

Thanksgiving

by Staff

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". . . giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." —Ephesians 5:20

Both America and Canada celebrate a day of Thanksgiving each year in the fall. America's Thanksgiving Day occurs on the last Thursday of November, while Canada's often coincides with the fall holy days on the second Monday of October. Last year, the Last Great Day and Canada's Thanksgiving Day took place on the same day, and incredible similarities exist between them.

The Canadian Encyclopedia article on "Thanksgiving Day" remarks that it is "proclaimed as a day of General Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the bountiful harvest with which Canada has been blessed." God's people are not to participate in the majority of the world's holidays, but this is one we can celebrate if we keep it in the proper spirit.

The Canadian Encyclopedia article continues:

Thanksgiving draws upon 3 traditions: harvest celebrations in European peasant societies for which the symbol was the cornucopia (horn of plenty); formal observances, such as that celebrated by Martin Frobisher in the eastern Arctic in 1578—the first North American Thanksgiving; and the Pilgrims' celebration of their first harvest in Massachusetts (1621) involving the uniquely American turkey, squash and pumpkin.

For years, God's people have used the cornucopia as a decoration in our Feast of Tabernacles celebrations. Canadian Feast-goers have frequently kept Thanksgiving together when that day has fallen during God's fall festival. Interestingly, the Last Great Day has traditionally been the day when we say a well-deserved "Thank you" to those who have worked so hard to make the Feast a success. More important, however, is why and how God's people should give thanks to Him.

Ingratitude

To a member of God's church for many years, explaining why and how we should thank God may seem unnecessary. But ingratitude is a disease that has crept into our societies, and a real danger exists that it could rub off on God's children in these end times:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, *unthankful*. . . (II Timothy 3:1-2)

Paul's words vividly and accurately describe our Western societies. It is a disgrace to our nations to hear children and adults in public places apparently devoid of the smallest elements of common courtesy. The average Canadian or American acts today as if the good things of life are somehow owed to him. This lack of gratitude to God reveals itself in his refusal to offer thanks before a meal.

He is certainly in complete ignorance of the requirement to pay tithes, to give offerings to God, and to worship Him on His Sabbaths. For most, even our Thanksgiving Days have lost their real, original meaning, becoming mere excuses for partying, reveling, and getting.

God takes a serious view of ingratitude. Jesus expresses dismay after healing ten lepers and only one makes the effort to thank Him (Luke 17:11-19). Ninety percent of those lepers were ungrateful, using God rather than serving Him. What would our percentage be?

Ingratitude and selfishness are bad for us, both individually and collectively. A study of the appropriate scriptures reveals that ingratitude:

- » Contributes greatly to our nations' moral decadence and crumbling culture.
- » Produces vain imaginations and foolish hearts.
- » Weakens our spiritual, moral, mental, and ultimately, our physical health.
- » Wars against the permanent, eternal, spiritual things.
- » Comprises part of the reason for apostasy:

For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, *nor were thankful*, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (Romans 1:20-21)

Paul writes here about a group of people who had known God's truth and had practiced His way of life, but they were not thankful for it. They rejected it and returned to the ways of the world.

God looks upon ingratitude as being a sin that is Laodicean in nature: "Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17). Only a selfish, thankless and ungrateful person says or thinks, "I am wealthy, a self-made man. I have earned it all by my own hard work and ingenuity. I need thank no one for what I have."

Again, God considers ingratitude quite seriously, due to where it can lead.

Why?

From a positive viewpoint, why should we be thankful? What are the reasons we should give thanks to God?

Many scriptures, including many psalms, express thanksgiving to God. We will concentrate on one of them, Psalm 92, which answers our two main questions:

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High.
(Psalm 92:1)

We should give thanks to Him, first, because it is good for us to do. It is good for God too. Although He does not need our thanks, He is glad when His children offer them. It is certainly beneficial for us. In contrast to the dangers of ingratitude, the benefits of a thankful attitude include:

- » Guarding against ungodly attitudes and works.
- » Subduing what one commentator calls "man's potentially animal-like nature."
- » Teaching God's "way of give," as we *give* thanks.
- » Promoting good spiritual, mental, moral and physical health.

