

Colossians 3:15-17 Give Thanks With A Grateful Heart! Nov. 23-24, 2016 Thanksgiving

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Grace and peace from God our bountiful Father and from Jesus Christ our Savior and Provider.

God's Word to give us grateful hearts is written in Colossians 3:15-17

These are Your words dear Father. Help us to grow in thankfulness through Your truth. Your Word is truth.

Dear Christian Friends,

It's Thanksgiving! We're gathered today (tonight) to give thanks to God. Like the first pilgrims, we're thankful to God for the crops that are in and to be able to live in a land of freedom. We have so much more than those early pilgrims: jobs, schools, warm clothes, and good health. Thinking of these and many more blessings should lead us to praise and thank our God. Even though we have challenges, we still can:

Give thanks with a grateful heart!

First, what keeps us from being thankful? Often, we're not content. That started after the first temptation when Satan got Eve to question the goodness of God. The devil supposedly offered her more than a perfect life on earth, that she would also know evil along with good. His sowing seeds of discontent worked in Eve and Adam and it often grows in us. We're tempted to think that we always need more or something better. And when we don't get it we become discontent and unable to thank God as we should.

Take the example of Israel in the wilderness. At first they had no food. So, they called to God for help and He miraculously provided Manna. They were thrilled with it for the first month or so. But eating nothing but Manna every day got old and they complained. It's the same with all people. If you give a child a special treat one day, he will be thankful. If he continues to get the same treat every day, he may not be as thankful. But, if you run out of the treat after a week, he can be angry! What happened? He went from being grateful, to expecting the treat as if it were his right to get it. It's in all of our natures have the same attitude with God. He gives us abundant blessings day after day and year after year, but our thankfulness turns to complacency or demands more from God. We have a sinful attitude that says, "I deserve good things" or worse yet, "I deserve better." This thinking keeps us from being as content and grateful as we should be.

The other thing which keeps us from being thankful is when we tie our thankfulness to human success. We think blessings must include having: friends, a job, doing well in school, having a home or money. What happens when things don't go well at work, school, or with friends, when we get sick or have to leave our home? Has God stopped blessing us that we should no longer be thankful? No! Should we simply try to counteract negative thinking by reminding ourselves that others have it worse? No! That may help us accept a problem, but it doesn't help us get thankful hearts. God has a best solution!

Second, remember the good things God has done! Paul wrote in v. 15, "*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.*" (v.15) He wants us to focus on "the peace of Christ" not the peace of the world. Christ's peace is especially important when the world around us or when we are not at peace. How can we focus on His peace? We begin by confessing our unthankfulness to God. Then, we listen to His Word that Christ has forgiven all our sins by His death on the cross. He won peace between God and us. The Lord is now for us. In the midst of troubles, God said to Jeremiah, "*I know the thoughts that I think toward you... of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.*" (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

We need that Word! Paul wrote in v. 16, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”*(v.16) If we begin every day in God’s Word, He will give us a humble attitude that helps us appreciate what He has done and He keeps doing for us. His Word states that when our hearts condemn us, *“God is greater than our hearts.”* (1 John 3:20) As we pray we trust in God’s promise that in Jesus *“God will work out all things for our good.”* (Romans 8:18) Whether *“we live or die, we belong to the Lord.”* (Romans 14:8) We even look at problems differently when we remember: *“The Lord disciplines those He loves.”*(Hebrews 12:6) So, we pray for God’s Word to give us confidence in His promises no matter what is going on around us!

I once read an article about a woman who contracted cancer of the blood cells. She suffered greatly from it, but she found joy despite the pain! How could she do this? God’s Word gave her a stronger faith. She learned that despite the radiation treatment and the chemotherapy, she could put everything in God’s hands. She thanked God for every day of life. She thanked God for her caring spouse. She thanked God that she could help other people who were struggling with the same illness. And she thanked God for letting her be a witness to help the medical personnel as they helped her.

She was following what Paul wrote in v. 16, *“Teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.”* (v.16) By her life of faith she was teaching others. She learned and showed others that gratitude does not start with the things that we have. Thankfulness begins with trusting God. This concept is foreign to people. They want to see blessings before they respond with thankfulness. But, we want to see things God’s way and help others to do the same. Think of your spiritual heart as a home. How much time is the Word of God with you? Is His Word just a visitor once a week or is it a full-time resident? We want to unclutter our hearts making room for the Word of God so that the Holy Spirit works the changes we need. Our faith and the gratitude which comes from it can only be as strong as our connection to Christ.

Third, our thankfulness helps others give thanks with a thankful heart. Paul wrote, *“Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”* (v.16, 17) We should remember that every moment we have in the world is a gift of God. Have you ever wondered why God has allowed you to live as long as you have? Why hasn’t God taken you to heaven, yet? There are probably many reasons, but one of them is so that you can encourage other people. You do make a difference as a Christian in this world as you pray and as you live in Christ’s love. Think about a room full of gloomy people gathered because they think they’re about to lose their jobs. A person walks into the room with the news that the jobs will not be lost, and the mood of the whole room is changed. Our news is much better: Christ loved us and gave His life for us to save us from eternal death and give us life! This news changes everything and fills us and all who believe God’s good news with joy and thankfulness.

Thanksgiving is a wonderful time to remember God’s blessings, recent and past, physical and spiritual. It is also a time to seek God’s continued blessings for our country, our community, our church, and our families. But, we also pray that God would continue to give us thankful hearts in Jesus’ peace. Let us listen to God’s Word to better see that in all circumstances God is working for our eternal good. So, give thanks with a grateful heart in Christ and let your light of joy in Him encourage others to give thanks and learn of the Savior for eternal life. Amen.