

Thankfulness

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[0 : 00] Turn with me, please, to Colossians, Colossians chapter 3. We'll be reading verses 12 to 17.

Colossians 3, 12 to 17. Put on, then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing 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. And above all these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 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. Father, I ask that you would empower your word.

[1 : 27] Use me, Lord, to bring your word to your people, that you would be glorified. Amen. Amen. Imagine a favorite family recipe.

A dish that has been served many times. The family knows it well. They enjoy it. They savor its unique and distinctive taste, which they know.

They smell it preparing. Everybody's getting ready for it. And when you sit down to eat, enjoying the meal, after a while it becomes evident that something's a little different.

The meal is enjoyable, but this isn't quite that well-known dish that you all recognize so immediately. And the one who prepares the meal, checks the recipe and reviews in their mind, bringing out the ingredients and preparing them and putting them together.

And they realize that they forgot one ingredient. It's still good, but it's not quite the same.

[2 : 53] That one missing ingredient interacted with all the others and imparted its own distinct flavor and brought out flavors in some of the other parts of the recipe.

And the final product isn't the same. This morning, I would like to focus our attention on the end of the last three verses that I just read.

And on the presence there in the exhortation to put on the repetition, the three-fold repetition of the exhortation to be thankful.

You see it at the end of verse 15, and be thankful. And then at the end of verse 16, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And then at the end of 17, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Let me back up for a moment and put those verses in the larger context. In chapter 1 and 2 of Colossians, Paul has been urging his readers to continue in the gospel they had received, entrusting in the sufficiency of Christ, in not losing sight of Christ's excellence, his supremacy, his sufficiency.

[4 : 16] And then in chapter 3, Paul comes to then work out the implications of our union with Christ in the life of the body. In verses 1 to 4, he reminds them, if you have then been raised with, in verse 1 of chapter 3, if you have then been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above.

Since this is true of you, since you are united to Christ, since you are trusting in him, think about the implications of that. Put your mind, put your focus on heavenly things, on things above.

You've died with Christ. Your life is hidden with Christ. He reminds them of that groundwork from which they start. You're united with Christ.

In verses 5 to 11, then he comes to another implication of that. Put to death, therefore, since you are united with Christ, since you want to set your minds on things above, put to death these things.

Put to death sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desires, covetousness, which is idolatry. Verse 7, in these you too once walked, but when you were living in them, you were once like that, but now you must put them all away, anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk from one another. [5 : 36] Do not lie to one another. You notice that presence of one another. There's a theme that runs through the chapter of one anothering.

We see it for the first time there in verse 9. So, verses 5 to 11, there's put all that stuff off, put to death. In verses 12 to 17, comes to put on.

Verse 12, put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another.

There's a one another again. And he goes on to putting on love, harmony, the peace of Christ rule in you. And then at the end of verse 15, and be thankful.

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 : 40] 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. You notice the prevalence throughout that passage of the one anothering.

A call to put off, to remember who we are in Christ. A call to put off and to put on. And in that list of put on, a focus a number of times on thankfulness.

This morning, I'd like to focus our attention on thankfulness, but not on thankfulness as an element of our corporate worship or our private worship.

Of course, they're central there. Of course, thankfulness shapes and directs our praise and our corporate worship, our time of coming before God and humbling ourselves before him and praising him.

The context here, though, is on the place of thankfulness in our walk of faith. In our walking with the Lord.

[7 : 55] In our growth in sanctification. In putting off and putting on. That's where I want to spend our time this morning.

The central theme this morning is that thankfulness, a spirit of gratitude, is an essential ingredient in growing in grace and putting on the grace to which we have been called in Christ.

A sub-theme, which I will point out but not open up as much, is that it is assumed that that growing in grace, that walking in the faith, that working out, the putting off and putting on, will be done within the context of the church.

There's a one another theme that runs through that. Yes, we are called to strive individually. It is assumed we will be doing that in the context of the church.

We will need to put off sins against one another. We will need to put on graces towards one another. We are called to strive to grow in the grace, to grow in grace, to put off sin.

