

LIVING A LIFE OF PRAISE

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Doxology

The English word “doxology” comes from the Greek word *doxologia*. This is a compound of the two Greek words *doxa* “praise, glory” and *lego* “to speak.” Literally, therefore the word means “to speak words of praise or glory.” The definition given for “doxology” in the 1828 edition of *Webster’s Dictionary* is “In Christian worship, a hymn of praise of the Almighty; a particular form of giving glory to God.” In the eleventh edition of the *Old School Hymnal*, hymn number three is entitled *The Doxology*. The beautiful words to it were written by Thomas Ken, who lived from 1637-1711. The music to which it is sung came from the Geneva Psalter of 1551. The simple yet sublime words to this doxological paean of praise are:

*Praise God from Whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him all creatures here below;
Praise Him above ye heav’n-ly host,
Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*

The title of this article, “Living a Life of Praise” means living a life that is filled with doxology. I believe that the Scriptures make it plain that it is the duty and privilege of all Christians to live with praise and thanksgiving to God always running through their lives as a mighty underground stream. Very frequently this current of thanksgiving and adoration of God should erupt in streams of verbal joyful praise.

God, speaking in His inspired word by the writer to the Hebrews, exhorted us to: “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” (Hebrews 13:15). The word translated “continually” is *diapantos*. It means “constantly, always, continually.” Saints should live in a continual state and attitude of praise and thanksgiving. Even when things are not going well at all for us in our estimation, we should still praise our wonderful Lord and God. The prophet, Habakkuk, spoke of a very dismal time in the history of Israel. He said there was coming a time when “... the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls...” These would be very trying times indeed. Nevertheless, even in the midst of all this he said, “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.” (Habakkuk 3:17,18).

David’s life was filled with this continual praise to God. He had his downittings and his uprisings, but his life was fundamentally characterized by praise. When he wrote Psalm seventy- one he was an old man. He had been in many dangers and difficulties while serving God. He had been rescued from his own sins on more than one occasion, by His gracious God. When he thought of all the watch care that

God had blessed him with all the days of his life, he said in Psalm 71:6 “By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise shall be **continually** of thee.” As he thought over all this, he determined to praise God even more than he had in the past. He exhorted himself to “Let my mouth be filled with thy praise and with thy honour **all the day.**” (verse 8). He determined that “...I will hope **continually**, and will yet praise thee more and more.” (verse 14).

David and Habakkuk were not the only Biblical characters who filled their lives with doxology. Other Old Testament personages could be mentioned. Also many of those in the New Testament, both men and women, continually praised and thanked God, no matter what outward circumstances they found themselves in. We will examine the lives of several of these a little later on.

Why Praise?

His Inherent Excellence

Why have the pages of history been filled with those who continually praised the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? Can we emulate them in our lives? Is this an unrealistic goal?

The most fundamental of all reasons to praise God is simply for Who He is. It is obvious that He should be praised for His manifold works and blessings, but He should be praised because of His **intrinsic excellence**. The word “intrinsic” means “belonging to the nature of a thing; not dependent on external circumstances; essential; inherent.” All true excellence is inherent in God. David recognized this in the well-known Psalm 103. In this psalm David praised God for His many blessings. In verse 2 he said “Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits...” Then he went on to enumerate an extensive catalog of the wonderful, inimitable blessings that can come only from the hand of God. However, even before he began to bless God for all His blessings, David said in verse 1 “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless **his holy name.**” In Scripture when the writers speak of the name of a person, they mean all that the name represents. The name of the person and the person are therefore identical. Here David is saying that praise should be given to God simply for Who He is. This should be done even before the abundant benefits that He graciously bestows on His people are considered. David had reference to this inherent excellence again when he wrote in Psalm 8:9 “O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”

We should praise God simply for Who He is!

His Works

Creation

We should also continually praise our great God for all **His marvelous works**. His works are manifested in many different areas. David said in the last verse of that marvelous Psalm 103, “Bless the LORD, **all his works** in all places of his dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul.” It would be impossible here to give an exhaustive catalog of the works of our great God, but let us just consider a few areas. What about the work of **Creation**? How long has it been since you have actually taken time out to meditate on the power and wisdom of God as manifested by His creation? In Psalm 8:3, David said that he was made to rejoice “When I consider thy heavens, the **work of thy fingers**, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained...” We have this witness continually with us night and day, but how does it affect us? Does it cause us to praise God? Do we lift our hearts to the heavens which remind us of our God? I am afraid that all too often we are like the hogs who eat the acorns from under the oak tree and never lift up their heads to observe where the blessings come from. God has done an incomprehensibly mighty work in His work of creation, and we ought to continually praise Him for it. After all “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his **handywork**.” (Psalm 19:1).

