

Communal Thanksgiving

Colossians 3:12-17

The main idea of this morning's sermon is **Godly gratitude ought to pervade local church life – from interpersonal relationships to teaching to corporate singing.** The point of this sermon isn't to emphasize our individual responsibility and opportunity to be grateful people. This sermon is to emphasize the corporate responsibility of *Christians* to be grateful *together*. This might sound a little odd to you because we're so used to thinking of God's commands as individually focused, but God's commands also come to God's people as a whole. We have the privilege together to express gratitude.

In the sermon last week, Mark Buhl briefly mentioned Romans 1:21 which speaks of the world around us and how all people are born suppressing the truth about God and embracing lies. We humans elevate all sorts of created things to the level of God. We love those things – money, power, sex, affirmation – at the level of God and therefore suppress the truth about God. But in Romans 1:21, we're told that the world isn't *thankful*. That's a simple indictment on the entire world. Is Paul saying that if the world were just *thankful*, that would evidence that they really loved God? I think so. But hold on a second. I know a lot of people who aren't Christians who are very thankful people. In fact, there's a lot of writing today about the power of gratitude and how gratitude affects our minds and emotions. Gratitude is promoted by many. So, are Paul's words outdated in Romans 1? Maybe the Roman culture wasn't thankful, but ours is?

This is where we need to define the word "thanksgiving." What is thanksgiving? In the Greek, the word refers to gratitude for benefits and blessings. But, from a biblical perspective, there's more to this word. In Mark's sermon last week, he shared about the psalms surrounding Psalm 106 and how these psalms emphasize God's sovereignty – his power over all things and his sustaining of everything. They also emphasize his goodness in caring for people and rescuing them. This past week, I discovered that the Hebrew and Greek words for gratitude show up *always* (or, almost always) in contexts where the author is emphasizing God's power and/or grace to people. In addition, gratitude is always focused on God. This is different than the world's kind of gratitude. I hear people say, "I'm so thankful for my house" or "I'm so thankful I have these children." But my questions are, "Thankful to who" and "Why are you thankful?" Maybe ask yourself these questions: **To whom are you thankful? Why are you thankful?**

I'm going to simplify this with one example. How many of you have ever watched *Little House on the Prairie*? If you've watched at least a few episodes, you know of Nellie Oleson. She had everything she could desire. And she'd express thanks when we got something, but do you think she had a heart of gratitude? No. She had a heart of selfishness. When she got what she wanted, she may say thanks to her dad or mom. But in reality, she just loved herself and loved the stuff.

This is what I think Paul was getting at in Romans 1. People don't love God. They're not thankful to him for who he is. And, they're not thankful because these things draw them closer to him. No. Instead, they use God's gifts for themselves. They're thankful for these things because these things make much of them – not much of God. Even in this world where people will say to be thankful for the trials in life, they're not thankful to God, and they're not thankful so that they can love God more. They simply talk about how these things make *them* stronger.

Worldly gratitude isn't really gratitude because it doesn't focus on the Gift-Giver and it focuses on the creation. God has more for his people. As you travel through the letter to the Romans, you get to

chapter 12, and Paul uses the word “discern” which is the exact opposite word for “reprobate” in Romans 1. The world has an undiscerning mind and therefore all the people of the world move into various kinds of sins. But Paul shows in his letter to Rome how God rescues people through trust in Jesus. If you’ve turned from your sins and turned to Jesus for salvation, you are now loved by God and made a part of a new people, God’s people. God’s people are discerning and they live the will of God. They’re different than the world. This new community lives in light of God, and as Paul moves forward in further chapters, he calls God’s people to be a rejoicing people. In essence, we are a *thankful* people. We are thankful to God for God, and we are thankful for blessings because they draw us closer to our Lord who saved us! This point, I think, comes out even more clearly in Colossians 3, which we’ll be studying today.

