

Week 5 - Living Thankfully - Colossians 3:16-17

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 5:15-21

Introduction

This morning we come to our fifth and final sermon in our Thanksgiving Living series of messages

In our previous four messages we have seen how we need to cultivate a sense of gratitude, joy, generosity, and contentment if we are truly going to be thankful people

Those attitudes are the bedrock of thankfulness just as thankfulness is an attitude

To be thankful is to be impressed with a sense of kindness received and ready to acknowledge it

And that's where "thanksgiving" comes in

Thanksgiving is expressing the thankfulness that we have to the one who has benefited us

True thankfulness has to be more than a feeling or a sentiment it's an attitude that results in declaration

As author Robert Brault wisely stated, "There is no such thing as gratitude unexpressed. If it is unexpressed, it is plain, old-fashioned ingratitude."

God's Word, the Bible tells us repeatedly that we are to be thankful people who express thanksgiving

Colossians 2:7 tells us that the life of a Christ-follower should be "abounding in thanksgiving"

And **Colossians 4:2** tells us that we are to pray steadfastly and watchfully with thanksgiving

Philippians 4:6 tells us to make our requests known to God with thanksgiving

1Thessalonians 5:18 tells us to give thanks in all circumstances

And **Ephesians 5:20** tells us to give thanks to God for everything

Psalms 92:1 tells us that "It is good to give thanks to the Lord"

And we could go on and on listing references about living thankfully and expressing thanksgiving

The Bible is full of them and one of the really good ones is our focus passage today **Colossians 3:16-17** and I encourage you to follow along as I read the passage in its entirety:

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. 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.

Actually, if we back up a bit to the last part of verse 15 we see another command to be thankful making for three references to being thankful in three verses

And what we find in the verses before us this morning is that thankfulness is a holistic condition that extends to all of life

The first thing we see in verse 16 is that:

I. Thankfulness begins in our minds

The first word of verse 16 is very important so we don't want to read past it quickly

"Let" indicates a determination to allow something

And what Paul is exhorting his readers to allow is "*the word of Christ to dwell in you richly*"

The "word of Christ" is of course the gospel message but it goes much further to include all of Christ's teaching during his earthly ministry and beyond to the teaching of the apostles after he returned to the Father in heaven

Remember how Luke states in Acts 1:1 that in the gospel that bears his name, he "dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach" indicating that the apostles carried on Jesus' ministry after his ascension

But “the word of Christ” goes extends also into the Old Testament because the Bible is one continuous account that is directed toward Christ

So, what Paul is saying here is that his readers should allow all Scripture to take up residence in them

And we do that through reading, hearing, studying, meditating on, and applying it to our lives

Studies have proven that engaging multiple senses entrenches learning and that putting things into practice instills them into us in a more permanent way

And we are to allow or invite the Bible into our lives, not as a guest, but as a resident

Think of the difference between a hotel guest and a tenant

Both may reside in a dwelling but one does so fleetingly and temporarily as a visitor with limited rights while the other moves in and establishes a permanent habitation as a resident with the full rights of ownership

Paul is saying that we should allow the Word of Christ free and unfettered access to every area of our lives

And just as the owner determines what happens within his home, the words of the Bible should govern and control our every thought, word, and deed

John Wesley comments that “richly” means “in the largest measure and with the greatest efficacy so as to fill and govern the whole soul”

It isn’t evident in our English translation but Paul uses the plural form of “you” meaning that this admonition isn’t just for individual believers but also for the church collectively

Which sheds some additional light on the what follows in verse 16 [**Colossians 16b**]

Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom

Unless we have the word of Christ dwelling within us richly, we can’t possibly fulfill this duty either as individuals or as a local church

We need to know God’s Word in order to teach people how to live according to God’s Word whether we are talking about an informal setting between individuals or a formal classroom or congregational setting

Teaching as we see it in the Bible is the orderly presentation of Christian truth to converts so they know how to live and grow in godliness as we see in The Great Commission of **Matthew 28:20** which is a command for all believers

And Paul speaks of formally “declaring the whole counsel of God” in **Acts 20:27** which is indicative of the formal teaching of the church including preaching

The Bible must be the basis of the church’s teaching ministry - if it’s not, then it’s no better than teaching you could get anywhere

The same is true when it comes to admonishing which means to influence by way of warning or giving notice - we see this used most often when warning of danger or evil

