

THANKFUL HEARTS...GIVING THANKS
COLOSSIANS 3:15-17



Rudyard Kipling is one of the most well-known British writers from the 19th and 20th centuries. He penned many poems and such classic stories as *How the Leopard Got His Spots* and *The Jungle Book*. His writing made him famous and wealthy. A newspaper reporter approached him one day and said, “Mr. Kipling, I just read that somebody calculated that the money you make from your writings amounts to over one hundred dollars a word.”

Seeking to humble Kipling, the reporter then reached into his pocket and pulled out a hundred dollar bill: “Here’s a one hundred dollar bill, Mr. Kipling. Now give me one of your hundred dollar words.”

Kipling took the bill, stuffed it into his pocket, and said — **“Thanks.”**

Thankfulness certainly is a one-hundred dollar attribute. Even unbelievers recognize it. And I am thankful that even our secular culture reminds us of the importance of giving thanks. I am more grateful that God gives us direction on how to be thankful in this secular culture. Here is what Paul will say about gratitude in Colossians 3 —

CHRIST IS SANCTIFYING US TO BE THANKFUL.

CHRIST IS SANCTIFYING US BY BEING THANKFUL.

Thankfulness is one of the goals of our sanctification. We are re-created in Christ to be thankful. But we are also sanctified as we are thankful — thankfulness is a means of sanctifying us. So thankfulness is both the goal and the means of our sanctification.

In this passage Paul provides **three admonitions** for when and how to be thankful.

Context: A Transformed Life (vv. 1-14)

1. Gratitude and Christ’s **PEACE** (v. 15)
2. Gratitude and Christ’s **WORD** (v. 16)
3. Gratitude and Christ’s **COMMISSION** (v. 17)

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Context: A Transformed Life (vv. 1-14)

- The first two chapters of Colossians explain the position of the believer in Christ; chapter three begins an explanation of the implications of that position (3:1) — keep pursuing Christ and Christlikeness.
- That Christlikeness (which we also call the process of sanctification) involves three aspects:
 - ✓ *Renewing the mind* — thinking the way God would have us think (vv. 1-2)
 - ✓ *Putting off sin* — mortification (v. 5) and **putting aside** specific deeds of the flesh (vv. 8-11)
 - ✓ *Putting on righteousness* — replacing ungodly and fleshly habits with godly, spirit-produced actions (vv. 12-14).
- How will we be sanctified in these ways? Paul gives three primary words of admonition in vv. 15-17, and all three of those instructions are related to the practice of being thankful. Consider...

1. Gratitude and Christ's PEACE (v. 15)

- What is ruling and governing your heart these days? Fear/Anxiety? Anger? Outrage? Discontentment? Rebellion? Despair? Joylessness?
- To the Colossians and us, Paul says that because of our position in Christ, **Let the peace of Christ rule**.
 - ✓ The word **rule** is a word that relates to an umpire's decision — it has the imagery of athletics and the courtroom in mind — the judge in both places administrates and controls his setting. What is to control our minds and hearts is the peace of Christ.
 - ✓ The peace of Christ is the objective reality that Christ's work has changed us from the enemies of God to his friends and sons. It is akin to what we saw in Rom. 5:1, 10.
 - This peace is the absence of war with God, but also the presence of harmony and joy.
 - The reality of the peace we have with God should then direct, govern, and "referee" our hearts.
 - Because we have peace with God, we should fear nothing else that can happen to us (Mt. 10:28; Heb. 13:6; Ps. 118:5-10).
 - ✓ The place where this peace should rule is in **our hearts**. That is, peace should rule the mission control center of our lives — Christ's peace should govern what we think, what we desire, what we love, what convicts us in our consciences, and what we will to do — all our commitments. The peace of Christ should govern everything that is inside us and comes out from us.
 - ✓ This admonition from Paul is similar to Jesus' own teaching — Jn. 14:27; 16:33.

- How are we going to stimulate this peace? How will we be controlled by peace when everything around us seems to be so turbulent and anxiety-producing? He tells us — **and be thankful**.
 - ✓ In part, we will be controlled by the reality of Christ's gift of peace to us when we are thankful.
 - ✓ More than any other NT writer, Paul is consumed with the idea of gratitude. He speaks more of gratitude even than Christ (which is not to say that he is more grateful than Jesus). The "thankful" word group is used 54x in the NT — Paul uses it 37x, more than 2/3 of the uses.
 - ✓ This is a particular emphasis in this book (1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:15-17; 4:2).
 - ✓ What is notable about this admonition is not just that we should cultivate gratitude in our hearts, but that our gratitude should be *expressed*. We need to think *and* speak gratefully. Our speech should be ~~sprinkled~~ saturated with gratitude.
 - ✓ In fact, one commentator has suggested that "the regular offering of thanks to God is almost synonymous with being a Christian." [O'Brien] And unbelievers are noted for their ingratitude (Rom. 1:21). If we are believers, we will be thankful. And gratitude will contribute to our hearts being controlled by peace.
- Is your life characterized by the **peace of Christ** (are you free from anxiety and worry)?
- Have you taken time to verbally give **thanks** to God? Two suggestions —
 - ✓ Keep a daily journal writing down at least three things each day for which you are thankful. They might be physical provisions (ability to exercise, a blooming flower, an encouraging doctor visit), or they might be spiritual provisions (friend to pray with you, forgiveness for sin, growth in maturity).
 - ✓ Spend a day on a regular basis just praying prayers of gratitude — turn your requests into expressions of trust (thank You that in my suffering you will preserve me and not be against me)
- Be intentional to verbalize gratitude — and see if your heart will not also be ruled by Christ's peace.