So, this past Thursday, there could have been a lot of damnable thanksgiving going on. Meaning that it wasn’t godly. Maybe even Christians embraced this kind of simplistic, worldly thanksgiving. You took the appearance of godliness, but denied the power. I pray that wasn’t the case, but I know my own heart’s tendency to forget the Savior. So, today, I want to remind us of what godly gratitude is – and I want to encourage us as a church family to live in gratitude as a community of believers, pursuing Jesus together.

With this, let’s get back to the main idea of the sermon today and jump into Colossians 3: Godly gratitude ought to pervade local church life – from interpersonal relationships to teaching to corporate singing. Let’s take the first section of this statement first:

1. Godly gratitude ought to pervade local church life (vv. 12-14, 17).

Look at Colossians 3:12-14, and 17: ¹²Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. . . . ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. ¹

Aren’t these verses focused on our individual selves? Why do I say that godly gratitude ought to pervade local church life? Because every command in these verses is given in the plural form. It’d be like if I was in the South, and someone say, “You better behave” versus if they said, “Ya’ll better behave.” What’s “ya’ll” mean? It means “You all.” It’s not individually focused. Neither are these verses in Colossians. Paul is speaking to the entire church at Colossae as a church. The local church is to be known as a grateful community, in contrast to the world around them. The world might express gratitude, but to who and why?

This is why we must read these verses as commands for the local church – which means, we (Ventura) must look at these commands as a responsibility of all of us who are members of this same church family. We together have a privilege and responsibility.

But *why*? Why do we live this way? I just pulled verses 12-17 out of it’s context, and I don’t want us to forget what Paul is talking about here. Notice in verse 12, Paul says “then.” It’s a “therefore” statement, meaning that it’s connected to what he previously stated. Immediately preceding this, Paul says that we

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 3:12-14, 17.

have put on a new self that is being renewed in the image of our Creator. He also states that within the church of God, there's no division based on ethnicity, man-made laws, slavery or freedom because Christ has become our life! Paul is reiterating what he stated in verses 1-3 of this chapter: If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. ²

I have many favorite verses in the Bible, and verse 4 is on that last. When Christ *who is your life* appears (emphasis mine). Is Christ your life? What or who do you live for? What angers you? What excites you? What compels you to wake up in a given day? When the bottom falls out and trials abound, what do you turn to? Do you turn to Jesus? Who is your life? I pray Jesus is your life! If Jesus is your life, Paul urges you to set your mind on things above. Don't set your mind on the stock market, Social Media, people's opinions of you, climbing higher on the ladder of success, video games, food, even your family. May your mind be set on Christ. What does that mean? Like setting your clock to the true time, you are set to the reality of Jesus. Your life is hid with Christ in God! Therefore, to set your mind on Christ is to focus on your Lord and live in light of who you are in Christ! Focus on, and love, Jesus – and live in line with who you are in him.

Now, even as I say this, I don't want to assume everyone listening knows Jesus in a saving way. Have you turned from your sins and turned to God to forgive you? Did you know Jesus took the punishment sinners deserved on the cross? You have nothing you can add to take away your guilt. Jesus' sacrifice could take it all away. And you might wonder how. Our loving God simply says to trust that Jesus is sufficient! Ask God for forgiveness on the basis of Jesus and forgiveness will be had! Praise God.

Now, if you are a Christian, let's move back to verse 12. Paul says on the basis of our individual union with Jesus, we are also united with each other. That's why Paul states in verse 12: "Put on then. . . ." And now he gives commands of how we behave towards each other within the church family. Why? Because Jesus is so kind to us we are to exercise his kindness to one another. This is in contrast with the world. With a world today that is full of cancel culture, we don't treat each other that way within the church. Jesus hasn't cancelled any of us! He has welcomed us, so we welcome one another. We are chosen, we are holy (meaning, set apart to him). We are "beloved," meaning that we're dearly loved by God. Oh, how glorious! Now, may we have compassionate hearts towards each other. Notice, Paul doesn't simply say we are to be compassionate. He calls our hearts to be compassionate towards each other. Do you have that heart towards people here? We are to be kind, humble, meek, longsuffering. We are called to bear with one another. And, if we have a complaint with somebody else in the church, we are to forgive. Why? Because the Lord has forgiven you! There is no greater forgiveness than the forgiveness you and I have experienced by Jesus!

