

Grateful or Grumbling?
Pastor Steven J. Cole, October, 1997

Helen Keller, born blind and deaf, wrote, "I have always thought it would be a blessing if each person could be blind and deaf for a few days during his early adult life. Darkness would make him appreciate sight; silence would teach him the joys of sound."

Her words lead me to ask, Do we truly appreciate each day as God's gracious gift to us? Are we filled with gratitude for the many blessings He gives us? It's so easy to slip into a grumbling, negative attitude, frustrated by the problems and irritations we face, not seeing even these things as sent from the hand of a loving God. As His redeemed people, our lives should daily overflow with gratitude for His gracious salvation, even in the midst of trials (see Col. 1:10-12; 2:7).

I just finished reading a wonderful section in Calvin's *Institutes* in which he argues that God's providence rules over *every* aspect of His creation. Even inanimate powers, such as sun, moon, and stars, wind and rain, obey His every command. As he puts it, "It is certain that not one drop of rain falls without God's sure command" (1.16.5). He reminds us that not even a sparrow falls to the ground without the Father's will. How much more, then, does He care for us!

I just read this yesterday. This morning during my quiet time, a small gray junco flew into the window outside where I was sitting and fell to the ground. It stayed there for a few minutes, so I went outside and picked it up. It seemed to be alive, but stunned by the impact. It sat on my finger for a few minutes, blinking as if it was trying to come back to full consciousness. I tried to put it on the limb of a tree so the cats would not get it, but it took off over my shoulder. I thought it had flown off and I was about to go back in the house when I realized that it was sitting on my shoulder. Finally, after a few more minutes, it flew off into a tree, seemingly okay. Having just read Calvin on God's providence over such trivial happenings, I rejoiced in the loving care of God for all His creatures, especially for my family and me.

After citing many biblical references that show God's fatherly care for His people, Calvin concludes, "Indeed, the principal purpose of Biblical history is to teach that the Lord watches over the ways of the saints with such great diligence that they do not even stumble over a stone [Ps. 91:12]" (1.17.6). In the next section, he applies this to the theme of gratitude: "Gratitude of mind for the favorable outcome of things, patience in adversity, and also incredible freedom from worry about the future all necessarily follow upon this knowledge [of God's providential care]." He goes on to show how God's servants should relate every incident in life, even everyday common blessings, to His beneficent care. He concludes the section, "Admonished by so many evidences, [the Christian] will not continue to be ungrateful" (1.17.8). The beauty of Calvin's teaching here is how he relates all of life, even the so-called trivial and commonplace happenings, to the providential care of the loving Sovereign of the universe. As he states, "If you pay attention, you will easily perceive that ignorance of providence is the ultimate of all miseries; the highest blessedness lies in the knowledge of it" (1.17.11).

In a "Peanuts" cartoon, Lucy and Linus are looking out the window at a steady downpour of rain. "Boy," said Lucy, "look at it rain. What if it floods the whole world?"

"It will never do that," Linus replies confidently. "In the ninth chapter of Genesis, God promised Noah that it would never happen again, and the sign of the promise is the rainbow "

"You've taken a great load off my mind," says Lucy with a relieved smile.

"Sound theology," states Linus, "has a way of doing that!"

Precisely! Sound theology should make us grateful people, not just once a year at Thanksgiving time, but every day, in every incident, no matter how trivial. And our grateful lives should radiate the loving care of God to a world filled with gloom. Are you growing in gratefulness, or groveling in grumbling? Maybe you'd better re-focus on your theology!