[9 : 20] But growth in grace is never individual. It is individual, but it is never individualistic. We need the body of Christ.

We need to be walking as brothers and sisters as we work at growing in grace. That is the core of where we want to go this morning.

That is what I want to look at with you. Now, the front of your bulletin says, I think, Colossians on thankfulness. It is actually more of a topical sermon.

I want to start by showing you that this is a theme that we see a number of different places in Scripture. I would like for you to turn there with me. We are going to start by just looking across the page in Colossians 2, verses 6 and 7.

Paul has not yet gotten to the point in chapter 3 where he opens this up fully, but he is moving in that direction. Chapter 2, verses 6 and 7. Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus, so walk in him.

[10 : 28] There is the same themes. Since you received Christ, work it out. Walk in him. Rooted and built up in him. Established in the faith just as you were taught.

Be established in the word. Trust in Christ. Grow in grace. And then the end of verse 7. Abounding in thanksgiving. Abounding in thanksgiving.

That is to be characteristic of us as God's people as we grow in grace. Turn back towards or forward towards Ephesians.

Ephesians chapter 5, verses 3 and 4. Here Paul jumps directly from all of these.

Just put off all of this. Don't do this stuff. Put it away. Replace it with thanksgiving. Of course, assumed in that is all the particular virtues that are mentioned in Colossians.

[11:53] And in just a bit here in Ephesians chapter 5. But isn't it interesting that Paul, in exhorting the church, can move from putting off all of these vices, all of these sins, replace them with thanksgiving.

Replace them with a spirit of gratitude. Let me stick it in your head with this phrase. An attitude of gratitude.

That is to characterize us as God's people. Ephesians chapter 5, looking a little further, verse 15, 15 to 21.

Look carefully, then, how you walk. There's that call again, as we walk in the faith. Look carefully, then, how you walk. Not as unwise, but as wise.

Making the best use of 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.

[12:55] But be filled with the spirit. Again, we have the pattern of don't do this, do this. Stop doing that, start doing this. Addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart. Very, almost exactly the same as what we saw in Colossians 3. And then, 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. We see in this same passage, put off.

Put on. There's a one another theme that's there. There's a call to give thanks for everything. Giving thanks always and for everything.

Let me show you with just one more text. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verses 14, 22.

[13:56] And we see the same pattern again. And we urge you, brothers. Admonish the idle. Encourage the faint-hearted. Help the weak.

Be patient with them all. This passage, he begins with what they should be doing. Put on these virtues. Be living together. One another, the word one another is not used.

But it's evident through what they're being called to. Isn't it? Brothers, admonish the idle. Encourage the faint-hearted. Help the weak. Be patient with all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil.

But always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. Give thanks in all circumstances. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do you want to know what the will of God is for you?

[14:55] Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything, give thanks. In everything, give thanks. Why does thankfulness hold such a prominent place in the graces to be put on?

Why does Paul come back to it again and again? Why does he repeat it? Why are there times where he can even summarize all that we need to put on by simply saying, and be thankful?

Well, thankfulness holds such a prominent place because ingratitude is a very serious sin.

And let's look at that. In Romans chapter 1. Romans 1, I'll read 18 to 21. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world and the things that have been made.

[16:14] So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him.

But they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened. God reveals who he is, his power and his goodness to all men and women.

And all of us are without excuse. We see it. We cannot deny it. God's goodness and his power is displayed all around us.

But in the hardness of our hearts, we don't want to acknowledge it. We suppress the truth. We deny it. We will not honor.

The ungodly will not honor God. Or give thanks to him. Giving thanks naturally flows out of honoring God.

[17:23] Not giving thanks. Being ungrateful. Is a result of not honoring God. And so, because they would not honor God or give thanks, their thinking became futile.

Useless. Fruitless. Vain. Pointless. We see that in the world all around us, don't we? The folly of the thinking that is taking over our culture.

Who will not honor God or thank him. So their hearts become foolish and dark. Their consciences are seared.