Admonishing someone is typically risky business because of the chance of offense

But when we can point to the truths of God’s Word and do so with the loving manner that is described in verses 12-14 and the wisdom that we gain from having a deep understanding of God’s Word, we stand a far better chance that the admonition will be accepted in the proper spirit

God has revealed himself to us and shown us how we can be reconciled to him and then live to please him in the pages of the Bible and he has given us the capacity to understand and apply it

For that we should be truly thankful because thankfulness begins in our minds

Next, we see that thankfulness isn’t merely related to the mind. It also involves the heart as:

II. Thankfulness engages our emotions

There is some division among Bible scholars as to how to understand verse 16 and whether the signing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs is a part of teaching and admonishing one another

Or whether it's like we see it in our ESV Bible as a separate activity

I believe that either could easily be true but I'm treating it the way the ESV does because I believe singing has more to do with our emotions than our intellect -

And that's not to say that doctrinally sound songs can't teach biblical truth

Because of the power of music, I always try to have the songs we sing match up with the sermon topic and text so that what we sing reinforces what we learned from the sermon

After all, there is a reason we teach our children to sing their ABCs and teach Bible-themed songs in our children's Sunday school classes - rhyme and rhythm resonate and help us remember

And I believe that learning God's Word should affect one's emotions as well as their intellect

How can you not rejoice as you learn about who God is and what he has done and what he has promised to do?

Worship should be the natural consequence of being steeped in God's Word because as our minds are filled with truth our hearts should overflow with praise

I love the fact that Paul mentions three types of music here - psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs

I believe "psalms" describes an established piece of sacred music and I believe can accurately be understood as the book of Psalms in the Old Testament

After all, the book of Psalms was the songbook of the Jewish synagogues

"Hymns" I believe can rightly be understood as other songs that are composed and sung in honor of God like we find in our modern hymnal

I would relate "spiritual songs" to our modern worship music as a form of sacred music that is more informal and freer in form and expression

The mention of the different forms of music plus all the mentions of the different musical instruments that were acceptably used in worship in the Bible should effectively put an end to the "worship wars" within our churches

That is, to the degree that the meaning of the songs in question are true to God's Word and are sung in the proper spirit which Paul says is "*with thankfulness in your hearts to God*"

The Greek word Paul uses that is translated as "thankfulness" is *charis* which literally means grace

Now *charis* can also mean "thanksgiving" and that meaning fits within the context here

But it shows us that our singing must be a form of thanksgiving that comes from a heart of thankfulness because we are recipients of God's grace in our lives

Here in Colossians we see that singing is a result of taking in the Word of Christ but in Ephesians 5:18-20 we see that singing is the result of being filled with the Holy Spirit

It seems logical to deduce that the person who is steeped in the Word is more likely to be a believer who is under the control of the Holy Spirit

And being filled with both the Word and the Spirit should lead to having a heart that desires to please God

Of course, singing is uttering melodious sounds with musical inflection

But singing that honors and pleases God doesn't begin with the voice - it begins in the heart

And while we should always strive to do our level best in our service to God, God isn't as impressed by the performance as he is the heart behind the performance

After all, **Psalm 100:1-2** doesn't say to sing like an angel - it says:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!

You may have been told you have a voice made to sing solo - so low that it can't be heard - but it doesn't matter

God is satisfied with the noise you make as long as the noise comes from a heart of thanksgiving so don't be afraid to sing out

I said earlier that what we sing must be true to Scripture and I don't want to gloss over that stipulation

I hate to break it to you but not all music that is labeled "Christian" is honoring to God because it isn't true to Scripture

That's not to say that the tune might not be catchy and that the song might not move a person in some way

But the music that Paul has in view must have a message that is consistent with the Bible

And that's where our minds come back into the picture as knowledge of God's Word is necessary to help us determine whether a song is suitable for worship and we have to know the difference between worship and entertainment

All suitable worship music should have a message that is faithful to the Bible and edifying

So we need to be discerning because some so called Christian music is merely emotional and sentimental or outright in error doctrinally

But the fact remains that we cannot discard any style of music because God allows for different tastes as long as the content is there and it is sung from the heart

Having seen how thankfulness begins in our minds and engages our emotions, lastly, we see that:

III. Thankfulness involves our activities

Look with me again at verse 17 [**Colossians 3:17**]

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.