What about our **human bodies and minds**? The human body is a marvel of engineering. Countless volumes have been written on the amazing complexity of the many systems which comprise the body of man. After centuries of study there is still much more that we do not know about our makeup than we do know. It is a sad commentary on our ingratitude to our Creator that we seldom give Him thanks and praise for how He has made us. We perform very complex functions with our minds. Our eyes are better than the most complicated camera ever built. We could go on and on and comment on the many organ systems we are blessed with that we take for granted day after day. These bodies and minds were given to us by God and we should bless and praise His name for these wonderful gifts. When David contemplated his physical and mental gifts, he said “I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: **marvellous are thy works**; and that my soul knoweth right well.” (Psalm 139:14).

Deliverance

Not only should the Lord continually be praised for His work in creating the universe and mankind; He should also be praised for His works of **deliverance**. More times than we are aware of, we have been delivered from danger and destruction. We are constantly faced with dangers both seen and unseen. We would all have been destroyed long ago had it not been for the mercies of the Lord. We are much more helpless and dependent than we are usually aware of. Truly “... in him we live, and move, and have our being...” (Acts 17:28). Psalm 107 is a recital of how the Lord continually delivered Israel from the difficulties they got themselves into by their own disobedience to God’s laws. He graciously had mercy on the Israelites and rescued them time after time. As the psalmist contemplated this he repeated several times what he said in verse 8, “Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!” If we would slow down a bit from the hectic course of our lives and reflect on the many times the Lord had delivered us from various dangers and difficulties, we would find ample reason to continually praise our God.

To see a good Old Testament example of how Israel sometimes praised her God, consider the song of triumph and thanksgiving recorded in Exodus 15:1-21. This expression of worship and gratitude was given immediately after Israel had been delivered through the Red Sea from the murderous hordes of

the bloodthirsty Egyptians. Sadly, the children of Israel soon forgot this marvelous deliverance and began to complain against the very same God they had previously praised. We must constantly be on guard against this sinful tendency that affects even the people of God. A good New Testament example of praise for God's deliverance is recorded in Acts 4:24-31. This wonderful expression of praise and thanksgiving was rendered after the apostles had successfully withstood the efforts of the Jewish leaders to silence their testimony on behalf of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ.

We who make the humble yet grateful claim to be the children of God should stand ready to constantly praise our God for His continually delivering us from all sorts of disastrous situations in which we find ourselves. May we say what David did in Psalm 26: 6b-7, "...so will I compass thine altar, O LORD: That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all **thy wondrous works.**"

Salvation From Our Sins

The thing that should bring forth loud and continual praise from us is the fact that we have been saved from our sins by the grace of God extended to us in the **Person** and **Work** of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been ultimately saved from the holy wrath of God which will be poured out on all for whom Christ did not purchase redemption. We cannot even imagine how horrible is the wrath of God against sin. Paul said that we ought "...to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which **delivered us from the wrath to come.**" (1 Thessalonians 1:10). Admittedly those Israelites had ample reason to enthusiastically praise God when He opened up the Red Sea for their deliverance, and then destroyed their inveterate enemies in that same sea. Can you imagine how those unarmed people felt when they saw the immense cloud of dust raised by the war chariots of the Egyptians? Their hearts were filled with fear and dread. They knew that Pharaoh would have no mercy on them. At best they would return to an even harsher slavery than they had been delivered from. Most likely, however, they would be slain without mercy by those cruel warriors whose land had been devastated by the ten plagues. They could not hope to defend themselves against the trained veterans of Pharaoh. In just a few hours they would see their wives and little ones cut down before their very eyes. The sea was before them and there was no way of escape. When the Lord miraculously delivered them we cannot imagine their gratitude and euphoria. They praised God with animation and enthusiasm.

