**Sing To God With Gratitude**

October 9, 2016

Colossians 3:12-17

Key Verse 3:16 “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

Thanksgiving Day is celebrated in the name of God only in Canada, USA and Liberia. In 1863 while USA was still in the midst of Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the observance of a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to God. In his proclamation, he pointed out that “we are prone to forget the Source of blessings---being habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of the Almighty God.” President Lincoln also requested that, along with thanksgiving, we offer to God humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience. Thankfulness springs from awareness of God’s grace. As God’s chosen people, we are dearly loved. We are born to be loved. But how often we doubt his love! As President Lincoln pointed out, we have a habitual insensitivity and forgetfulness toward God and his blessings. At this Thanksgiving, let’s think about God’s grace so that we may have a joyful Thanksgiving with praises and singing in our souls.

Look at verse 12. “Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” Here we have great truth and paradox of a believer’s position and his practice (or practical reality). Our position in Christ is that we are chosen people, royal priesthood, and holy nation, and dearly loved. When a person believes in Jesus, God no longer looks at him as a condemned sinner. God does not see all the ugly sins. God sees him holy and blameless. We are perfect in his sight. We are dearly loved just like Sam’s youngest sister loves Mousey. We are valuable, not because we have any value, but because he loved us dearly like a treasured possession.

But our practice (our practical reality) is quite different. We are imperfect. We are full of sinful desires. But God’s will is that our practice should match our position as holy children. It will never match until Jesus comes again and clothe us with glorious resurrection bodies. But the process of sanctification, growth, and increasing Christlikeness, should be going on continually while we are on earth. Look at verses 10-11. “…have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.” In the past, in our sinful nature, we struggled to find our significance , our identity and our happiness and our security in what we were in relation to other people—we are Canadians, we are Koreans, we are rich, we are smart, we are strong, we are pretty, we are cool. But then we have taken off that old self with its practices. We put on the new self. And the core essence of the new self is that CHRIST IS ALL. We are being renewed in the image of Christ Jesus.

Look at verse 12b. “...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” These are some of God’s attributes, revealed especially in Christ. These are the attributes that we should have as God’s chosen people. Let me mention some of them. Humility is the most important virtue. It is to acknowledge God as God and to respect others more than oneself. Once Augustine’s disciples asked him what was the most important of all Christian virtues. He said, “First is humility; second is humility; third is humility.” One of the fundamental qualities invariably found in a grateful person is humility. Gratitude is the overflow of a humble heart, just as surely as an ungrateful, complaining spirit flows out of a proud heart.

Proud people are wrapped up in themselves. They think much of themselves and little of others. If people or circumstances don’t please or suit them, they are prone to whine or become resentful. Humility enables us to be thankful people, even in the midst of challenging circumstances. Humble people are wrapped up in Christ. A humble person thinks much of God and others, and little–if at all–of himself. He recognizes that anything he has is better than he deserves. He does not feel anyone owes him anything. He does not feel entitled to have more, or for life to be easy, or for everyone to love him and treat him well. He is grateful for the least little kindness that is extended to him, knowing it is more than he deserves.

Too many of us live with a chip on our shoulder, as if the world owes us something. “You ought to do this for me. You ought to serve me. You ought to meet my needs.” But the humble heart–the grateful heart–says, “I don’t deserve this, and it’s an amazing act of grace that you should minister to my needs.” Last August, right before I left for staff conference in USA, the internet here was down. I wanted to take care of it before I left. So I called our internet service provider. But the phone line was so bad that I could hardly hear her, and I could not follow her instructions well. But she began to disparage me for not following her instructions. I could feel in her tone the disdain and contempt. I was very angry in my heart, thinking, “How dare she would treat me like this?” I was angry at my wife who was at the church, but did not lift a finger to help me, even though I was struggling. I seriously considered yelling at the technician, saying “Hell with it,” and switching to another internet service provider. But I remembered the word of God, “God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.” (James 4:6) Then God restored my soul and I could be healed and participated in the staff conference with joy.

Did you know that there is no word in classical Greek for humility? There is none. They didn’t believe in it. Humility was something that Greeks despised. Pride was what they were after. Then came Christianity and said, “Put on humility.” Here came Jesus and said, “Be humble.” Jesus said in Matthew 11:29, “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” This is the antidote to self-love, and self-love poisons all relationships. When you love yourself and you are self-seeking and you desire things for yourself, whatever they are, whether they are at your job or in your family or in your church, wherever you are self-seeking, you will poison relationships with other people.

Gentleness is sometimes called meekness. It is power expressed in mildness. Meekness is not weakness. It is the strength to deny oneself and walk in grace toward others. God’s gentleness was expressed when he became a baby in a manger instead of coming as a superman to crush all sinners. Even though he is the King of kings and Lord of lords, he did not exercise his authority. Rather, he humbly served sinners so that he can make friends with them. Patience is waiting quietly without anger. Paul said that patience was the first element of love (1 Cor 13:4). Patience never gives up hope. We must grow in these virtues as God’s children.

