

Giving Thanks Always For All Things

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At this time of the year it is customary throughout our country to observe a National Thanksgiving Day. Since 1941, Thanksgiving Day has been set by an act of Congress as the fourth Thursday of November. It's a day in which we are to give thanks for National Prosperity, for the "perfect union" of our states, the "established justice" guaranteed by our constitution, the "domestic tranquility" to which we all have a right and for the "blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity." It's also a day set aside for feasting and rejoicing for the individual prosperity enjoyed throughout the country. Tables groan with the weight of luxurious foods while afterwards garbage cans bulge with exotic wastes. It's a day of reflection: people sit down with their tally sheets, count up their blessing on one side and their misfortunes on the other, like credits and debits, and hopefully end up with something for which to be thankful. So the world eats, drinks, is merry, and tries to be thankful for tomorrow they may die.

In Article 67 of our church order we read, "The churches shall observe, in addition to the Sunday...The National Thanksgiving Day..." This was not in the original church order adopted by the Reformed Churches in the 1500's but was added to this article in 1914. Since then, it's been the practice of Reformed churches in general and our own Protestant Reformed Churches in particular, to observe this special day as a day for thanksgiving. This is well and good. However, the church and the child of God will have a different motivation and goal as they celebrate this special day. Our celebration is a call to worship in order to show forth thankful praise to our gracious Father in heaven for His care over us. We are called upon to emphasize the spiritual nature of thanksgiving. Such a special day has a proper and rightful place once a year in our lives. But for the child of God it must not be the extent of our thanksgiving. Rather, thanksgiving must be an everyday response of gratitude. Paul writes in Ephesians 5:20, "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Since the world also talks about Thanksgiving and claims it can be thankful, we must, first of all, consider the idea of Christian thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is exclusively a Christian response and virtue. It is foreign to the nature of sinful man to be thankful in any way for anything. How can a man destined for everlasting hell fire be thankful? How can wicked man living in enmity with God be thankful in any but a superficial way? He may outwardly pretend to be thankful and even be very convincing to himself and before others yet it is truly impossible for him to show thanksgiving. Only a child of God who knows that he is saved by grace through the work of Christ the Lord, can be thankful. With the child of God it is the spiritual reality of salvation from the misery of one's sins that prompts the response of thanksgiving. It is not based upon or determined by physical well-being or material prosperity. He can and must be thankful when these are given him in this life but they are not the basis of his thanksgiving and gratitude. A child of God gives thanks always because he is a regenerated, sanctified through the blood of Christ, child of God.

Furthermore, thanksgiving depends upon contentment. Someone who is not content with his lot in life will not be and cannot be thankful. If you, as a young man, desire a newer model Corvette and Dad instead buys a rather ordinary looking, older model Chevrolet Biscayne, do you think you could or would be thankful? Outwardly you feel you should thank your father-so you do-but inside you are seething with indignation and disappointment. You are not content with your gift and therefore not at all thankful even though you said "Thank you."

This is also true when trials come your way and you question God's wisdom in afflicting you. Can anyone possibly be thankful when he is dissatisfied with God's dealings with him? Of course not. Again, only a child of God who is assured that God is good when He sends trials, disappointments, afflictions and even death, can be content and therefore, thankful.

In all things we must give thanks, this is a requirement we are required by God to do. "All things" includes poverty and riches, sickness and health, war and peace, sadness and joy, failure and success, life and death. Imagine being thankful when a young father or mother is struck down with a terminal illness and the children will be left behind fatherless or motherless; when war ravages the land, bombs destroy your home and bullets kill your sons; when poverty, want and starvation is your lot and empty stomachs of crying, hungry children your constant care and concern. Yet that is the calling of every child of God. Thanksgiving is an amazing work of God's grace. It is so unexpected and unnatural that the world is stunned when it observes thanksgiving at times such as these. The triumphant thanksgiving of the child of God is that "in all things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers nor things present nor things to come, not height nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:37-39. Thanksgiving, impossible by nature yet possible by grace every day of our life.

Finally, the response of the child of God is that he continually offers to the Lord the sacrifices of thanksgiving. These sacrifices are rendered to God in many different ways. Some examples of Biblical heroes of faith will help to make clear the meaning here. Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his very own brothers, lived a life of thanksgiving in the house of Potiphar and in prison. He refused to turn in sin against God and give in to temptation. He was diligent and honest in his dealings with his master and the head of the prison. Paul and Silas, though unjustly beaten with whips, bound in stocks and cast into the inner most dungeon of a Philippian prison, sang songs of praise and thanksgiving to the wonderment of their fellow prisoners. Daniel was cast into the lion's den and his three friends into the burning fiery furnace because of their thankful walk in a world of sin. David, in Psalm 51, confesses his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and asks God to clean him of this sin because he is thankful that God, through the prophet Nathan, pointed out to him his sin.

Covenant Young People of God, you have a responsibility before God to be thankful everyday of your life. Show your thanksgiving in the way you honor your father and your mother. Sarcasm, ridicule and disobedience towards parents in the home is condemned by the fifth commandment. Show your thanksgiving by being courteous to your elders at all times. Refrain from walking in the way of the world and pray often to God for spiritual stamina to withstand the pressures of friends who would lead you astray into sin. Be careful that you do not lead others into sin. The thankful child of God makes a conscious effort to stay away from even the appearance of evil. May God bless you with a life of thanksgiving.

Originally Published in:
Vol 36 No 7 November 1977