We who hope in the eternal salvation wrought by Christ on the cross have much more reason to praise God than did the children of Israel. The wrath of God against sin is eternal. The few descriptions we have of this wrath in the Bible are horrible. Jude speaks of those who are "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." He also says that there are some who will be "suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." He speaks of those "to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever." Revelation 19:20 tells of a horrible place and condition in the following words, "And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone." The beast and the false prophet are not alone in being eternally consigned to that horrible state of eternal existence. We read that "...whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire." (Revelation 20:15). Bible readers know that those who are not the elect children of God do not have their name in the book of life. If we

have hope that we have been delivered from this unspeakably terrible condition by the precious blood of Christ, **how we should raise doxologies to our glorious God and Saviour!**

Not only should we constantly praise God for the **relationship** we have with Him through the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We should also thank Him for restoring **fellowship** between us and Him when that fellowship has been broken by sin. A child of God can never lose his relationship with God. Just as my children will always be my children, whether or not they are obedient or disobedient, so the children of God will always be the children of God, even when they are temporarily in disobedience. However, even though my children will never lose their relationship with me, they can certainly lose their fellowship with me. When they are disobedient and I am displeased with their misbehavior, I do not manifest myself to them as affectionate and friendly. There is tension and unpleasantness until the situation is resolved by repentance and a change in behavior. Likewise a child of God loses that sweet, comforting sense of God's approving presence when he persists in disobedience. This is not a minor matter. When God hides His smiling face, the recipient of His disapproval is miserable. David lost his fellowship with God and gave a very graphic account of how miserable he was while this situation persisted. He said in Psalm 32:3,4 "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer..." He described this miserable condition in Psalm 51:8 in this way, "Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice." Life was hardly worth living in such a condition.

However, God graciously allows His erring children to have that sweet fellowship with Him restored. He said in 1 John 1:9 that "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." What a glorious blessing this is! We must not take this for granted. How should we respond when our dear Lord kindly allows us to get back in His fellowship? David expressed it this way in Psalm 51:14,15 "Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, thou God of my salvation: and **my tongue shall sing aloud** of thy righteousness. O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

The Apostle Paul

Paul is one of the best examples in the entire Bible of an individual who lived a life filled with praise to God. This is remarkable when we consider that Paul did not live a life of ease or luxury. In fact, if any of us were called to live the kind of life he lived we would be very sober-minded about it. He lost almost everything that most people count dear to serve his Lord. He spent most of the several decades in which he functioned as an apostle in poverty. He supported himself by working hard with his own hands. He actually went hungry on more than one occasion. He was ship wrecked more than once. Many of his one-time friends turned their backs on him. His life was frequently in danger. He had many permanent marks or scars on his body, which were the results of beatings he had been subjected to by both religious and civil authorities. He several times spent time in jails and prisons. He finally gave up his life in a martyr's death. How could such a man be almost continually joyful in the Lord? How could his epistles be filled with doxology? Remember this is the man who himself said that he had "suffered the loss of all things..."

Doctrine and Doxology

The answer is that Paul continually had on his mind the great truths that concerned the **Person** and **Work of the Lord Jesus Christ**. Paul was a very **doctrinal** preacher and writer. Many Christians today think that doctrine is dry and dull, and dread it when the preacher announces that he is going to preach a doctrinal sermon. Very few people voluntarily read books on theological doctrines. What a great mistake and misunderstanding this is! Doctrine is not a set of theoretical mental abstractions. True Christian doctrine is composed of eternal truths. The **doctrine of the resurrection**, for example is not some complicated and esoteric theory. The resurrection is a glorious fact! This doctrine tells what is really going to happen to the bodies and souls of the saints. It tells of their incomprehensibly blessed eternal condition. Likewise, the **doctrine of redemption** tells of something that actually happened. It tells us that the debt we owed to Divine Justice has been paid in full by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are gloriously free of that debt! Paul rejoiced in that truth when he said in Gal. 2:20 "...the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." This doctrinal truth made Paul joyful. Even though she was blind, Fannie Crosby spent a life filled with rejoicing. One of the things that made her rejoice was the glorious truth of redemption. She wrote, "I think of my blessed Redeemer, O think of Him all the day long; I sing, for I cannot be silent; His love is the theme of my song."

Paul was also happy because of the glorious doctrine of **election**. He knew that he had been an enemy of Jesus Christ. He also knew that this same Christ had sovereignly saved him even as he was going about persecuting His people. After he was saved he became aware of the fact that the reason he had been saved was because the Father had chosen him in the Son, even before the world began. He wrote of this in Ephesians 1:4 "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love..." However, he did not consider this doctrine of election as a cold, dry, or forbidding truth. He greatly rejoiced in it, because he knew this was the only way he could have been saved. He preceded his description of this doctrine with a **spiritual song** of joy and wonder. He said in Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ..."

Brothers and sisters let us keep our minds centered on God, on His Person, His ways, His works, His doctrines, and let us live lives that are filled with doxologies to His Holy Name. If we do this we will be getting a little foretaste of what the redeemed will be doing for all eternity!