In addition, it is common sense to thank God when He has answered our prayers. After all, we undoubtedly will need help again!

To declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night.
(Psalm 92:2)

We should acknowledge and thank God for His lovingkindness and faithfulness toward us. In His love and faithfulness, He had endowed us with so much. We should constantly think about the following blessings and thank God for them, and be careful not to take them for granted:

- » His truth, which He continues to reveal to us.
- » His gifts, spiritual and physical, that He continually pours out to us.
- » His church and our part in it.
- » His ministry and their unstinting service to us.
- » Our brethren and the opportunities for fellowship with and service to them.
- » Our families and their health and prosperity.
- » Our nations and all the blessings that accrue from our citizenship.
- » And myriads of other gifts and good things He bestows so freely.

For You, Lord, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands. (Psalm 92:4)

We should thank God because He gives gladness and even a sense of triumph and victory to those who play an active part in His work, and every single member of His church has such an opportunity. We are all members of Christ's Body, and like the parts of the physical body, we have been given different talents and functions (I Corinthians 12:12-31).

The apostle Paul also relates thanksgiving and triumph in I Corinthians 15:57, "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." When the Last Great Day's fulfillment arrives at last, and we see our loved ones rise in the Second Resurrection, we will shout with great

joy, " 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'" (verses 54-55).

O Lord, how great are Your works! Your thoughts are very deep. (Psalm 92:5)

God's works and thoughts are worthy of our gratitude. His creation is marvelous in its beauty, detail, and usefulness, and His thoughts are deeper than any human being can comprehend. If we consider the care in which He created the universe, we can catch a glimpse of the same care He employs in creating children for His Family.

A senseless man does not know, nor does a fool understand this. When the wicked spring up like grass, and when all the workers of iniquity flourish, it is that they may be destroyed forever. But You, Lord, are on high forevermore. For behold, Your enemies O Lord, shall perish; all the workers of iniquity shall be scattered. (Psalm 92:6-9)

Verses 6 and 7 interrupt to mention the future of the incorrigibly selfish and ungrateful of the world: the brutish, foolish, wicked workers of iniquity. Then the psalmist contrasts them to God, who is eternally exalted. We should thank God because He is the Most High, the great and sovereign God. We must come to appreciate that He is God and no other!

But my horn You have exalted like a wild ox; I have been anointed with fresh oil. (Psalm 92:10. In Hebrew, the verbs are future tense.)

We should be grateful that God will one day exalt His people. From the weak and simple of the world (I Corinthians 1:26-29), He will bring us to glory, raising us from our lowly beginnings to anoint us as kings and priests (Revelation 1:6; 5:10).

My eye also has seen my desire on my enemies; and my ears hear my desire on the wicked who rise up against me. (Psalm 92:11)

The psalmist encourages us to thank God for His justice upon His and our enemies. Is it right that we should be thankful for God's judgment and punishment upon them? We certainly should not gloat over their fate (Proverbs 24:17-18). However, we would be wise to remember the just punishments of Nadab and Abihu, of Eli's sons, of Uzzah, and of Ananias and Sapphira. We must beware of thinking of God as harsh or rash in His judgments. God's enemies are our enemies too, and His punishment of them is for our good (and ultimately theirs).

The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree, he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon. (Psalm 92:12)

God gives spiritual and physical health and growth to His people, according to His will and His great wisdom and mercy. This is certainly something to rejoice and give thanks for!

