

Sing To God With Gratitude  
Colossians 3:12-17  
Key Verse: 3:16

2011 Thanksgiving by P. Abraham Kim

## SING TO GOD WITH GRATITUDE

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"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."

We are in the Thanksgiving week. We should first thank God for Thanksgiving Day. Thanksgiving Day originated from our country and is celebrated in the name of God only in the USA, Canada and Liberia. In 1863 while America was still in the midst of Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the observance of the last Thursday of November as "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. May God help us and the people of North America to truly thank God with penitence.

Thankfulness springs from awareness of God's grace. Suppose you opened a door for a person, but the person ignored your kindness. You would think that the person is rude. Compared with opening a door, how uncountable are the kindnesses and blessings that God has rendered to us throughout our lives! As President Lincoln pointed out, we have a habitual insensitivity and forgetfulness toward God and his blessings. How terribly rude we are! This passage helps us to remember and thank God for four things he has done for us. Let's think about God's grace so that we may have a joyful Thanksgiving with praises and singing in our souls.

First, we thank God for choosing us to be holy and dearly loved (12a). Look at verse 12. "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." God chose us in Christ before the creation of the world (Eph 1:4). Before the world began, God conceived each of us in his mind. God knew how we would each look and kind of person we would each be. Nine days ago, Dr. James Kim, the president of YUST and PUST, asked us to look at the fingerprints of our thumbs. There has never been nor will ever be anyone who has my or your fingerprints. Praise God for creating us in his image as unique persons! We don't know why God chose us. It is solely by his grace. Thank God for his mysterious and marvelous grace of calling!

God chose us to be holy. The word "holy" has two meanings: One meaning is "separated" or "set apart." God separated us from the peoples of the world to be consecrated to serve God, like the angels. The second meaning for "holy" is "divine in character" or "perfect in goodness and righteousness." In this sense, we are not holy. Only God is holy in this respect. But God calls us saints, that is, holy ones. In spite of our unholiness, the holy God made us a royal priesthood who can approach him, serve him, and intercede for the people of the world. Though we were born in sin, our heavenly Father chose us with the most wonderful plan to sanctify us through Christ's

blood. God chose to restore us as heavenly princes and princesses without blemish or defect. Thank God for his hope for us!

Not only we are chosen to be holy, but we are also dearly loved by God. I know a couple who has a daughter and a son. The girl was handicapped from birth and suffers frequently from seizures. But the parents dearly love her as they love their son, with compassion on her. No matter what, they regard her as the most beautiful girl in the world.

Their love for their children helped me to understand what God's love is like. God does not value us because of our usefulness or perfection. God loves us absolutely as precious ones, because he is our compassionate Father. Psalm 103:13-14 says, "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust." We thank our Father God because of his compassion and love for us.

Second, we thank God for nourishing us to grow in holiness. Verse 12b reads, "...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." These are some of God's attributes, revealed especially in Christ. In our weakness, we often do not know what we ought to pray for. But the Holy Spirit, out of his compassion, intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express (Ro 8:26). With humility, Christ embraced all kinds of sinners and served them with God's love. Patience is long-suffering endurance in the face of provocation. We often provoke God with our sins. However, the holy God does not punish us; rather, he bears us with gentleness and patience, waiting for our repentance.

The Apostle Paul exhorts us to clothe ourselves with the attributes of God and of Christ. In fact, this is God's hope and purpose for us. Romans 8:28-29 says, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters." God works in all things throughout our lives to form Christ-like character in us. This is a wondrous promise and assurance. This is one of the reasons why we should be thankful in all circumstances. For this purpose, God nourishes us through the living word of God. God gave us the Holy Spirit to nurture us like a mother. The Holy Spirit pours out God's love into our hearts (Ro 5:5). He opens our eyes and minds to discern God's will. He helps us to confess our sins and be cleansed by Jesus' blood. Just as children grow to be adults under caring parents, we all grow to be mature children of God under God's care.

Because of the Father's good will, the Son's intercessory prayers, and the Holy Spirit's nourishment, we all can ever grow and change. May we remember how God has changed us throughout our lives. Let's each consider how God has led each of us throughout this year to grow in Christ's image. Let's thank God for nourishing us to grow in Him.

Third, we thank God for forgiving us. 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." Forgiveness is not an easy thing to do for anyone. A hurt feeling cries out for justice rather than forgiveness. But the Apostle tells us to forgive whatever grievance we have against someone. Forgiveness requires self-denial and sacrifice. It requires overcoming pride, vengeance, and anger.

It is possible only through submission to God. The Apostle tells us to forgive unconditionally. "Forgive as the Lord forgave you."

While living apart from God, we lived as enemies of God. Every inclination of the thoughts of our hearts was corrupt and evil. With our sins, we provoked and grieved God for many years. The Holy God should have punished us for all the sins we committed. Instead he sent his Son to bear our sins. God denied his holy anger and great grievances and decided to sacrifice his one and only Son. Jesus Christ renounced his heavenly glory, took a human form, and became a servant. Throughout his earthly ministry, he was grieved due to evils of people. In order to bear the punishment we should have received for our sins, he received mockery, betrayal, thorns, the whip, the rod, the fist, the nails, the shame, and death. But he did not retaliate. Instead, he prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Lk 23:34) In the darkest and most painful moment in his life, Jesus did not think of himself. He thought of those who crucified him and prayed for their forgiveness. His prayer revealed why he died on the cross: he died to bring forgiveness for all who sin, not knowing what they are doing. Jesus' prayer was for you and me.

