

THE LORD'S SUPPER "THANKSGIVING"
Colossians 2:6-7

(NLT) "And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. ⁷ Let your roots grow down into Him, and let your lives be built on Him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness."

True story: A woman in her 70s, cooking Thanksgiving dinner for the first time, called Butterball for help. Her mother said she was tired of doing the cooking. It was time her daughter learned how to prepare the Thanksgiving meal. This 70+-year-old woman evidently experienced a rude awakening at Thanksgiving; the loss of something to which she'd thought she was entitled. Yet, did she still have reasons to be thankful? Taking any of our blessings for granted may produce bitterness in our hearts if we become consumed with what we don't have and lose sight of the many blessings we already enjoy. A *Peanuts* cartoon pictured Charlie Brown bringing out Snoopy's dinner on Thanksgiving Day. It was just his usual dog food in a bowl. Snoopy took one look at his bowl and said, "This isn't fair. The rest of the world today is eating turkey with all the trimmings and all I get is dog food. Because I'm a dog, all I get is dog food." He stood there staring at his dog food for a few moments before commenting, "I guess it could be worse. I could be a turkey."

This Thanksgiving weekend, can you find reasons that encourage you to "overflow with thankfulness"? We all admit the circumstances of our lives are not always the best. We may face uncertainties concerning jobs, our country, struggles of family members, health concerns, loneliness, or other matters. But our Maker instructs us in **I Thessalonians 5:18** (NIV) to look for something to be thankful for in every situation we face: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." Would you not agree that the more you "let your roots grow down into Him [into Christ Jesus after you embrace Him as your personal Lord and Savior], and let your lives be built upon Him, then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught [which means you will entrust yourself to God's Spirit to be your spiritual surgeon in removing unChristlike actions and poor values that are crippling you], and you will overflow with thankfulness"?

Outwardly, some may wonder why we can be content and be at peace despite the difficult circumstances we seem to be facing. Our "secret" is that we are grateful for God's blessings that we can see with our eyes of "faith," despite our struggles, of which others are often unaware. One morning after a terrible snowstorm, a woman named Susan was outside shoveling her driveway. She stopped to wave hello to her neighbor, and he asked her why her husband wasn't out there helping her with the chore. She explained one of them had to stay inside to take care of the children, so they drew straws to see who would go out and shovel. "Sorry about your bad luck," he said. Susan sprightly replied, "Don't be sorry. I won!"

Based upon your own life or experiences with others, name common reasons why people are not properly thankful for the blessings we receive? May I suggest the chief reason for ingratitude is the nature of sin: we are never content with what we already have because we selfishly seek something else to fill our lives with the happiness or contentment only God can truly give us? Adam and Eve knew Paradise on Earth from the moment of their creation, filled with everything God knew they needed for everlasting happiness and contentment, yet they could not resist the temptation to reach for something more, although they were warned this would shatter the blissful harmony and peace they enjoyed with their Creator and between themselves (**Genesis 1:26-30; 2:15-25; 3:1-6**). How much are you still afflicted with the original sin of ingratitude?

Warren Wiersbe has written over 100 books (more than some people today have read!). He served for many years as pastor of The Moody Church of Chicago. In his commentary on these verses we read from *Colossians*, Wiersbe recalls the story of Edward Spencer. Northwestern University, the only private school today in the Big Ten athletic conference, was founded in 1850 in Evanston, IL, just south of Chicago, by nine prominent Chicago businessmen who were leaders in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Edward Spencer

enrolled at Northwestern University to prepare for the ministry. He joined a life-saving squad sponsored by Northwestern to assist passengers traveling the waters of Lake Michigan. This summer, I learned being a lifeguard in the Great Lakes is more difficult than it seems. These lakes have currents. After a brief dip in Lake Huron, I tried swimming back to the boat, only to discover the current pulled me away from the boat faster than I could swim! I then floated on my life jacket until the boat could swing around to pick me up.

Around 2:30 A.M. on September 8, 1860, the steamship *Lady Elgin* collided with the schooner *Augusta* about 40 miles north of Chicago. The *Lady Elgin* was carrying more than 300 passengers and crew on a round-trip sightseeing tour from Milwaukee to Chicago. It never made it home. The captain, not realizing how badly the ship was damaged, continued toward Milwaukee in the dark. About a half-hour later, the heavy boilers and steam engine broke through the weakened hull and the ship quickly tore apart. Most passengers and crew died; 279 were lost. Only a handful reached the lifeboats. Spencer, an experienced swimmer, had a rope tied to his body and time after time swam through the frigid waters of Lake Michigan to grab exhausted passengers who desperately clung to small pieces of wreckage praying to be rescued. His associates on the other end of the rope then pulled him and the victim to shore. Despite numerous injuries from floating debris, he repeatedly dashed into the raging surf to rescue 17 people who were in mortal peril. No one else among the onlookers dared such danger. Finally, Edward Spencer collapsed in utter exhaustion, his body covered with scrapes and bruises. He awoke in the infirmary with his brother, William, by his side. Edward's first words were, "Will, did I do my full duty—did I do my best?"

The rigors of the ordeal he endured that fateful night permanently damaged his health, left him a semi-invalid, and forced him to give up his dream of being a minister. But he still married, fathered three daughters, and lived a full and satisfying life in service to the Lord **Jesus**. He is honored by a bronze plaque in the library of Northwestern University's main campus. Yet, he never thought of himself as a hero. The faces and cries of the victims he'd not been able to save forever haunted him. His misery could have been relieved by those he *did* manage to save. Edward Spencer died on February 8, 1917, nearly 57 years after the wreck of the *Lady Elgin*. Newspapers of that time made him a public figure. Everyone of those he rescued could have easily located him, had they wished to do so. Yet, a friend who visited him late in life reported that Spencer confided to him with tears, "Not one ever came back and even said thank you."