Those who are planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God. (Psalm 92:13)

The psalmist repeats the word "flourish" (Hebrew *parach*), which can be translated as "bud," "blossom," "grow," "sprout," "fly," and "spring up." In the Old Testament, "the courts of our God" refers to God's physical Temple, an earthly symbol of His heavenly throne room. In the New

Testament, the term refers now to God's church and prophetically to the time when the Father and Christ will reign on the earth (Revelation 7:15; 21:3). We should thank God, then, for "planting" us in His church where we can grow abundantly in preparation for that future time when we will work and rule with Him forever.

They shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be fresh [vigorous] and flourishing.
(Psalm 92:14)

We should be grateful to God that even seniors in His church are generally in good physical and spiritual health, still able to be active in His work in bringing forth fruit. This is attributable to living God's way of life, including obedience to the laws of vibrant health revealed in His Word, as well as to the blessings He bestows upon each of us. One day, in the fulfillment of the Last Great Day, all sickness and disease will be eradicated forever (Revelation 21:4; 22:2). God speed that day!

To declare that the Lord is upright: He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him. (Psalm 92:15)

Last, but certainly not least, we are to be thankful to God because He is totally—one hundred percent—dependable, upright, solid, and righteous.

How?

We now move on to our second question: How should we thank God?

At some undeterminable time in the past, God created some very special spirit beings. They are described in Revelation 4:4-11 as twenty-four elders and four living creatures. Some of their special functions in heaven are to worship, glorify, honor, and to *thank* Him continually:

And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!" Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and *thanks* to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: "You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You have created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created." (Revelation 4:8-11)

When the Last Great Day is fulfilled, the whole world will be able to see these marvelous spirit beings. God arranged for many furnishings and procedures in His Temple to serve as physical symbols of various aspects of His heavenly throne room (Hebrews 9:23-24). Perhaps as physical counterparts of these heavenly creatures, God designated a special group of priests to preside over the formal and regular thanksgiving ceremonies in His Temple:

Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah . . . led thanksgiving psalms. . . For in the days of David and Asaph of old there were chiefs of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. (Nehemiah 12:8, 46)

Psalm 92:1-3 tell us how God's people should thank Him in these last days:

It is good to give thanks to the Lord, and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night, on an instrument of ten strings, on the lute, and on the harp, with harmonious sound.

A way we should thank God is by singing praises to Him. The closest we in the modern church of God come to the thanksgiving activities of the ancient and heavenly Temple is in singing hymns, leading songs, offering special music, and participating in church choirs on God's Sabbaths.

We have our greatest opportunities for singing praises to God during the eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles and the Last Great Day. These song services are all the more enjoyable for the members of the smaller groups who meet in homes each Sabbath and, sadly, no longer have the regular opportunity to sing praises to God as part of a large group.

Both Paul and James encourage us to sing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 5:19-20; see James 5:13). The implication is that this can and should be done anytime, anywhere the Spirit inspires us. We tend not to express our religion publicly these days, but how often has a psalm or hymn popped into mind at the store or in the car or at work?

The reference in Psalm 92:3 to ten-stringed instruments, the lute, and the harp, refers to the instrumental accompaniment of songs of worship and thanksgiving. Although we have occasionally made use of other instruments, today's church has traditionally used pianos to accompany our hymn singing. This shows our thanksgiving does not always have to be done in words.

In addition to our weekly hymns of thanksgiving, we most certainly need to thank God in our daily, personal, detailed prayers. In Psalm 92:2, God urges us to do so morning and night. In His "prayer outline" in Matthew 6:9, Jesus indicates that thanks should be given right at the beginning of our prayers, though thanking Him throughout our prayers is undoubtedly fine.

We tend to ask God for a lot in our prayers. Do we place equal importance on thanking God when He answers those prayers and gives us what we ask for? Some years ago, a minister in our area recommended that, every so often, we should spend our whole prayer time in nothing else but thanking God.

We have so much to thank Him for! As God's children, let us not be guilty of the great sin of ingratitude. God admonishes us in Colossians 3:15:

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you are called in one body;
and *be thankful*.