

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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The Giving of Thanks

by Dan Trygg

“I am rejoicing to see your good discipline (order) and the stability of your faith in Christ. ⁶ Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, ⁷ having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, ...overflowing with thanksgiving.”

Colossians 2:6,7

“Rejoice always; ¹⁷ pray unceasingly; ¹⁸ in everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.”

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Sometimes it is good to stop and ponder why we do what we do. What is “thanksgiving”? What is it all about? What does it mean, and why is it “God’s will for us”? I find it is helpful to me to dig around in the original languages and try to see what was done during the times of the Old and New Testaments, so that I might gain a clearer understanding of the terms used in our Bibles. Often, through the course of the centuries, we have lost the clarity of what was meant, or even what the original word pictures were. It is beneficial to do some investigation, and to meditate on what we can discover, in order to understand and implement these biblical concepts more effectively.

Words for “thanks”, “thanksgiving” or “gratitude” occur 200 times in our English Bibles. The Hebrew word *yadah* occurs 114 times, and another related word, *todah*, occurs another 32 times. Interestingly, although these words are often translated as “to thank” in most English versions, that is not actually a good translation. The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament observed that there was no OT Hebrew word used to express “thanks” to God and to people. There were no common Hebrew words for expressing thanks to one another. *These words are used only in relation to God Himself.* The Hebrew words mean “to acknowledge; to praise; to confess; or, to give voice to”. These are verbal declarations of praise and blessing to God for what He has done. One of the definitions is to “throw up in the air”, which is thought to refer to the throwing up of the hands in praise. So, in the OT, there was not a separate category for “thanksgiving”, ...there was just the exclamation of praise and delight in Him who has been good to us.

The NT Greek verb for “thanksgiving” is *eucharisteō*, which occurs 38 times, and the related noun form, *eucharistia* occurs an additional 16 times. There is also another noun form, *eucharistos*, which is found once in the NT, which means “grateful or thankful”. What would be obvious to anyone familiar with Greek is that this is a compound word, from the prefix *eu*=well or good, and *charis*=grace, favor or *charizomai*=I am gracious, or I show grace or favor on someone. Thus, thanksgiving is the *response* to the graciousness or favor that someone has shown to you. It is basically an emotional response of gratitude, or an outward declaration of praise or thanksgiving, to one who has shown kindness, grace or favor to you. The related Greek words are instructive: Grace or graciousness (*charis*) is expressed in a gracious act or gift (*charisma*), which produces joy (*chara*) in the recipient, ...this joy evokes an inner response of gratitude (*eucharistia* = “Good grace!”) which is outwardly expressed as praise or thanksgiving (*eucharisteō* = I declare “Good grace!” or “Good gift!”).

We can see a similar relationship in Latin words, which carry over into English. *Gratus* is the Latin word for “something pleasing, a gift or a favor”. From this word are derived, “grace, grateful, gracious, gratify, gratitude, gratuity and gratuitous”, to name a few. Again, we see the relationship between an inner graciousness of the giver, the expression in the form of a gift or favor, which causes an emotional response in the recipient, who then expresses this inner joy or gratefulness as an exclamation of gratitude or thanksgiving.

As we ponder thanksgiving in our relationship with God, we need to mentally retrace these steps. We must recognize or identify the many, many ways in which God has shown us the favor, grace and kindness of His heart. One way to do that is to “count your blessings”. When you begin to give your mind to this, you see that everything you have, ...everything that is pleasing and good, ...everything that is a benefit and blessing..., has come from His gracious heart. It is important to work back from the gifts themselves to see the heart of Him who gives them. As we count them up, ...all the pleasing and favorable things that we have and enjoy..., our hearts come alive with joy and gratitude. We find ourselves naturally wanting to express this joy to the One who has given it to us, the Giver. We find ourselves saying, “Oh, *this* is good!”, “*That* is wonderful!”, “Oh, I appreciate *this*!”, and “*This* is such a blessing to me!” Our hearts are lifted up to the heights of praise, and we throw up our hands in delight and worship! Or, we find ourselves humbled with a quiet gratitude before Him who has given so much, ...and continues to confer upon us blessing after blessing. *Something in us wants to speak it out*, ...whether in a shout, or a whisper..., “Thank You, ...that was *so good*, ...YOU are *so good*!” Our hearts are filled to overflowing with gratitude, joy and praise, ...as we enumerate and appreciate each blessing. Even in the most difficult of times, we can find refuge and solace in the sovereignty, goodness and faithfulness of our God, and we can be thankful. We can be thankful in *all* circumstances.