

Daily Thanksgiving

by Staff

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"In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." —I Thessalonians 5:18

This is the season in which millions of Americans will be focused on Thanksgiving Day—or "Turkey Day," as the modern vernacular styles it—with its traditional turkey dinner, sumptuous side dishes, pumpkin pie, and football games. Many people will have various reasons for celebrating this autumnal holiday. Some will actually consider their own circumstances and America's place in the world as they seriously examine reasons to be genuinely thankful. Others will consider it as an opportunity to take part in another routine holiday party. Football fans will look forward most to the games on television and perhaps a pickup game in the backyard. Certainly, shopaholics will see it as the day before Black Friday, the beginning of the final shopping lap before the Christmas holiday.

The first Thanksgiving in New England took place in 1621 in the Plymouth Colony in what is now Massachusetts. After arriving in November 1620, their first winter was filled with hardship: little food except the game they hunted, only crude bark shelters to live in, and much sickness. Sadly, about half of the colonists died during the first winter. Therefore, after a good harvest the next year, the Pilgrims, a devoutly religious people, wished to display their deep thankfulness to God for the help, guidance, and progress the colony had been granted.

In 1789, the first President of the United States wrote a Thanksgiving Proclamation. In it, George Washington stated:

It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits . . . that we may all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection . . . for the great degree of tranquility, union, and plenty which we have enjoyed . . . and, in general, for all the great and various favors which He has been pleased to confer upon us . . . that we may then unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech Him to pardon our national and other transgressions.

Most Americans, especially those who consider themselves Christians, make some attempt to be thankful on Thanksgiving Day, if on no other day of the year. However, once a year is not enough. For true Christians, thanksgiving should be a daily occurrence.

This article will present the answers to four critical questions on the subject of thanksgiving, and here is the first:

What Does It Mean to Be Thankful?

When we are thankful, it means that we have been impressed with a sense of kindness that has been expressed toward us, and we desire to acknowledge it. Essentially, it indicates that we are grateful. Thankfulness is the actual expression of our gratitude and acknowledgement of the kindness done to us.

Thankfulness is also a state of mind, an attitude. It is a content and positive perspective, which does not focus on what one does *not* have, but rather values what one *does* have, no matter how basic. The apostle Paul expresses this concept in his letter to Timothy, writing: "Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content" (I Timothy 6:6-8).

Paul continues this thought in the following verses, explaining that greediness creates a great many problems, ultimately bringing upon us discontent and unhappiness. This is just the opposite of the thankfulness that real contentment generates.

Reading these verses on greed and considering the greedy state of man's mind, a popular bumper sticker from several years ago comes to mind: "He who dies with the most things . . . wins." Of course, it did not take long for those whose thinking ran counter to this to reply with their own that read, "He who dies with the most things . . . is dead." This is true; the pursuit of material gain to the exclusion of all else ends in death.

Being thankful is part of being content. Unfortunately, many people feel that being content means that they have to give up on their dreams and goals. It does not. Like thankfulness, contentment is a state of mind. God wants us to be content with and thankful for what we have been given. That does not mean that we cannot want better and work to make our situations better, but it does mean that we should not approach our proper desire for more with a greedy, covetous attitude.

Nor can we compare what others have and what we may not have from an attitude that we deserve the same or even better. Maybe we do deserve it, but right now God has chosen not to give it to us, and we must be content with that and thankful for what we have been given.

How thankful and content we are can be seen in the illustration of water in a glass. Is the glass half-full or half-empty? Our answer depends on and reveals our state of mind.

Why Should We Be Thankful?

It may come as a surprise, but the Bible contains more material about thankfulness than it does about the Sabbath. Does that make it more important? No, but it does mean that it *is* important. Being thankful shows an attitude of humility toward God. It shows God that we know and understand that everything comes from Him, and that we are mindful of His generosity. This point is brought out in I Thessalonians 5:18: "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

In other words, it is God's will for us to be thankful because He knows that it is good for us to have an attitude of thankfulness towards Him. When we have a thankful attitude and an attitude of appreciation for Him and what He does for us, it does not leave much room for ingratitude in our lives.

In reading Psalm 8:3-6, we can see ourselves in perspective to God's creation:

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man, that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him? For You have made him a little lower than the angels, and You have crowned him with glory and honor. You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet. . . .

God has given us—humanity—dominion over the things that He has created. And beyond that, out of all humanity, we have been given a tremendous responsibility to develop righteous character and have the potential of living eternally in His Kingdom. This thought alone should help us to be thankful each day.