And unthankfulness is a key descriptor of fallen, depraved men. And unthankful. And unthankful. We see that also in 2 Timothy.

2 Timothy. Chapter 3. Verses 1 to 5. Paul is writing to Timothy.

[18 : 28] Warning him of godlessness in the last days. But understand this. That in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self. Lovers of money.

Proud. Arrogant. Abusive. Disobedient to their parents. Ungrateful. Unholy. Heartless.

Unappeasable. Slanderous. Without self-control. Brutal. Not loving good.

Treacherous. Reckless. Swollen with conceit. Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Having the appearance of godliness but denying its power. Did you notice that enlisting of the sins that the false teachers would exhibit in the last days.

The last teachers who were to be avoided. Paul included ungratefulness. You know it doesn't seem as serious a sin to us does it?

I mean consider some of the others in that list. Proud. Abusive. Unholy. Heartless. Brutal.

Treacherous. And there in the middle with all of those others in the second half of verse 2 we have ungrateful.

[19 : 43] It doesn't seem as significant a sin. But it is. Paul considers it just as serious.

God considers it just as serious. In Jerry Bridges' book Respectable Sins he confronts the sins we tolerate.

And in the book he includes correctly I think unthankfulness as one of those sins. Brethren, we're called to be thankful people.

Are we? Are we? Are we? You know if we don't put on thankfulness in our walk. There will be some sin which we have not put off.

The absence of gratitude will not just leave some morally neutral void in our walk with the Lord. The absence of gratitude will leave some morally repugnant sin.

[20 : 50] If we don't put on gratitude, we will have an attitude of complaining or grumbling. Fault finding.

Slander. Cynicism. Pride. Entitlement. Selfishness. Covetousness. Think about this.

It will be very hard for us to slander a brother for whom we're giving thanks, wouldn't it? How can we be thankful for something we're complaining about?

How will we grumble if we already have a spirit of thankfulness towards that situation? We're to be putting on thankfulness.

How can we increase in our thankfulness? What is the soil in which gratitude will thrive? I just want to give three broad principles.

[22 : 02] We could probably divide this up differently. I'm not going into specific application here.

But just the broad principles of if we are to have a biblical gratitude, what is the soil in which that will grow?

How do we nurture that? One. One. Biblical gratitude gladly assumes a holy God to whom we should express our thanks.

Biblical gratitude gladly assumes, gladly embraces, delights in a holy God to whom we render our thanks, to whom we express our thanks.

With joy we give thanks to our creator. We are his creatures. If we are assuming that, that as creatures we have a good and holy creator, a good and holy God, it will be drawing out and developing thankfulness in us.

But depraved man, as described in Romans 1, hates God, will not acknowledge God, exchange the truth of God for a lie. So will not thank God.

[23 : 40] Honoring God naturally results in giving thanks to him. Biblical gratitude gladly assumes a holy God to whom we should express our thanks.

Now probably most of us don't stumble there. We assume a holy God. We will acknowledge that there are times when we are not as conscious of it as we should be.

But the Lord has opened our eyes and changed our hearts. We assume a good and holy God. And we delight to give him thanks.

As the characteristic of our life. Yes, we sin in many ways. But that's not where most of us stumble. At least not at that beginning point. Two, biblical gratitude requires a spirit of humility. The humble person knows they need God's wisdom and strength and joyfully rests upon it.

[24 : 52] Biblical gratitude requires a spirit of humility. We can acknowledge the presence of a holy God and yet find that our pride rears up again and again.

We want to be self-sufficient. We want to be in need of nothing. There is an intellectual assent. Even a heart's responding to a good and holy God. We know he is God. He is our creator. We are his creatures.

We see his goodness around us. He has changed our hearts. And yet, we're proud. We're not as humble as we should be.

We're not as thankful as we should be. Three, biblical gratitude sees and acknowledges receiving good gifts to which we do not have a right.

[25 : 50] I think that's where we stumble the most.

At least I think that's where I stumble the most. I do not have a spirit of thankfulness as much as I want to.