"Whatever you do" is a general statement of the principle of activity that allows for no exceptions

But Paul goes on to further qualify the command by adding "in word or deed" showing that everything we say and do is included

And he says that every activity is to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus

One thing we have to acknowledge right off is that Paul doesn't allow for a secular/sacred division as we are prone to do

All of life is involved and every aspect of the life of a follower of Christ is to be characterized by holiness

We saw this same thought when we studied 1Peter not so long ago in **1Peter 1:15-16** where Peter commanded:

As he who has called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

As Christ-followers we are prone to wonder whether we can engage in a particular activity or not and here Paul provides the test - can you do the thing or say the thing in the name of the Lord Jesus

Whatever we do and say we are to do it as Jesus were the one doing and saying it

That's what doing something in the name of someone else means

The name of Jesus doesn't simply mean how he is identified but rather all that he is - it's the summary of his essence, his attributes, and his characteristics

And when we speak of acting in the name of Jesus we are saying that we are acting in his complete authority as he would act

WWJD is an expression that has become rather trite in our culture but it's actually a filter that sifts pretty finely

But Paul continues that we are to do and say everything while giving thanks to God the Father

Being thankful and expressing those thanks is an obligation

To paraphrase Brault - Thankfulness that isn't expressed isn't thankfulness at all

We may well be pleased by favorable circumstances but being pleased isn't being thankful

Thankfulness will result in expressions of thanksgiving - in acknowledging the gift and the giver and saying "Thank you"

God is the giver of all good gifts as we have seen repeatedly during this series [**James 1:17**] and our acknowledgment of God's gracious provision should cause us to thank him

But I want you to notice that this is also to be Christ-powered thanksgiving

Ephesians 5:20 actually expresses Paul's meaning here more clearly when he writes that we are to be:

giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

It turns out that even the giving of thanks is part of the "whatever you do" that is to be done in Jesus' name

God's greatest gift is the gift of his Son who freely gave himself to be the substitutionary sacrifice that reconciles us to the Father

The apostle Paul speaks of the magnificence of this gift in **2Corinthians 9:15** where he exclaims:

Thanks be to God for this inexpressible gift!

When you stop to consider what Christ has done for us you will come to realize that you wouldn't even have the ability to truly thank God at all if it weren't for Jesus' death on the cross

Because it was by his death that the veil was torn asunder removing our separation from the Father and giving us direct access to his throne making it possible to offer our thanks to him

Psalms 116 is a song of praise and thanksgiving for gifts received and in verse 17 the psalmist sings of offering the "sacrifice of thanksgiving" [**Ps 116:17**]

The Old Testament sacrifices are a part of history now but we can still offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving by thanking and praising God both privately and publicly for all that he has done

The author of Hebrews alludes to this in **Hebrews 13:15** where he writes:

Through him [meaning Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God

And for many people expressing thanks requires an act of sacrifice because they have to give up their illusions of self-sufficiency long enough to acknowledge that they had a need that was met by God and then bend a knee to say "thanks"

But true thankfulness and thanksgiving are evidence of genuine, saving faith as we see in the account of the lepers from Luke 17

Ten lepers were healed but only one returned to thank Jesus

And, apparently he acknowledged who Jesus was and came to saving faith in him because in verse 19 [Luke 17:19] Jesus mentioned that he had "cleansed" ten but told him alone:

"Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

And the word that is translated "made well" actually means "saved or rescued" and I believe it's likely that he was not only healed of his leprosy, as were the other nine also, but he was also saved

Being thankful and living lives of thanksgiving should be traits that identify us as followers of Christ

Conclusion

So let me ask you, how are you doing at thanksgiving living?

We've spent four Sundays looking at how we need to cultivate gratitude, joy, generosity, and contentment in our lives

And we've consistently seen that how thankful we are is a direct reflection of how we think about God

Whether we truly see God as the giver of all the gifts we possess and whether we trust in his sovereign control and goodness in our lives

Thankfulness and thanksgiving may not be our natural inclinations since we fight against humility and dependence but we can learn how to be thankful people

And when we do, we will come to see that expressing thanks to God is a kind of supernatural power that allows us to look past our present circumstances to comprehend how God is working in our lives

We always have a choice because in life there will always be things about which we can complain and grumble

And that's the default position of most people today

But we can be different and when we openly and unashamedly offer thanks to God and those around us who have blessed us in some way, we will be countercultural in a positive way

John 10:10 tells us that Jesus came that we might have life and have it abundantly

And when we honestly consider just how abundant our lives are in spite of the ups and downs we experience, we know that living lives of continual thanksgiving is the only appropriate response

Let's pray

Ephesians 5:15-21 (page 978)

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.