

Thanksgiving to God: A Lost Art?

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In a few days, families all across our land will take part in the yearly tradition known as Thanksgiving. This has long been my favorite holiday. When I was younger, I think it had more to do with the feasting than the thankfulness (and to be honest, the feast is still very appealing!), but as I mature, I find the original intent of this day to be more and more meaningful.

The founding fathers of this nation were certainly wise to acknowledge their indebtedness to God for safe passage to the New World. Perhaps more so than any other generation in this nation's history did our nation's forefathers understand the importance of thanksgiving to God. It is a wonder that the secular, humanistic society we now live in today even celebrates Thanksgiving anymore. It is shameful that every year, it seems, more and more merchants infringe upon this day of thanks by catering to the materialistic lusts of the buying public. It amazes me that the day after (and in recent years the day OF) a holiday dedicated to thankfulness and contentment, shoppers from sea to shining sea flock to Black Friday sales, only to be stomped on and fought and argued with and mowed down in order to save a few dollars on materialistic "stuff" that will only be burnt up when this world comes to its end (2 Pet. 3:10).

The word "thanksgiving" appears 28 times in both the Old and New Testaments. Interestingly, there was such a thing as thanksgiving offerings in the Old Testament (see Lev. 7:12-13, 15; 22:39; Psa. 107:22). The concept of thanksgiving was also deeply connected to prayer and singing (see Neh. 11:27; 12:46; Psa. 69:30).

While these types of thanksgiving offerings are not mentioned in the New Testament, certainly Christians understand that our weekly financial offerings should, in fact, be given with thanksgiving in our hearts — see 2 Cor. 9:7 compared with 2 Cor. 9:12. We, too, should also have a spirit of thanksgiving when we sing songs of praise to God: "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Heb. 13:15).

The spirit of thanksgiving is foundational to the Christian faith. Paul wrote that, upon reflection of God's grace, Christians ought to be exuding thankfulness so much that it superabounds to the glory to God (2 Cor. 4:15)! What is amazing about that passage is that Paul is teaching thankfulness in the context of AFFLICTION! "For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:16-

18; emphasis mine throughout, TCG). When Christians find reasons to be thankful, even in the midst of their afflictions, God receives the glory!

Thanksgiving in the life of a Christian is just as important as prayer! Paul said, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God” (Php. 4:6). Col. 4:2 says, “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving.” When you pray, how often do you utter the words “thank you” to God? The indication seems to be that every prayer should include thankfulness to God!

Speaking of thanksgiving in prayer, it is a sad commentary on society today that many families have forsaken the habitual practice of praying before meals in order to give thanks for their food. In dealing with a forthcoming error of some who would forbid Christians from partaking of certain foods, Paul wrote in 1 Tim. 4:3-4: “... commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving.” Paul makes it quite clear that the bountiful blessings of food that you and I so richly enjoy ought to be received with thanksgiving.

Finally, as we reflect on the idea of thanksgiving, consider the glorious benediction uttered at the throne of God in Rev. 7:12: “Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, AND THANKSGIVING, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.” Thanksgiving is an ESSENTIAL aspect of the praise that is due to the Almighty God Whom we serve. Yet, sadly, thanksgiving is becoming a lost art as our society degenerates more and more into selfishness, materialism, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Col. 3:5). May it never be said of us, however, as we strive to be truly thankful in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.