



TEEN TREE OF LIFE

Five Truths About Thanksgiving November 28, 2021

Before you begin, ask yourself a very important question: Do you believe that Jesus Christ died on The Cross for all of your sins? If you answered yes, you will need to be sure that you are filled with The Holy Spirit. How do you do this? You name your sins to God The Father in His Son's Name. This is called Rebound. As a Christian, you must rebound any time you sin. This is taught in 1 JOH 1:9: *If we confess [name] our sins [directly to God], He [God] is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Now, if you have never believed that Jesus Christ died on The Cross for all of your sins, all you have to do is say to yourself that you believe in Him and you are saved! The Bible verse which teaches us this is ACTS 16:31: *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."*

With Thanksgiving behind us, let's step back and think about this holiday in relation to our Christian Walk. Long before settlers came to the East Coast of the United States, the area was inhabited by many Native American tribes. The area surrounding the site of the first Thanksgiving, now known as southeastern Massachusetts and eastern Rhode Island, had been the home of the Wampanoag people for over 12,000 years, and had been visited by other European settlers before the arrival of the Mayflower in 1620. The native people knew the land well and had fished, hunted, and harvested for thousands of generations.

The people who comprised the Plymouth Colony were a group of English Protestants called Puritans who wanted to break away from the Church of England. These "separatists" initially moved to Holland. But after 12 years of financial problems, they received funding from English merchants to sail across the Atlantic Ocean in 1620 to settle in a "New World." Carrying 101 men, women, and children, the Mayflower traveled the ocean for 66 days and was supposed to land where New York City is now located. But windy conditions forced the group to cut their trip short and settle at what is now known as Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

One day in the fall of 1621, four settlers were sent to hunt for food for a harvest celebration. The Wampanoag heard gunshots and alerted their leader, Massasoit, who thought the English might be preparing for war. Massasoit visited the English settlement with 90 of his men to see if the war rumor was true. Soon after their visit, the Native Americans realized that the English were only hunting for the harvest celebration.

Massasoit sent some of his own men to hunt deer for the feast and for three days, the English and native men, women, and children ate together. The meal consisted of deer, corn, shellfish, and roasted meat – quite different from today's traditional Thanksgiving feast. They also played ball games, sang, and danced. Although prayers and thanks were probably offered at the 1621 harvest gathering, the first recorded religious Thanksgiving Day in Plymouth happened two years later in 1623. On this occasion, the colonists gave thanks to God for rain after a two-month drought.

The modern Thanksgiving holiday started to take shape in the 19th century. In 1846, Sarah Josepha Hale, editor of a magazine called "Godey's Lady's Book," campaigned for an annual national thanksgiving holiday. But it didn't come to pass until 1863, when President Abraham Lincoln declared two national Thanksgivings: one in August to commemorate the Battle of Gettysburg during the Civil War, and the other in November to give thanks for "general blessings." It's the second one that we celebrate today.

But as it relates to the Christian way of life, Thanksgiving is more than a day off. It's more than eating turkey, mashed potatoes, and gravy, and watching football on television. Thanksgiving is actually an essential concept in Scripture. And although it's good to set aside a Thursday each November to cultivate a heart of thanksgiving, God's Word has more to say about giving thanks than one day a year can handle. In this study, we're going to look at several biblical truths about thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is trinitarian which simply means that it relates to belief in the doctrine of the Trinity. The Trinity is a title given to the Godhead that consists of Three Members each holding a specific function: God The Father as The Author of The Plan, God The Son as The Executor of The Plan and God The Holy Spirit as The Revealer of The Plan. God is three in persons and one in essence.

The typical pattern of thanksgiving in the New Testament is that God The Father is The Object of thanksgiving, God The Son is The Person through Whom thanksgiving flows, and God The Holy Spirit is The Source of thanksgiving. Paul teaches this in **ROM 1:8 (New American Standard Bible): *First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the world.*** He also touches on this idea in **COL 3:16–17 (New International Reader's Version): *Let the message about Christ live among you like a rich treasure. Teach and correct one another wisely. Teach one another by singing psalms and hymns and songs from the Spirit. Sing to God with thanks in your hearts. Do everything you say or do in the name of the Lord Jesus. Always give thanks to God the Father through Christ.***