Then, we move into verse 14 and Paul says, "And above all these put on love. . . ." Love binds everything in perfect harmony. I don't know about you, but I've seen people serve without love. I've seen it in my heart before. I have an attitude. I'm not caring for the other people. I've forgotten all the love and grace Jesus has towards me, and in reality I act like a snotty, spoiled child: "I'm doing this, but I don't like it." Well, newsflash, I don't have to LIKE doing something. But if I LOVE the Lord and LOVE his people, I can have joy. Truly, when we love God and each other, it fills all of our actions. It reveals that we are the one body that Jesus died to make whole.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 3:1–4.

Therefore, we get to verse 17, which I think sums this up nicely: ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.³ Paul's list isn't extensive in verses 12-14. Therefore, Paul says whatever you do, in word or actions, do it all in Jesus' name. Meaning, do everything on the basis of Jesus and for Jesus' glory! Make sure you're living to make Jesus known. Why? Because he is your life!

Listen, I know people know things I love and enjoy in this life. But I pray that you would know that my surpassing love is Jesus. I pray that in all my actions and words, I am always seeking to point people to Jesus. He's my life! And if you're a Christian, he's *your* life, too. Live on the basis of him. Make him known! And then Paul adds this qualifier. If you're living to make Jesus known. If Jesus is your life, you will give thanks to God the Father through Jesus. In everything you do, you'll be giving thanks *to God*.

This is in contrast with worldly gratitude. Worldly gratitude simply says, "be grateful." But to who? Godly gratitude directs the gratitude *to God*. And, this is *in* everything. I remember talking to Lorraine Palmer when she was in hospice care. Her favorite Bible passage was "As for God, his ways are perfect." She taught me that she learned that when God took her husband when he was in his 40's. God's ways are perfect. But she also said that this verse comforted her when there were circumstances she enjoyed. Sometimes she felt guilty at the goodness of God, but she said, "Well, as for God, his ways are perfect here, too." All this said, in the painful providence and the "preferred" providence we as a church family are to express gratitude *to God*. As for God, his ways are perfect! So, Ventura, how are we doing right now as a church family. Today, are we expressing gratitude *together*. Are we bearing with one another and loving one another with gratitude to God for him saving us and ordaining all the circumstances we're going through right now as a church? I pray so. Gratitude is to be a constant characteristic in church life.

2. Godly gratitude ought to be expressed in interpersonal relationships (v. 15).

Look at verse 15: ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.⁴

I know that the previous verses emphasize interpersonal relationships, too. You can't bear with one another or forgive one another without having relationship, but I find verse 15 to stand out in a special way. If you look at verses 12-17, you find the word "and" many times. Paul keeps building on what it means to be a community that is united in Jesus. Then he says "let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts." This is an individual and communal command.

In our day and age, many think of peace as simply a feeling. As I've stated in past sermon, this peace is a reality. Paul isn't saying, "Let the warm fuzzies of Jesus rule your hearts." He's saying to let the reality that we are no longer at war with God and that we are at peace with him rule in your hearts. We were once enemies of God, and Jesus took the punishment that God's enemies deserved. Then, for those who turned to Jesus, we are now at peace! Ponder that, Ventura. There's no wrath of God towards you – not even the least bit. You are given perfect communion with God. You are truly blessed.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 3:17.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 3:14–15.

Let these realities rule our hearts. This is individually focused. Ventura, we should be individuals who ponder this peace, rejoice in this peace, think through all that God has done to be at peace with us. Then Paul makes this command communal by saying, “in which indeed you were called in one body.” The Colossian church, and Ventura Baptist Church, are called to live in and live out this peace as *one* body. With love, endurance, longsuffering, we are to exercise peace. We aren’t to war with each other. We are to love and forgive each other.

