



**Thanksgiving in Colossians, Part 1**

**November 27, 2013**

### **Introduction**

The book of Colossians provides us with many important reasons for giving thanks. At the heart of it, we must recognize that thanksgiving is an essential element of the Christian life. This is seen all throughout Scripture as the mark of a believer.

Notice the opposite of that in Romans 1:21 — unbelievers “did not glorify Him as God, *neither were thankful.*” Two marks of unbelief are idolatry and ingratitude. Paul even warns Timothy about a number of things coming in the future, and near the end of the list is that people will be ungrateful (2 Tim 3:2).

Contrast that with the work and power of grace:

“For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.”

~2 Cor 4:15

One of the immediate outcomes of a heart that responds to God in salvation is a heart that responds with thanksgiving to God. But this thankful attitude also continues throughout a believer’s life. Consider Paul: even though he had a life filled with adversity, trials, and difficulties, he maintained a heart of thankfulness through it all.

When he wrote to the Colossians, he was writing to a group of people he never actually met. The church was planted by another man, and he had learned of the church through some of his associates. But in every chapter of this letter, something is said about thanksgiving. There are six reasons Paul gives for the giving of thanks. We will examine the first three of these here.

### **Reason #1: Colossians 1:9–12**

**So that we may walk worthy of the Lord and please Him in everything.**

Notice the breakdown of these verses. Verse 9 gives the content of his prayer — that they would be filled with the knowledge of God. Verse 10 addresses the two reasons for praying this: that they would walk worthy of the Lord and that they may please Him. And finally from 10b–12, Paul tells us what it takes to please God:

- 1) Bearing fruit in every good work
- 2) Increasing in the knowledge of God.
- 3) Strengthened with all power...for patience and longsuffering with joy
- 4) Joyously giving thanks to the Father.

These are four essential elements for pleasing God! But what happens if we take out joyful thanksgiving and replace it with a grumpy demeanor? You are no longer walking in a manner worthy of God and living a life that pleases Him. Don't miss the connection in the chain between the end of the thought and where we started. Notice:

Start

End

Knowing God's will.....A life marked by thanksgiving

To walk worthy of the Lord, we need joyous thanksgiving!

## **Reason #2: Colossians 2:6–7**

### **We must be overflowing with gratitude!**

Notice the reason why it is stated this way — thanksgiving is how we *remain* faithful and growing in the Lord. The context of this thought is found in verses 4 and 8. These verses provide a warning against being deceived by others. Verse 8 also speaks of the traditions of men. What we are supposed to follow is the apostolic tradition — the tradition the apostles received from the Lord. He is at the center of this tradition. According to verse 6, those who accepted the apostles teaching about Christ received Jesus as their Lord. If that is true in your life, then verse 7 instructs us to walk in Him! Don't let others persuade to leave Christ or minimize Christ. Don't let philosophical ramblings undercut the sufficiency of Christ. What Paul is saying is that if we have received Christ, we shouldn't leave that path. He is the way, so walk in Him! Verse 7 provides four characteristics of what this walk is like:

- 1) Having been firmly rooted (already happened)
- 2) Now being built up in Him
- 3) Established/made stable in your faith — Having roots and being built up result in stability in your faith.
- 4) Overflowing with gratitude

Note: Gratitude should be abundant and overflowing, not meager or minimal. If you want to have a life that is really living out the truth of your profession in Christ, then it won't be stingy with thanksgiving. It will be overflowing with it!

How does a life overflowing with thanksgiving serve as a preventative against false teaching? Let's consider this from both the positive and negative angles.

On the positive side, a clear sense of gratitude preserves a loyalty to the One who has blessed us. One way to keep from being drawn away to something else is to consider how much God has blessed us through Christ. Every blessing has been purchased through His death. Every excess we have also comes through Jesus Christ. If we truly understand these things and keep them on the forefront of our mind, then our hearts will overflow with gratitude to Him and the thought of betraying Him will be guarded against.

John says this in another way in 1 John 2:15. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in Him. They are mutually opposed! Jesus said we cannot serve two masters — we will love the one and hate the other. That's just the way it works!