By God's grace, through years of being in his word and walking with him, by God's grace, I have learned to speak to my heart when I feel it rising up, when the plans for the day crash and burn, and by God's grace, I don't react as badly as I once did.

I remind myself that God is in control, that he is a good God, that he does all things well. I quiet my spirit. I turn my thoughts back to these things.

But am I thankful? Am I thankful that the plans for the day have crashed and burned? I'm not.

[27 : 24] I don't rant and rave. But am I thankful? No. Some of you are saying, oh, come on, Rick.

That doesn't call you to be thankful for stuff like, are you sure? Yes, we live in a fallen world.

Yes, there is sin. Yes, the wicked do stuff every day, which should provoke our righteous anger.

Our righteous anger. That's another sermon. Yes to all those things.

But God still uses it in our lives. I don't have to be thankful that my plans for the day crashed and burned in the sense that I have an attitude of being naive and careless, and there's things that aren't going to get done now, and I'm going to have to adjust plans, and I'm going to have to let this person know I can't get to that.

[28 : 40] All of that's true. But I need to be reminded that I am not God. Lord, once again, you've reminded me that you are God and I am not.

Once again, Lord, you force me to turn from my self-sufficient plans to quiet myself with your word. Lord, I thank you for your word.

I thank you that your spirit is with me. I thank you that you are conforming me to the image of Christ. Brethren, we're to have a spirit of attitude.

Excuse me. We're to have a spirit of thankfulness. We're to have an attitude of gratitude. We're to be growing in that grace. We're to be putting off those sins of self-sufficiency and anger and cynicism and slander and putting on all those other graces with thankfulness.

Always. Always. In everything. In every circumstance. And there are good gifts that come to me and to you every day, which we don't even see as gifts.

[29 : 59] We earned them. We work for them. I achieved it. Yes, the Lord works through means.

He provides for us by telling us to work. He gives us the ability to work and to produce income and to buy the groceries and prepare the food and get it on the table.

But they're gifts from him. At what point in that chain that I just gave did I achieve any of it by my own strengths?

Did I give myself the strength and the health to be able to work? Did I give myself the abilities I have to do certain works and to think? Did I give myself the ability to go to the grocery store to have a wife who faithfully does that work?

Did I provide any of that by my own wisdom and strength and power? No. They're all good gifts from God. How often do we not even see those things?

[31 : 07] We think of them, that's just the way the world works. That's just how things are. Cause and effect. And we never even trace the cause and effect back to God.

It's all just, I worked, I got the money, put it in the bank, wrote the check. Biblical gratitude gladly assumes a holy God to whom we should express our thanks.

Biblical gratitude requires a spirit of humility. Biblical gratitude sees and acknowledges receiving good gifts to which we do not have a right. Oh, brethren, but we must always love the giver more than the gift.

We must love the giver more than the gift. Do we have a spirit of gratitude? Are we thankful? Are we even aware of that lack in our lives?

Are we even aware of that missing ingredient? Do we again and again quiet our spirit? I must put off the anger and the irritation. I must quiet myself.

[32 : 14] God's in control. He's good. Where's thankfulness? Where does that come into play? Brethren, this sermon took shape as, oh, weeks, a couple months ago, reading in the epistles where I was struck by Paul's thankfulness.

For the church, even the most difficult church, for the Corinthians, where there were many problems and issues he had to address and face and correct, and yet he had a spirit of thankfulness for them. I thought, I don't. I don't have that kind of spirit of thankfulness. So I started looking at that theme of thankfulness.

And I'll acknowledge, was a bit surprised to see the connection again and again between putting off, putting on, life together in the body, one anothering, and a spirit of thankfulness.

We need each other to be growing in that grace. We need the fellowship of believers. We need to be putting off and putting on.

[33 : 47] Throughout the sermon this morning, I've asked you a number of different questions. I've asked, why does thankfulness hold such a prominent place in the virtues to be put on? I've asked, how can we work to increase thankfulness?

What is the soil in which thankfulness thrives? I've asked, do you have an attitude of thankfulness? Are you grateful? Are we?

