicating its delights to others. It is fulfilled when the love communicated is received and reciprocated. Therefore the Lord created us—human beings capable of receiving and reciprocating His love. But this relationship cannot exist apart from our freedom. Only that which is received in freedom is delightful, and only that which is given in freedom confers delight on the recipient. Therefore the Lord said to His disciples: “Freely you have received; freely give” (Matthew 10:8).

It is essential to the Lord's purpose in creation that we be free to acknowledge that all the blessings of life come from Him—or to deny this. Although the Lord guards against our being compelled to acknowledge Him, nevertheless He provides every possible means for our coming to this acknowledgment *in freedom*. He supplies us with all the evidence we need to confirm and support ourselves in this acknowledgment and belief.

To the degree that we recognize this basic reality of life and respond to it affirmatively, to that degree we fulfill the purpose of creation. For, as said before, love is in its delight when it is received and reciprocated, and we cannot reciprocate unless we acknowledge the source of what

we are receiving. To reciprocate means to give back or return. How can we give back or return something if we do not know (or are unwilling to acknowledge) the source from which it comes?

Since this is the order of creation, each one of us has a choice to make, and the Lord preserves our freedom to make it. We may choose to deny the Lord as the source of life and all its blessings, and live in an unreal world, according to an order and code of our own devising. Or we may choose to acknowledge the truth: that the Lord is the creator and preserver of the universe, the source of life and happiness.

As we have noted, the Lord never communicates His gifts to us perceptibly. He operates secretly, so that the appearance of self-life, which is essential to freedom, may be preserved. Therefore, we must work—as of ourselves—to obtain these gifts. We see this truth abundantly illustrated in life. A farmer, in order to obtain a harvest, must prepare the land, sow the seeds, cultivate the soil, remove the weeds, and, finally, reap the harvest. Before the mineral deposits of the earth yield up their riches, they must first be mined, then the ore must be smelted to separate the metal. The metal must then be tempered and treated until it is serviceable for use. The clothes we wear go through many processes and many hands before the finished product emerges. The same is true of the houses we live in. The wood, steel, bricks, glass, iron, stone, cement and paint have all gone through many processes, and the labor of many hundreds of people has been involved before a house is ready to live in.

On the surface it would appear that these things, mentioned above, were not gifts of the Lord, but the products of human hands and ingenuity. The Lord takes care that it should so appear! But if we look at it more deeply—if we penetrate the appearances—we will see that in every case, even with synthetic materials, the basic raw materials are provided by the Lord. He provides a variety of seeds which produce the many different kinds of woods suitable for different uses in building. All the different elements in nature were created by Him, and each one contributes to some use for the benefit of humanity. We do not create these materials; we discover them and then adapt them for our use.

We see from this that the benefits which we enjoy come to us *from* the Lord *through* the instrumentality of people. The appearance is that people provide them; the reality is that the Lord does. In this way the Lord provides that if we acknowledge Him as the source of all these benefits, we do so in freedom. For we are free to confirm either the *appearance* or the *reality*.

If we recognize this truth, then this question naturally and spontaneously arises within us: “What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?” From a sense of gratitude we wish to make a voluntary return to the Lord in recognition of the fact that we receive everything from Him. Then what should be the nature of the return? This question is answered very simply in our text: “I will take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.” This is all that the Lord asks of us. If we wish to show, in a living way, that we are truly grateful to the Lord for the many benefits He bestows on us, all we need to do is use His gifts for their intended purpose.

Every thing which the Lord has created is created to perform a use for humanity. And since His ultimate purpose in creation is to make us happy to eternity from Himself, therefore every thing

is created to contribute to our *eternal* welfare and the eternal wellbeing of our fellow human beings.

Here, again, the Lord leaves us in freedom. We may use His Divine gifts for their intended purpose—to promote *eternal* ends—or we may regard them only for their *temporal* value. We may seek them for their own sake, without regard for their intended use. When we misuse the gifts which the Lord gives us, we make, in ourselves, the origin of evil. We pervert that which we receive when we apply it to something for which it was not intended.

Let us not allow ourselves to be deceived by appearances. When we experience the delight which the Lord's gifts confer upon us, the appearance is that the delight comes as a result of receiving the gifts. The reality is that all genuine delight comes in *using* the gifts for their intended purpose. There is no true delight apart from use. All delight is from the Lord, and He bestows delight upon those who use His gifts as He intended them to be used.

When we reflect on this, we see in it the great wisdom and mercy of the Lord. For He has so ordered His creation that the more we use His gifts aright, the greater our delight in them becomes. The Lord's purpose in creating us is fulfilled when we receive His love and reciprocate it by communicating it to others.

If we wish to truly express gratitude and thanks to the Lord for the many benefits He bestows on us, we should recognize that all things were created to serve an eternal end. And that end is that there may be a heaven from the human race. We may say, therefore, that every blessing which we enjoy, both natural and spiritual, is given to us for the sake of regeneration—ours and that of other people.

The food which we eat and the recreations we enjoy are given to us that we may have a sound body in which our spirit may dwell and positively affect others while we live on earth. All the knowledge we receive, and all the truths from the Word which we perceive, every delightful experience which we have had—all these gifts are intended to serve as a means of our regeneration. And they will serve this end if we use them for this eternal purpose, and do not seek their delights apart from their intended use.

True thanksgiving consists in acknowledging that we receive everything from the Lord, in a heartfelt desire to make a return to Him, and in the life of regeneration through the performance of uses to others. So, let us “take the cup of salvation and call upon the name of the Lord.” Let us “enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise: be thankful to Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endures to all generations” (Psalm 100:4, 5).

*Amen.*

Lessons: Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 100; *Arcana Coelestia* 9294:1-2

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