The very presence of thanksgiving points to The Holy Spirit as the source of thanksgiving because without The Work of The Spirit, it is impossible to please God: ***So don't live under the control of sin. If you do, you will think about what sin wants. Live under the control of the Holy Spirit. If you do, you will think about what the Spirit wants. The thoughts of a person ruled by sin bring death. But the mind ruled by the Spirit brings life and peace. The mind ruled by the power of sin is at war with God. It does not obey God's law. It can't. Those who are under the power of sin can't please God.*** (ROM 8:5-8 New American Standard Bible)

Christianity does not call for vague thanksgiving to a vague deity. Remember – Our God is triune and, as a result, thanksgiving flows to God The Father, through God The Son, from God The Spirit. Think about that the next time you give thanks! Another important thing about thanksgiving is that we're taught it can replace sin. When Paul commands believers to stop sinning, he also commands believers to put thanksgiving in its place. Look at what he wrote in **EPH 5:4 (The Message Bible): *Though some tongues just love the taste of gossip, those who follow Jesus have better uses for language than that. Don't talk dirty or silly. That kind of talk doesn't fit our style. Thanksgiving is our dialect.*** We either act with sinful, thankless hearts which leads to foolish talk or crude jokes, or we act with thankful hearts and, by doing so, please God with our speech. Theologian John Piper wrote: *"The key to unlocking a heart of gratitude and overcoming bitterness and ugliness and disrespect and violence is a strong belief in God, the Creator and Sustainer and Provider and Hope-giver. If we do not believe we are deeply indebted to God for all we have or hope to have, then the very spring of gratitude has gone dry."*

As believers, we should aim to have our thanksgiving rise in proportion to the value of the object for which we give thanks. This simply means that we should be most grateful for God's work for us in Christ because it unites us to our highest joy – God Himself. In **1 COR 1:4 (New International Reader's Version)**, Paul wrote: ***I always thank my God for you. I thank him because of the grace he has given to you who belong to Christ Jesus.*** This beloved apostle never tired of giving thanks for The Grace of God in Jesus Christ's Person and Work. And neither should we! God has shown His Love for us even when we were His enemies: ***But here is how God has shown his love for us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (ROM 5:8 New International Reader's Version)***

Another thing to be thankful for is that we have been called out of darkness and made heirs of God. This is taught in **ROM 8:17 (New International Reader's Version): *As his children, we will receive all that he has for us. We will share what Christ receives. But we must share in his sufferings if we want to share in his glory.*** God has essentially adopted us! This Biblical connotation of adoption is based on the Roman adoption that existed when the New Testament was being written. This adoption was nothing like our modern rules for adoption. In ancient times, it was an adult son that was adopted. Therefore, in The Word of God, adoption means every person becomes an adult son of God in position at the moment of Salvation. And just like Roman adoption meant blessing and promotion for the recipient, God imputes 40 grace gifts to every adopted son at the moment they believe in Christ for Eternal Life. As each adopted son is in union with Christ, we are joint-heirs with Christ, and have received in escrow all that Christ has.

Arguably the greatest thing that's ever been done for us is that Jesus bore the punishment we deserved, and we receive his perfect righteousness: ***Christ didn't have any sin. But God made him become sin for us. So we can be made right with God because of what Christ has done for us. (2 COR 5:21 New International Reader's Version)*** There's absolutely nothing greater to be thankful for than that, is there?

Now, it will always be true that giving thanks in all circumstances is especially difficult while undergoing suffering. How can we be thankful when there's something that hurts so much? We can give thanks in the midst of suffering because it's meant to increase our faith. Look at trials as lessons not punishments. **2 COR 4:17–18 (The Message Bible)** explains how we should react to troubling times: ***So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without his unfolding grace. These hard times are small potatoes compared to the coming good times, the lavish celebration prepared for us. There's far more here than meets the eye. The things we see now are here today, gone tomorrow. But the things we can't see now will last forever.*** Don't despair when troubles come upon you. We live in a sin-filled world and trials should be expected. Remember always that God can and will use tough times to make you more like Jesus Christ if you will allow them to be a test of faith in trusting Him.

History should serve to both teach and inspire us in our own lives. What great examples we have in the Pilgrims who gave thanks not only when there was a bountiful harvest, but also in the midst of starvation, sickness, and death. They were grateful for God's Mercy and Grace which saved them from their sins and was changing them even through the trials. They counted their blessings and we should do the same. Their example is only one of many repeated throughout history and on the pages of the sacred Scriptures.

Thanksgiving is something we should practice in all circumstances, not just one big meal a year: ***Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Give thanks no matter what happens. God wants you to thank him because you believe in Christ Jesus.*** (1 THESS 5:16–18 (New International Reader's Version))