It's become accepted terminology among Christians in America to speak of "accepting" **Jesus Christ** to describe the act whereby one's sins are forgiven and our eternal place in Heaven is secured. Modern Bible versions, such as the New Living Translation, have adopted this term. But our English word "accept" can mean nothing more than "agree to" or "resign oneself to" without any genuine commitment or support on our part. We can "accept" many things we are not in favor of, such as a job layoff, the death of a loved one, or a health crisis. We would reject what's happened to us in such cases if we could. We certainly feel no need to be thankful for such circumstances. Or we may "accept" help when we are in desperate straits, whether in the form of government assistance, an emergency loan, or being rescued from great danger or death, without any genuine devotion or gratitude toward our benefactor being required of us. Sadly, some professed Christians display little genuine devotion or thankfulness toward the Savior, the Lord **Jesus Christ**.

The Apostle Paul chose a Greek word in **Colossians 2:6-7** that is a much stronger word than "accepted." It literally means, "to take to one's self," or "to join to one's self." Most Bible versions wisely translate our text, "as you have *received* Christ Jesus the Lord," not "accepted Christ Jesus." This Greek word appears in **Matthew 1:24** (NIV): "When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and *took* Mary home as his wife." Joseph did much more than *agree* to take her as his wife or *resign himself to* it. He committed his heart to Mary because he believed nothing would give him greater joy and blessing than to become one with this special gift of God. The more he embraced the privileges and responsibilities of being Mary's husband, chosen by God to give birth to our Savior, the more Joseph's heart overflowed with thankfulness. As Christians, the more we embrace the privileges and responsibilities of being united to

"Christ Jesus" as our Savior and Lord, the more our heart will overflow with thankfulness. The level of our thanksgiving toward Christ is a good indicator of the level of our commitment and devotion toward Him.

Two Greek words are translated "thanks," "thankfulness," or "thanksgiving" in the New Testament. Both words are rooted in the Greek word for grace, *charis*, which describes generous giving without regard for the worthiness of those upon whom the gifts are bestowed, such as Edward Spencer bestowed upon passengers of the *Lady Elgin*. The Greek word translated "thankfulness" in **Colossians 2:7** is *eucharistia*. You can hear the Greek word *charis* ("grace") within *eucharistia*. *Eucharistia* describes the attitude of "gratefulness," of "being mindful of favors received." Did any of those who were saved from drowning by Edward Spencer demonstrate such "thankfulness" toward him? The more our "faith" in the Lord "grows strong" so we can place full trust in God's will in every part of our lives, the more we will "overflow with thankfulness," with *eucharistia*, for the benefits God bestows upon us through Christ, regardless of the difficulties we may face.

Does anyone know what the English word "Eucharist" means? It's another word for The Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper commemorates God the Father's ultimate gift of grace to us by sending "His One and Only Son" (**John 3:16**) to free us from sin's penalty and power. The costliness of this gift—**Jesus'** arrest, trial, and crucifixion—made God's sacrificial gift both the worst moment in human history and our best moment. It was the worst moment because it proved how fiendishly sinful human beings are capable of becoming. The most perfect Man who ever walked the earth demonstrated a level of love, compassion, and selflessness never before seen in any one individual. Yet, He was spat upon, beaten with rods, His scalp was pierced with a crown of thorns, patches were torn from His hair and beard, much of His back and torso were reduced to a bloodied pulp by flogging. Then He was crucified. Yet, despite this being the worst moment in human history, early Church leaders gave the name "The Eucharist" to the Lord's Supper. Why should the Lord's Supper be a time of "thanksgiving"? Because what **Jesus** accomplished for us by His sufferings, death, and resurrection allows a holy God of perfect love and goodness to forgive us, restore us to an intimate family relationship with Him, and grant us a secure place in Heaven to celebrate His grace toward us with the redeemed of all the ages! As **II Corinthians 5:21** (NCV) exquisitely proclaims, "Christ had no sin, but God made Him become sin so that in Christ we could become right with God." This is why the Lord's Supper can be said to commemorate the best moment in human history; not just the worst moment.

Are you thankful God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were willing to pay the costliest of prices to save you *from Hell and for Heaven*? Early Christians called baptism a "sacrament." In Latin, *sacramentum* was a Roman soldier's oath of absolute devotion and obedience to his general. By being baptized, the first generations of Christ's followers took a public oath of absolute devotion and obedience to be commanded by their Savior as their Lord. If you have placed faith in **Jesus** to receive God's gift of forgiveness and eternal life, and if you have sealed your faith by baptism's public oath of absolute devotion and obedience to **Jesus** Christ as your Savior and your Lord, you are welcome to participate as we observe the Lord's Supper.

[Hymn *In Remembrance*]

In **I Corinthians 11:23-4,26**, the Apostle Paul wrote, "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: On the night when He was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, ²⁴ gave thanks, broke it, and said, 'This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.'" Thankfully receive the gracious gift of **Jesus** suffering for you by His body [Prayer; pass bread.]

"In the same way, after supper He also took the cup and said, 'This cup is the new covenant established by My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'" Thankfully receive the gracious gift of **Jesus** suffering for you by His blood [Prayer; pass juice.] "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."