

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Thanksgiving

By James E. Cooper

In the United States and Canada, a day is legally set aside each year as Thanksgiving Day. In Canada, it is the second Monday of October, but in the United States it is the fourth Thursday in November. Although Thanksgiving has not always been observed on these precise dates, a day of Thanksgiving has been observed in one way or another on this continent ever since the first colonists arrived from Europe in the early 1600's. Since most of the early colonists were deeply religious, those early observances were primarily religious in nature, with an emphasis on thanks-giving.

A National Holiday

In Virginia, December 4 was observed as a day of Thanksgiving to God by a group of English settlers who arrived at the Berkeley Plantation, on the James River near what is now Charles City, in 1619. The group's charter specified that the day of arrival should be remembered each year as a day of Thanksgiving to God.

In New England, the first Thanksgiving was observed less than a year after the Plymouth colonists had settled in the new land. Arriving late in the Fall of 1620, poor food, difficult work and changeable weather resulted in the loss of almost half of their numbers before Spring. But a bountiful harvest led Governor Bradford to declare a three-day celebration of Thanksgiving late in the Fall of 1621. The Pilgrims invited their Indian friends to join them in the festival. He decreed a day for prayer as well as celebration for July 30, 1623.

The first national day of Thanksgiving was proclaimed by George Washington for Nov. 26, 1789, but there was no regular national Thanksgiving Day for many years, until President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November 1863, as “a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father.” Each year for the next 75 years the President of the United States proclaimed the last Thursday in November as a Thanksgiving day. In 1939 and 1940, President Roosevelt set it one week earlier, but Congress finally ruled in 1941 that the fourth Thursday in November would be observed as a legal federal holiday. In 1957, the Canadian government set the date now observed as Thanksgiving by Canadians.

Give Thanks Daily

Although numerous churches will meet for a special worship service on Thanksgiving Day, the Bible does not authorize one special day to be observed in this fashion. We may, indeed, be thankful on this day, but there is no less need for us to be thankful every day of our lives.

The Christian is to “*abound in thanksgiving*” (Col. 2:7). Paul further wrote: “*Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus to you-ward*” (1 Thess. 5:16-18). Again: “*Giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father*” (Eph. 5:20). We should be grateful in everything. Even in the midst of “tribulation, anguish, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, or the sword” (Rom. 8:35) we may be thankful, and rejoice: “*knowing that tribulation worketh steadfastness; and steadfastness, approvedness; and approvedness, hope*” (Rom. 5:3-4). Gratitude and thanksgiving are characteristics of the person who truly worships God in “*spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24).

To the Philippians Paul wrote: “*In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus*” (4:6-7). “*When a person prays with-*

out giving thanks, he has clipped the wings of prayer, so that it cannot rise” (William Hendriksen, N.T. Commentary on I & II Thessalonians, pg. 138). A grateful heart will cause us to express our appreciation for God’s benevolence.

Commenting on Ephesians 5:20, Hendriksen said, *“Gratitude is that which completes the circle whereby blessings that drop down into hearts and lives of believers return to the Giver in the form of unending, loving, and spontaneous adoration. Properly pursued, such giving of thanks is a self-perpetuating attitude and activity, for it implies a review of blessings received. Naturally, such a review, the purposeful concentration of attention upon benefits, causes them to stand out more clearly, resulting in increased thanksgiving. The expression of gratitude is therefore a most blessed response to favors undeserved. While it lasts, worries tend to disappear, complaints vanish, courage to face the future is increased, virtuous resolutions are formed, peace is experienced, and God is glorified.”*

Let Us Be Thankful

Thanksgiving, then, for the Christian is not reserved for one day of the year. It is to be observed every day of the year. It is essential for us to stop and reflect upon the many wonderful blessings we receive from our Loving Father. We should thank Him for the blessings we enjoy along with everyone else. He ***“maketh his sun rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust”*** (Matt. 5:45). At Lystra, Paul observed that the living God, ***“in generations gone by suffered all the nations to walk in their own ways. And yet He left not himself without witness, in that he did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons, filling your hearts with good and gladness”*** (Acts 14:15-17). Every one of us benefits from these general blessings at the hand of God.

In a book called ***“Tonic For Our Times”*** (copyright 1952), Richard L. Evans suggested that one way to find out how much we have to be thankful for is to just give up some of our blessings. Try going without food for a couple of days, and you will appreciate a nourishing meal. Think about how life would be greatly changed for you if you lost your eyesight or even your hearing, and be thankful for them. When you get tired and frustrated from caring for your children, think about how empty life would be without them, and be thankful. There are numerous simple things that make our lives enjoyable, and we should be grateful.

Above all, we should be grateful to God for His plan for saving men. We should be thankful that He loved us enough to send His only begotten Son into the world (John 3:16), and ***“while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us”*** (Rom. 5:8). In Christ we ***“have our redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace”*** (Eph. 1:7). Without His shed blood, we would still be lost in sin, separated from God, and without hope beyond this life. But with it, by faith in his blood, we can enjoy the hope of life eternal (Rom. 3:25; Acts 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:3-5).

We should be thankful for the church He purchased with His shed blood (Acts 20:28) and for the privilege of being members of it. Here, along with our brethren in Christ, we may enjoy the fellowship of those of like precious faith, engage in corporate worship, and busy ourselves in sharing the good news of salvation with other people. In the church we receive strength and encouragement from others who are striving to live in this world in such a way that God is glorified.

We should be thankful for the privilege of associating with the best people on earth and at the same time enjoy the prospect of enjoying their fellowship in eternity (Mark 10:30).

As Americans we are wonderfully blessed, but as Christians far more so. Let us observe thanks-giving every day! – ***Knollwood church of Christ Articles***, December 2015. ■

“And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Col. 3:15).

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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