While verse 12 has to do with Christian character, verses 13-14 have to do with relationships in the Christian community. Look at verse 13. “Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.” What does it mean to bear with each other? Everyone has a strong point, and at the same time one or more weak points. We should encourage others in their strong point and tolerate their weak points. However, people have a tendency to emphasize others’ weak points and ignore their strong points. After pinpointing others’ weakness, we want to correct them. But we should realize that changing someone’s character is God’s work. Our job is to bear with others and to forgive others. An unforgiving heart makes people ugly and sick. But forgiveness brings peace, harmony and beauty. Forgiving others is not easy. So Paul said, “...as the Lord forgave you.” When we remember Jesus who forgave all our sins from the cross, we can find the strength and grace to forgive others.

What if they refuse to acknowledge their wrongs or they refuse to ask for your forgiveness? Do we still have to forgive them? Yes. For our own sake. When we do not forgive, bitterness and anger will grow and they become like a dagger in our hearts. They will inflict great harm. But when we forgive, God will remove the dagger from our hearts. Joseph in the Old Testament was sold as a slave to Egypt by his brothers. You can imagine the anger and hatred toward his brothers while suffering in a foreign land, away from his loving father. But Joseph forgave his brothers from his heart. When his first son was born, he named him Manasseh, saying, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” It does not mean that he erased all his painful memories, but God healed his heart and removed the dagger in his heart. So his past wounds did not cause him any harm even if he thought about them.

Verse 14 says, “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.” All the Christian virtues are summarized in one word: Love. Although we have great faith, without love we are nothing. God is love. God’s children must be growing in the love of God until they reach maturity. Childish Christians envy and dishonor others, boast about themselves and seek their own glory, get angry easily, keep records of wrongs in their hearts and talk badly about others. But mature Christians put childish ways behind them. They always protect, always trust, always hope, always persevere (1 Cor 13:4-8). When we put on God’s love, it binds us all together in perfect unity. In every fellowship there are conflicts between members. How can we solve these conflicts? Put on love. Jesus’ last and greatest command to his disciples was, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another” (Jn 13:34-35).

In verses 15-17, Paul gives practical suggestions for our lives: Three priorities of the new self. First, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Second, let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Third, let the name of Christ guide you in everything.

Look at verse 15. “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace.” The word “rule” is umpire. Let the peace of Christ be the umpire. You got a problem? You have to make a decision? Let the peace of Christ make that decision. When we are going to make a decision, we should ask, “Will it give peace to my soul? Will it give rest to my soul? Will it give me a sense of confident security that God is in this?” That is how we govern our behavior. We need the umpire to say, “You are safe. You are out. This is foul.” If the peace of Christ rules in all of our lives and umpiring all of us, a perfect unity is going to happen. Then Paul adds, “Be thankful.” Do you know how to keep your heart peaceful? Be thankful. Just keep thanking the Lord for everything. It is just amazing how peaceful you will be if you are thankful.

Look at verse 16. “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another.” To have peace and thankfulness and love and all these virtues in verses 12-13 is going to demand that the word of Christ dwell in you. The word of God is the word of life. We need to study and memorize it. All these attributes, love and peace are only possible with abundant words of God dwelling in our midst. But it doesn’t stop there. We are not just a walking biblical encyclopedia. The word of God should come out of our hearts like a music. When the word of God dwells in our hearts, we can teach (that’s positive) and we can admonish (that’s negative). Positive is saying, “Do this and do that.” Admonishing is saying, “Don’t do this. Don’t do that. It is not right.” So you have the positive teaching and the negative warning. That is going to come as a result of the dwelling of the word of Christ richly in your heart.

Look at verse 17. “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Jesus Christ is Lord. He is the head of the church. Whenever we gather, we must do everything in him and through him and for him. When Christ is honored, God is pleased and he will bless our community abundantly. The famous musician Johannes Bach did not sign his name to his compositions. Instead, he wrote the letters “INDNJC,” which stand for the Latin “In Nominee Domini Nostri Jesus Christi,” which means in English “In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.” This is the right attitude of a person in Christ. Young people today have a difficult time deciding whether certain things are right or wrong. Verse 17 is the key. The great test should be: Can I do this in the name of the Lord Jesus? Would this be to his glory?

When we look at verses 15-17 we find the words “be thankful,” “gratitude,” and “giving thanks to God.” Here we learn the important characteristic of Christian living. It is to be thankful. Paul frequently mentioned being thankful to God. Though we hear this often, our thankfulness falls short of what it should be. God really does not like grumbling, complaining and ungratefulness. The Israelites who complained in the wilderness were bitten by snakes, or swallowed by the earth, and perished. The characteristic of a mature Christian is that he or she is always thankful.

Let’s thank God for choosing us as his holy and beloved children. Thank God for sanctifying us more and more into the image and character of Christ. We thank God for forgiving us all our sins by the blood of Christ. May the grace and peace of Christ dwell among us richly now and always.