I don’t know about you, but I can be tempted to think, “No. I’m out. I’m done. I don’t want to get hurt. I don’t want to be around people who could hurt me.” But hold on! Who is your life? Who do you want to make known? What did he do for you? What has he called us to then? To display the peace we have in Jesus! And since this is our calling, Paul then adds, “and be thankful.”

OK, notice so far that Paul has used some form of the word “thankful” multiple times in a few verses. We’re going to see it one more time in verse 16. But this variation of the word “thankful” here is used only here in the entirety of the New Testament. To “be thankful” here actually can be translated to “become thankful.” The Colossians were not living out their identity. In reality, no Christian perfectly lives out their identity or else we’d be perfect! So Paul says to “become thankful.” Ventura, in our community with one another, we are to become increasingly thankful people in the joys and sorrows of our interpersonal relationships! But we do this because we’re at peace with God. And, as one person put it: Generally a lack of peace results from self-seeking or dissatisfaction with things as they are. Thankfulness points one to the realization that all things are provided in Christ. There is no room for ill will or bitterness if thankfulness prevails.⁵ So, gratitude should pervade the entire church. It should be seen in our interpersonal relationships. And,

3. Godly gratitude ought to be expressed in teaching and singing (v. 16).

Read verse 16: ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.⁶

How is the peace of God going to rule my heart if I’m not meditating on the realities of Jesus and what he has done for us? The answer is, it won’t. Some might jump to the end of this verse and focus on singing first, but Paul focuses on the church having Christ’s word dwell in us richly through teaching and admonishing one another. We are to constantly and consistently keep Jesus and his gospel central in the life of the church.

As elders, in our decisions, we don’t want the gospel to be eclipsed, but instead to be emphasized so that the peace of Christ is exemplified and unity around the gospel is seen. Therefore, we all must fill our minds with “Jesus Christ and him crucified.” How do you do that? Well, when you read the Bible and when you get together with other Christians, do you seek to know more of Jesus and to make him known? Do you welcome people into your life who admonish/challenge you in Christlikeness? The word is to dwell richly. It’s to dwell deeply. It’s to dwell pervasively in and through you. Do you meditate on and memorize the Word so that you know more of God’s power and also God’s redemption in Jesus? Or, do you simply read the Bible for facts?

⁵ Richard R. Melick, [Philippians, Colossians, Philemon](#), vol. 32, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 302.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Col 3:16.

When we gather together as a church, in smaller and larger gatherings, we do so in order for the gospel to be known more. And now Paul includes singing as a teaching instrument, too. This isn't just you singing by yourself. No. It's corporate singing. We are declaring truths about God. We are to sing in such a way that we are declaring to one another the gloriousness of Jesus! And then Paul adds, "with thankfulness in your hearts to God."

Sometimes I think people go to church and they approach the corporate singing like, "I hope it encourages me today." But that's not how Paul writes. He states that our hearts ought to be tuned to gratitude to God for who he is and then we can sing in such ways that we teach others about the gloriousness of Christ. So, how do you tune your heart even before you gather with the church family? Maybe at the beginning of the service, you should cry out to the Lord, "Tune my heart to sing your praise!" If gratitude to God for Christ is in your heart, you'll sing in a way consistent with the gospel! If gratitude isn't there, you'll simply be self-focused – which is contradictory to the goal of Jesus.

As I review all of these points, I want to emphasize the corporate nature of thanksgiving here, and how we should be evaluating our individual hearts so that we can contribute to the peace we have with one another in Christ. How are you expressing that peace with members with whom you disagree – even especially in this time period where a lot of disagreements have arisen? Do you rejoice and sing with one another and long for each other to know Jesus more? Do you rejoice in the God who is patient with you and patient with every other person for whom Christ has died? Do you elevate you or elevate your Lord? Who is your life?

But in all of this, who are we thankful for and why are we thankful? I pray that we *together* are thankful to God for all that he is in Christ for us. And, I pray that we are thankful to him for all gifts he gives because his intentions is that we know more of his eternal glory. May we be a church full of godly gratitude in our interpersonal relationships, teaching and corporate singing.