One more question. Why? Why? Why should we as believers be thankful?

I've reviewed the soil in which gratitude must grow. A joyful delight.

That's not the word I used. A delight. In acknowledging a holy God to whom we must give thanks. A spirit of humility.

[34 : 53] An acknowledgement of good gifts that we receive. Why should we be thankful? What should drive a growing thankfulness in that soil?

Oh, brothers, we can look all around at the things we receive in our lives. We can look at the blessings we know every day. Some of which I've already mentioned.

The ability to work and think. And the blessings of shelter and food and family and common grace. Yes, all of that. But what do we as God's people in particular have for which we should be thankful? You all know the answer. In 2 Corinthians 2, verse 9, Paul says, But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads in triumphal procession. Christ, our Lord, our Master, our King, our Elder Brother, is leading a great throng.

[36 : 19] He has triumphed. He has triumphed over sin. He has triumphed over Satan. The day is coming when he will triumph over death. He is the victor.

He is the King. And he's leading a mighty host. We are joyfully his captives. We had no heart that naturally inclined towards him.

But he gave us new hearts. He opened our eyes. He took us captive. And he leads us in triumph. And through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

How can that be? How can stinking sinners like you and I show the fragrance of Christ? And yet God's Word tells us that we do. Because we're in Christ.

We're united with him. He is our Lord. He is our Savior. He is our righteousness. And his fragrance spreads everywhere. Through us, his people.

[37 : 22] Through his church. Isn't that something for which we should be thankful? But thanks be to God. Who else will we thank for that?

For our righteousness? For our wisdom? Of course not. But thanks be to God that he has done the work. That he has redeemed the people. That he will lead us forward.

That the day will come when every enemy is defeated. When every enemy is put under the foot of Christ. And every knee shall bow. And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father.

Amen? Amen. Oh, brethren. Let's give thanks for that. Let us grow in that. Let us see it. Let us see that triumphant march.

Let us smell that fragrance of the glories of God. Of the aroma of Christ. Why are we dazzled with the stuff that comes to our senses in this world?

[38 : 22] It is a good world that God made. We see the effects of sin all around us. But we can still see his goodness. No one will have any excuse. His power and his goodness is seen in the world.

But all of these sensory inputs are going to pass away. The time will come when they will be no more. And there will be a new heavens and a new earth. Let's set our minds on heavenly things. Let's have our spiritual senses filled with Christ. To smell the fragrance. To see the march. Taste and see that the Lord is good. He prepares us at table in the face of our enemies.

The marriage feast of the lamb is coming. And there will not be any ingredient missing from any dish. We will see it. We will smell it. We will taste it.

We've heard the good news. He has opened our ears. Are there some here who have heard this message again and again. And still not responded. Oh, don't harden your hearts.

[39 : 24] Come in thankfulness to the salvation that God has provided in Christ. Humble yourself. Repent.

Trust in him. He will take your sin and pay all of its guilt. And give you his righteousness. As Pastor Chad has been opening up for us just the last few weeks. The good news is proclaimed.

Hear it. Trust in it. Fall before him. Kiss the son lest he be angry. Take refuge in him.

Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift. Why should believers be filled with thanksgiving? It is the only right, appropriate, logical, satisfying, God-honoring response to seeing and savoring the astounding grace of the gospel.

Have you seen it? Have you smelled it? Have you tasted it? Have you knelt before it? Have you heard it?

[40 : 38] With the ears of your heart? Oh, savor that grace. Trust in it. Be thankful to such a good God.

God. Look around you. At brothers and sisters he's given you. He's calling us as his people to put off our sin towards each other.

To put on his grace. And be thankful. The day is coming. Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks. For this is the will of God for you. In Christ Jesus. Father, we thank you for your goodness.

Oh, Lord, make us a thankful people. Open our eyes which see so poorly. Soften our hearts which so easily become dull.

[41 : 43] Remind us again, Lord, of how good you are. And make us a thankful people.

For your glory. For our good. So that the aroma of Christ may be perceived throughout the world. Amen.