2. Gratitude and Christ's **WORD** (v. 16)

- In verse 15 Paul says that the **peace of Christ** is to rule/arbitrate our lives.
- In verse 16 Paul says that **Word of Christ** is to richly live in us.
 - ✓ The structure of the verses is parallel — in both cases Paul is talking about us being controlled by one of God's provisions.
 - ✓ In verse 15, the reality of Christ's provision of peace for us should control us.
 - ✓ In verse 16, the reality of Christ's Word should control us. This verse is parallel to Eph. 5:18-19 and teaches us that we are controlled by the Spirit of God when we are controlled by the Spirit's Word.
 - ✓ The **word of Christ** is the Word *about* Jesus Christ — the Word that reveals the truth about Him and His saving work for us. It is ultimately also, then, a reference to all the Scriptures.

- ✓ That **word** should live in us **richly** — abundantly, extravagantly, and lavishly. When it does that, it overflows into **wisdom** that **teaches** and **admonishes** (exhorts) one another.
- ✓ As we all are controlled by the Spirit and the Word, there is a mutual work of ministering the Word to **each other**. That teaching and exhorting ministry is accomplished, in part, through **psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs**. That tells us that singing is not secondary in our corporate worship; singing is one of the reminders of spiritual truth that we need to know and cling to. When we sing, we are not only giving worship to God, but we are also instructing and exhorting one another.
- And as we sing, notice where that song originates: **singing with thankfulness in your hearts**.
 - ✓ That is, we are singing audibly, but we are also singing internally — in our **hearts**. Because we are grateful in our hearts (Mission Control Center), we sing with our lips.
 - ✓ “The entire man should be filled with songs of praise.” [Lohse, in O’Brien]
 - ✓ This is a helpful reminder because it keeps us from hypocrisy. God would not have us be the kind of people that speak of gratitude without being inwardly grateful (which was the pharisaic problem). Let your heart be ruled by gratitude and then let that gratitude naturally flow out of you (Lk. 6:45).
 - ✓ The word translated **thankfulness** is the word “grace” — “gratitude.” The sense is that we are overwhelmed by God’s grace towards us and it explodes into expressions of song.
 - ✓ Someone has said, “Wherever you see grace, give thanks.” (And grace is *everywhere*.)
 - ✓ I have always been curious why God focuses both here and in Ephesians on teaching by singing. It seems unusual. Perhaps it is the emphasis on corporate worship. But it is also an effective way to emphasize the need for gratitude that is internal and not just external. You can only really sing if it flows out of an internal heart of thankfulness. You can’t be ungrateful and sing joyfully.
 - ✓ And notice that our grateful singing is directed **to God**. We recognize we are indebted to Him for everything we have and our gratitude is the only fitting response to His gifts to us.
 - ✓ The unbeliever is not only ungrateful — but his ingratitude is directed toward God. “The worst moment for an atheist is when he is really thankful and has nobody to thank.” (Dante Rossetti)
 - ✓ We sing from a heart and life that is genuinely thankful for God’s grace to us. And we will feed gratitude when we soak in and are controlled by the Spirit and His Word.
- Are you giving **thanks** to God *in your hearts*?
 - ✓ We are frequently tempted to grumble rather than give thanks (Ex. 16:2ff; Num. 11:5; 1 Pt. 4:9). Are we complaining internally (even while externally we are doing the right things)?
 - ✓ What are we saying to ourselves about our situations, and are we giving thanks internally?
 - ✓ What are we reading and watching and with whom are we conversing? Are these helping us to be grateful or hindering us from being grateful?
 - ✓ Are you singing with gratitude? What are you singing?

