

Dear Friend,

Do you thank God for your food when you sit down to a meal? Why do you do that? Is it not true that when you thank a person for something you are acknowledging that the gift you have received has come from that person? If your Aunt Sallie gives you a new pair of socks for Christmas you do not write a thank you note to your Uncle Joe. You thank Aunt Sallie for the socks. So, each time you thank God for your food you are acknowledging that God himself gave you this food to eat. According to the Bible you are right to thank God for your food because the Bible declares that God is indeed the one who gives you your food and so you should thank him.

We are in a series of articles in which we are considering the doctrine of God's providence. God giving us food to eat is another work of God's providence, another thing that God is pleased to do (Psalm 135:6). This fact is attested to by hundreds of verses in the Bible. "The eyes of all look to you and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing (Psalm 145:15-16)." "Look at the birds of the air, they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them (Matthew 6:26)." "He has shown you kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their season. He provides you with plenty of food... (Paul speaking to idol worshipping pagans in Acts 14:17)." "He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: wine that gladdens the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread that sustains his life... The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God (Psalm 104:14-15, 21)."

All the food that every creature on the face of this planet consumes, from single-celled bacteria to blue whales is given to each one by God himself. Whether they are herbivores (plant-eaters) or carnivores (meat-eaters) or omnivores (plant and meat eaters) or plants themselves, God gives to each living organism the food they need to live. God's providing Israel with manna on the desert floor six days out of every week was an unusual way for God to provide food for people. Jesus providing food for the crowds by supernaturally multiplying the fish and bread was an unusual way for God to feed people. However, God is no less directly involved in his providing food for every human being and every other living creature every day than he was in providing manna to Israel or fish and bread to the crowds.

Just as we saw in God's using means (such as the water cycle) to control weather patterns, so we also see here that God uses means to provide food. He describes the provision of sun and rain as necessary for the growing of plants for food. He recognizes that man must sow and cultivate and reap in order to obtain the food that he provides. So when you give thanks for the steak you are going to eat, you are thanking God for giving you the steak by his controlling and directing of an innumerable number of processes and people to bring that steak to your plate. The fact that rain had to fall so grass would grow and the cow had to eat the grass and a rancher had to protect the cow from harm and a butcher had to cut up the steak and a grocer sold the steak and your mother cooked the steak does not mean that God did not give the steak to you. He managed all of these things and many more so that you could have the steak. It is his gift to you.

God provides his food to all without discrimination. Food truly is a gracious gift. You do not earn or deserve food. God freely, out of his own pleasure gives food to all. Every morsel of food that you and I eat is a gift that we have not earned, nor do we deserve it and thus we should

always be grateful. God is intimately involved in our lives. He is carefully, wisely caring for us in the weather he sends and in the food he supplies.

However, we must also recognize that God not only is pleased to provide food for his creatures but, according to his own wise purposes he also determines when to withhold food and to create famine. Joseph told Pharaoh that the dream he had of seven starving cows swallowing up seven well-fed cows and seven withered heads of grain swallowing up seven full heads of grain was a dream sent by God to let Pharaoh know that he was going to send seven years of abundant harvest followed by seven years of famine (Genesis 41:1-32, esp. 32). Thus, Psalm 105:16 says, "He (God) called down famine on the land and destroyed all the supplies of food..." We know that God sent these seven years of famine to exalt Joseph and to bring Israel and his sons to Egypt. In 2 Samuel 21:1-14 we are told that during the reign of King David there was a severe famine for three years. David, we are told sought the face of the Lord and this is what the Lord said to David, "It (the famine) is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."

While in the Scriptures we are often told why God has sent famines upon people, most of the time God does not tell us the specific reasons for why he withholds his food from certain people. God does tell us that we should seek to alleviate the suffering of the hungry as we are able (Luke 12:33, Acts 20:35). What we do know is that God is in charge of giving his food to his creatures as he pleases. Therefore we are to give thanks for our food and recognize famine as an out breaking of God's just anger against human sin. We should repent of our sins so that something worse does not happen to us as Jesus counsels the crowds when hearing of or experiencing suffering in this world (Luke 13:1-5).

Next month we will consider what the doctrine of God's providence teaches us about our work.

Thankfully,