What Should We Be Thankful For?

The Bible clearly instructs us on the things for which we should be thankful. There are countless examples of this as we read and study from Genesis (where we were created in His image) to Revelation (where we inherit His Family Kingdom). Salvation and eternal life are the most precious gifts that we could ever possibly be given. We can thank God every day that He has called us to them.

In Matthew 13:16-17, we see that God has given us another great gift in granting us the ability to understand His truth:

But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear; for assuredly, I say to you that many prophets and righteous men have desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

For all the thousands of years of history, men have searched for the truth that we have, but the vast majority were not given the gift to understand it. How awesome does that make the gift we have been given? God opened our minds and guided us to repentance. Because of that, we should also be thankful that "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (Psalm 103:12). In terms of additional spiritual helps and benefits, Paul says in Ephesians 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."

As we can see, God extends countless blessings—both physical and spiritual—to us for following His way. As the apostle James writes in James 1:17, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights." He blesses us so abundantly that, even if we tried, we could not name them all.

How Should We Show Our Thankfulness?

Philippians 4:6 answers this question: "[I]n everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Our prayers should reflect our gratitude towards God for what He has done in our lives and what He gives to us. Our everyday words and thoughts should reflect a positive mindset of hope and joy in thankfulness towards God our Father for His great plan of salvation and our parts in it.

As stated earlier, thankfulness is a form of contentment, or we could view it as peace of mind or tranquility. A truly thankful person is usually not an individual who worries a lot. Being thankful puts our thoughts on God, rather than on our problems. In Colossians 3:15, Paul writes encouragingly, "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts to which also you were called in one body and be thankful." The more we allow God's peace to be in control, the more settled and more thankful we will become. On the flip side, the more thankful we are, the more God's peace will rule our hearts and minds.

In our society, many problems like discouragement, depression, anger, and other mental and emotional troubles are treated with chemicals and drugs. These medicines are designed to offer some

form of relief. Some work and some do not. Many have side effects that, in some cases, are worse than the original problem. Some are addictive. For us, though, thankfulness and praising God are effective and beneficial antidotes for discouragement, depression, and anger.

Supplication with thanksgiving will enliven our prayer life. It will lift us up and give us a more positive perspective. A thankful attitude will help to erase any doubts we may have as we pray, and it will also decrease uncertainty in our lives in general because we know where our help comes from (see Psalm 121:1-8). Proper thankfulness will help us increase our faith in God because we will constantly be relating to and reflecting on Him.

God is *always* deserving of our praise or thanks—indeed, we cannot thank Him enough. How does our heavenly Father feel when we express only a qualified "thank you" occasionally or not at all? How does He feel, knowing that He has done what is the absolute and perfect best for us, and we just shrug it off? How do we feel when this type of unthankful behavior happens to us? Our thanksgiving to God should be so effusive that He will never feel that way!

Ingratitude, whether passive or active, is a tool that Satan can use to turn us away from God and His Family. By succumbing to thanklessness, we can allow him to plant us as tares within the church and spread our ingratitude to others. A steady outflow of gratitude to God will knock this weapon from the Devil's hand.

Such a constant attitude of thankfulness and earnest thanksgiving, no matter the circumstances, is a gift from God to us. Gratitude spreads a healing balm among those with whom we fellowship, and it will help to speed us along the path to God's Kingdom.

The nation will shortly celebrate its Thanksgiving Day. As we have seen from God's Word, His people are to have, not just one day that is set aside for thanksgiving, but a daily practice of heartfelt thanksgiving.

Please reflect on these sentiments about thankfulness:

- » Gratitude is the inward feeling of kindness received. Thankfulness is the natural impulse to express that feeling. Thanksgiving is the following of that impulse. (Henry Van Dyke)
- » Gratitude is riches. Complaint is poverty. (Doris Day)
- » I wept because I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet. (Persian Proverb)
- » If a fellow isn't thankful for what he's got, he isn't likely to be thankful for what he's going to get. (Frank A. Clark)
- » When asked if my cup is half-full or half-empty, my only response is that I am thankful I have a cup. (Sam Lefkowitz)
- » Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has plenty, not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some. (Charles Dickens)

- » See how many are better off than you are, but consider how many are worse. (Lucius Annaeus Seneca)
- » A thankful heart is not only the greatest virtue, but also the parent of all other virtues. (Marcus Tullius Cicero)
- » God gave you 86,400 seconds today. Have you used one to say "thank you"? (William Ward)