Consider also the situation when Jesus was with the Pharisees and the woman came in and anointed His feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair (Luke 7:36–50). The Pharisees were scandalized by a woman of questionable reputation anointing His feet. They said if this Man was a prophet, he would know what kind of woman she was. Their implied thought is that He would not allow her to touch Him. But what does Jesus do? He tells the parable of the two debtors. One was forgiven a small debt and the other a large debt. Jesus asked which of them had the greater sense of love. They responded correctly, saying the one with the greater sense of indebtedness. The same was true with the woman — she perceived her overwhelming sense of debt, so she looked to the One who forgave her debt with an overwhelming sense of love. This is where we see the relationship between thanksgiving and love. And here is Paul's point in verses 6 and 7. If we have truly received Christ, and truly understand what He has done for us and given to us, then our hearts will overflow with gratitude and love toward Christ and the temptation to turn from the One we love will be very small.

We can also consider the question of preventing false teaching from the negative side. We are most susceptible to temptation when we are discontent. When we are discontent, we are looking for something that satisfies. For the Colossians who were enduring persecution and suffering, Paul says that unless they keep a thankful attitude in the midst of suffering, they will begin to seek relief from their suffering — and not in a good way! In their day, persecution came from those who opposed the doctrines of Christ. So turning away from Christ to more “acceptable” doctrines would be a way out of their troubles.

Today, believers who are discontent are susceptible to the persuasive traditions of men. What happens is we go from being objects of scorn to being part of the scornful crowd. One of the guards against this is an overwhelming sense of gratitude. Any kind of discontentment, whether it be financial, physical, relational, etc. — these are all forms of spiritual discontentment. And this makes us ripe for deception and defection. So thanksgiving is how we please the Lord, do His will, and live out a life faithful to the Lord.

### **Reason #3: Colossians 3:15**

#### **Thanksgiving is how we maintain peaceful relationships.**

Verse 15 has been misused by several Christians as a rubric for decision-making. But that is *not* what this verse is talking about. The peace in this verse is between believers. The “one body” is a body of believers. Paul talks about maintaining this kind of peace throughout his letters:

Ephesians 4:3 — “...keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Romans 12:18 — “as much as lies within you, be at peace with all men.”

Romans 14:19 — “...pursue the things which make for peace.”

It’s important to have peace with one another in the body of Christ.

But here’s the real issue: if we *do* have a dispute with another person (and we will), the best way to resolve it is to ask, “What is the best way to advance the peace of Christ?” In some cases, we should go ahead and let ourselves be defrauded instead of going to court (1 Cor 6). We are not told to go after our own piece of the pie. We are told to pursue peace in the body of Christ.

The phrase at the end of the verse, “and be thankful” could appear as though it is simply tacked on the end. But the ideas of peaceful

relations and thankfulness are related. Both are keys to healthy relationships.

Generally, a lack of peace results from self-seeking or dissatisfaction with things as they are. Thanksgiving points one to the realization that all things are provided in Christ. There is no room for ill-will or bitterness if thankfulness prevails. If you have a conflict with someone and you can genuinely be thankful for something about that person, that is a giant step toward resolution.

Think about Joseph's attitude: his brothers threw him in a pit and then sold him into slavery. But later Joseph recognized that they meant it to him for evil, but God meant it to him for good (Gen 50:20)! In a way, he had his brothers to thank because through their actions, God brought about deliverance for Joseph's family in the midst of the famine.

Just as Joseph sought out peaceful relations with his brothers, so we should also seek peace with others even when they wrong us. There is always something we can be thankful for in any person!

### **Conclusion**

Because we are not burning in hell right now paying the penalty for our sins, we have an enormous amount to be thankful for. We are so far beyond the bare minimum. We are so far past that our hearts should overflow with gratitude! And if we did, that would have a radical effect on the nature of our Christian life, the health of the church, and the power of our witness for Christ!

Thankful people are radiant people! They are people who reflect a right relationship to God through Christ!

~AWB