

Thanksgiving, Gratitude, and the Gospel

Joshua Hawkins – www.joshuahawkins.com

We can see the concept of “thanksgiving” throughout the scriptures, and although it’s good to set aside a Thursday every November to be intentionally thankful, the Bible says much more about giving thanks than just one day a year can handle.

#1: Christian gratitude is rooted in the story of the Gospel

1. Without the story of redemption in view, the Bible’s call to gratitude does not make much sense.
2. We should aim to have our thanksgiving rise in proportion to the value of the object for which we give thanks (1 Corinthians 1:4).
3. God has showed his love for us even when we were enemies of God (Romans 5:8); he called us out of darkness and made us heirs of God (Romans 8:17); Jesus bore the punishment we deserved, and as we put our faith in Him, we can have confidence that we will receive his perfect righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21) so that when God comes to judge, our sin will not condemn us to destruction.

#2: Gratitude is an act of the heart

1. Genuine thankfulness is an act of the heart’s affections, not merely an act of the lips’ muscles. Gratitude is an *experience*.
2. New Testament passages on gratitude and thankfulness:

“May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” (Colossians 1:11–12 ESV)

“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” (Colossians 2:6–7 ESV)

“giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Ephesians 5:20 ESV)

“give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” (1 Thessalonians 5:18 ESV)

#3: Gratitude honors God

1. By giving Him thanks from our hearts, we honor Him and glorify Him for all He has done and all He has promised us. When we glorify Him, we are drawing attention to His greatness.

2. Ingratitude is a result of a prideful, sinful heart:

“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness ... For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes ... have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. 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.” (Romans 1:18–21 ESV)

3. God is glorified more fully when we feel thankfulness, not when we only say, “Thank you.”
4. Authentic heart-feelings are not in our control. We can’t make ourselves feel thankfulness. If our hearts are not moved by God’s goodness, we are ungrateful.
5. Therefore, as fallen sinners whose hearts are often dull, we should regularly pray for God to overcome our sinful hardness, and cause us to see what He has done, what He has promised, and feel thankful for it (Psalm 51:10-12).

#4: Jesus modeled gratitude

1. God himself, in the person of his Son, Jesus, entered into our thankless world, lived in flawless appreciation of his Father, and died on our behalf for our chronic ingratitude.

Matthew 11:25 (Luke 10:21); John 11:41; Matthew 15:36 (Mark 8:6; John 6:11, 23); Luke 22:17-20 (Matthew 26:27; Mark 14:23); 1 Corinthians 11:23-24

2. Jesus is not only God himself but also the quintessentially thankful human. The God-man not only died to forgive our failures in giving God the thanks he’s due, but also lived the perfect life of appreciation on our behalf toward his Father.

#5: Gratitude replaces sin

1. When Paul commands believers to stop sinning, he also commands believers to put thanksgiving in its place. Paul writes:

“Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.” (Ephesians 5:1, 4 ESV)

2. Gratitude is God’s way of inviting us to leave behind our sin and selfishness and receive, through the cross, “the immeasurable riches of [God’s] grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). The Bible’s command to be grateful is a command to *remember*. It is such a profoundly kind command.