With this prayer, Jesus forgave us of all our sins. Jesus' prayer reveals the unconditional love of God. We should not remain in self-condemnation; we must accept Jesus' forgiveness and forgive ourselves. We also must remember God's forgiveness and forgive anyone unconditionally. We should not become like the man whose debt of 1,000 talents was canceled, but who would not cancel the debt of one who owed him 100 denarii, which was only 1/30,000th of the debt he had owed and which had been canceled (Mt 18:23-34).

Look at verse 14. "And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Love is like a belt that binds all virtues together to work for unity. When we put on clothes and don't bind them with a belt, we feel awkward and cannot work freely. Without love: kindness, gentleness, and patience cannot bind hearts. Bible teaching and prayers without love cannot move a person's heart. We ourselves don't have this love (agape). But the Holy Spirit puts it on our hearts when we accept Christ's love.

Verse 15a reads, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace." Through forgiveness, Christ brought peace with God into our hearts. When we have Christ's peace, we can have peace with anyone. Christ's peace has power to free us from hostility and become peace-makers. Nelson Mandela was an anti-apartheid activist in South Africa. He was arrested and imprisoned for 27 years. During the 18 years of imprisonment on Robben Island, he was forced to hard labor in a lime quarry with the fewest rations. When the peace of Christ ruled his heart, however, he did not give in to hatred or the desire for revenge. His philosophy was: "If there are dreams about a beautiful South Africa, there are also roads that lead to their goal. Two of these roads could be named Goodness and Forgiveness." In 1993, just three years out of prison, he received the Nobel Peace Prize. In 1994, he was elected President of South Africa in the first democratic election and he helped to end the evil system of apartheid. Through the grace and peace of Christ, Nelson Mandela could forgive his enemies and be a peacemaker even for his nation. Thank God for his grace of forgiveness for us through Christ. May the grace and peace of Christ rule each of our hearts.

Fourth, we thank God for giving us hope in things above. Throughout this epistle, Apostle Paul reminds his readers of God's redemption and gives thanks to God for the hope he gave us heavenward. In 1:3-5, he thanks God for the Colossians' faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for them in heaven. In 1:23, he encourages them to continue in their faith, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. Then he says in 3:1-2, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." (Let's read these verses together.) We cannot live without hope. Hope is like an engine that powers a ship. Hope is also like a star that points to the direction in voyage. People live pursuing various hopes, hopes like a nice house or car, large screen TV, good savings and retirement plan, and so on. Sometimes people are just like little kids who want a new toy, but after one day get tired of it. Hope in this world disappoints. Some hope for an ideal relationship. But there is no ideal person in this world.

Apostle Paul tells us not to set our hearts and minds on earthly things. Why? Because we have been raised with Christ. We were liberated from death and condemnation. We have eternal life. We have the hope of the resurrection. We no longer belong to this temporal world in which death reigns. We have a promise of the inheritance of the new heavens and new earth in which there will be no more death or pain or crying. We have indeed a glorious hope. In this hope, we can wait for the Lord Jesus' Second Coming with overflowing joy.

"Set your hearts and minds on things above" means to live for eternity, not for temporal earthly things. Compared with eternal life, our life on earth is like the twinkling of an eye. We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it (1Ti 6:7). Then how foolish it is to live for earthly things! Here the words "Set your hearts and minds on things above" echoes the Lord's promise, "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." (Mt 6:33) When we set our hearts and minds on the things above, we do not lose direction on our life's voyage. Rather, the Lord Jesus, the Morning Star, guides our way to his kingdom. When we fix our hearts and minds on King Jesus, he enables us to live by the power of his resurrection. We can use our life and time wisely, storing up treasures in heaven. We can also guide our children and Bible students to the kingdom of God. We thank God for giving us hope that does not disappoint us. We thank God for helping us to live as holy pilgrims on our heavenward journey.

With these thanksgiving topics, what does the Apostle tell us to do? Let's read verse 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." We can edify one another when the message of Christ dwells in us richly. The message of Christ is the gospel. It is the new command of love (Jn 13:34). May God help us to have Christ's love toward one another. It seems that the early Christians sang a lot. This means that they were full of thanks to God, though their situation was not favorable. Let's think about God's grace and give thanks to him until our souls are filled with songs of praise. (Let's sing hymn 770 together)

Give thanks with a grateful heart;

Give thanks to the Holy One;

Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son,

Give thanks with a grateful heart;

Give thanks to the Holy One;

Give thanks because He's given Jesus Christ, His Son.

And now let the weak say "I am strong;"

Let the poor say, "I am rich," because of what the Lord has done for us.

And now let the weak say, "I am strong;"

Let the poor say, "I am rich," because the Lord has done for us.

Give thanks!

Let's read 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." By the grace of God, we are what we are. We owe all things to God the Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. We came from God and we are returning to God. In all things we do, we should do them for the glory of God. We Christians have two nicknames "Beloved of God" and "Thanks-giver." These are not merely because of our choices. These are God's will for us.

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. And we thank God for giving us hope in things above through Christ our Lord. May the grace and peace of Christ dwell among us richly now and always.