3. Gratitude and Christ's COMMISSION (v. 17)

- Some of the hardest passages in Scripture are the ones that leave us with no options (like Romans 12:14-21). This is another of those verses: **whatever you do...do all in the name of the Lord Jesus**.
 - ✓ To do something **in the name of the Lord Jesus** is akin to doing it for His glory (Col. 1:18; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; 10:31; 2 Cor. 4:15).
 - Whatever we do is done in *dependence* on the Lord Jesus
 - Whatever we do is done in recognition of the *authority* of the Lord Jesus
 - Whatever we do is done as a *representative* of the Lord Jesus
 - ✓ When he says **whatever**, it is a comprehensive statement — there is no situation in which we cannot glorify God. Just consider the immediate context —
 - In situations that tempt you to sin (vv. 4-5), you have what you need to glorify Christ.
 - In situations where it is hard to be holy (vv. 12-13), you have what you need to glorify Christ.
 - In all your relationships (3:18 – 4:1), you have what you need to glorify Christ.
 - ✓ The way that we do all things in Christ's name is by **giving thanks through Him to God...** Christ is our mediator for giving thanks. He is at the right hand of the Father interceding for us (Rom. 8:34).
- This statement about giving thanks is consistent with what the rest of Scripture says about giving thanks:
 - ✓ Consider Paul's admonitions — 1 Thess. 5:16-18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Tim. 2:1.
 - ✓ Consider the OT — Ps. 9:1; 30:4, 12; 100:1ff; 118:1, 19, 21, 28-29; Ps. 136; Is. 12:1, 4; 25:1
 - ✓ Consider that one thing we regularly forget to do is to give thanks for God's grace to others (e.g., Rom. 1:8; 16:4; 1 Cor. 1:4ff; Eph. 1:16ff; Phil. 1:3ff; Col. 1:3ff; Philemon 4...)
 - ✓ This phrase doesn't mean that we give thanks *for* sin (either that we do or that is done against us); it does mean that when sin happens, there are still things for which we can give thanks.
 - ✓ One of the graces of learning to give thanks is that it is an antidote to sin (Eph. 5:4; 1 Tim. 4:3-4).
 - ✓ In other words, giving thanks is good, and good for us. This is God's commission/command to us.
- Have you taken time to give **thanks** to God for everything in your life?
 - ✓ For what have you not given thanks? Have you overlooked an opportunity to give thanks? Are you intentionally not giving thanks for something hard? (If so, it's time to repent.)
 - ✓ Have you thanked God for His salvation given for you and to you?
 - ✓ Have you thanked God for *your* circumstances? The difficult ones and how they are producing sanctification in you?
 - ✓ Have you thanked God for your relationships? The difficult ones and how they are revealing ungodly desires and idols that can then be redeemed and transformed?
 - ✓ Have you thanked God for what the sins committed against you are revealing about you?
 - ✓ Have you thanked God for His sufficiency for all things and His sanctifying work in all things?

CONCLUSION: Prayer of Thanksgiving

- We thank you for our Savior —
 - ✓ We thank you for the peace that He provides that has reconciled us to the Father
 - ✓ We thank you that He gives us a worthy object for our thoughts
 - ✓ We thank you that He is at the right hand of the Father, ruling the world with sovereign wisdom, and interceding for us, defending us against the unjust accusations of the evil one.
 - ✓ We thank you for the Word of truth that has revealed Him to us so that we can know Him
 - ✓ We thank you for the Spirit He has sent to us to control and guide us so that we are conformed to Christ and sanctified.
- We thank you for salvation and its transforming work in us —
 - ✓ Thank you that while we used to be enslaved to sin, we are now free from sin
 - ✓ Thank you that your calls to put off sin and put on righteousness are possible for us
 - ✓ Thank you that while we are not what we will be in Heaven, we are less than what we were at salvation.
- Thank you for the relationships you give us —
 - ✓ Thank you for brothers and sisters in Christ whom you have given to teach and admonish us — we are more like Christ because of the relationships in the church body
 - ✓ Thank you for the spiritual gifts you give us that not only sanctify us, but are also used by you to sanctify others and serve and minister to others
 - ✓ Thank you for relationships in which we learn what heavenly fellowship is like — we know something of your love by the love we have for one another. And thank you for what we learn about you by accepting one another, honoring one another, serving one another, exhorting and encouraging one another, and forgiving one another.
 - ✓ Thank you for marriage that is a sweet gift to teach us what heavenly marriage and home is like.
 - ✓ Thank you for the hard relationships you have given us, where we learn what it is to confess our sins to one another and to be forgiving and to forgive one another. Thank you for what we learn about ourselves and our ungodly desires through those hard relationships. Thank you for what we learn about the power of reconciliation through those difficult relationships.
- Thank you for the circumstances in which you have placed us —
 - ✓ We share common circumstances with COVID and governmental leaders. Some of those things are particularly hard for us, but thank you that we have learned of the sufficiency of your grace through those trials.
 - ✓ Our personal circumstances vary — we are in different marriages, different work environments, different financial positions, and different levels of health. Thank you for where you have placed us in each of those circumstances; they are just right to teach us dependence on you and trust in you.

BENEDICTION: Romans 8:35-39