

Living Gratitude in a World of 'Never Enough'

Thomas Robinson, November 24, 2013

Colossians 3:12-17

- ¹² Put on then, as **God's chosen ones, holy and beloved**,
compassionate hearts, **kindness**,
humility, meekness, and patience,
- ¹³ bearing with each other and, if one has a complaint against another,
forgiving (giving grace to, charizesthai) each other;
as the Lord has forgiven (**given grace to, charizesthai**) you,
so must you also.
- ¹⁴ And above all these **put on love**,
which binds everything together in perfect harmony (maturity).
- ¹⁵ And let the **peace of Christ** rule in your hearts,
to which indeed you were called in **one body**.
And become thankful (eucharistos).
- ¹⁶ Let the **word of Christ dwell in you richly**,
teaching and admonishing one another in all **wisdom**,
singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
with thankfulness (charis) in your hearts to God.
- ¹⁷ And whatever **you do**, in word or deed,
do everything in the name of the **Lord Jesus**,
giving thanks (eucharistein) to God the Father through him.

Colossians 1:6

⁶ ... Just as [the gospel] is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day **you heard** it and truly **comprehended the grace (charis)** of God.

Colossians 3:1-5

¹ If then you have been **raised with Christ, seek** the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² **Think** the things that are above, not things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When **Christ who is your life** appears, then you also will appear with him in **glory**. ⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry.

Colossians 4:2-4

² Continue steadfastly in **prayer**, being watchful in it with **thanksgiving (eucharistia)**.
³ At the same time, pray also for us, that **God may open to us a door for the word**, to declare the mystery of Christ, **on account of which I am in prison** -- ⁴ that I may make it clear, which is how I ought to speak.

Gratitude as an Affirmation of Life

We've just shared our weekly "Thanksgiving meal" – "Eucharist," communion. This week is our Thanksgiving holiday: Food, family, festivities, fights. Sometimes holidays are really hard.

It's good to have a holiday, but better to have a way of life of thanksgiving. But it's hard. Almost everyone has personal reasons: losses, grief, sickness, broken relationships, dashed hopes. Besides, we all learn that we'll only be adequate if we buy more, achieve more, sell more, get

thinner, have better security, outdo our competition, etc. In abundance, we're urged to see ourselves as needing more: buy the next thing, follow the next guru, work more hours, etc.

Paul is writing from prison (not good!) guiding people not in prison to be as thankful, joyful, purposeful, and at peace as he is. He leads them toward thanksgiving, not as special celebration, but as a way of living, an affirmation of certain truths, realities of life in Jesus.

Grace as Gift and Response

Christian life is based on the grace (*charis*) of God – “*by grace you have been saved!*” (Eph 2:8).

God's free, unmerited favor, from his own self-giving love, bringing us into new life in Jesus.

It embodies the center of the gospel, grace flowing from God to us. We respond with faith.

It's often less apparent to us, because of translation, that varieties of the same word also express the life shaped by that grace: especially words for forgiveness and thanksgiving.

In our text, Paul starts from God's act of grace in calling us. But his emphasis here is on how God's grace shapes a grace-filled life in us: how we are to become people who “give grace” to each other in situations of conflict. How we “become thankful” (well-graced), giving grace (thanks) to God, and in all actions showing that we know that we have received God's grace.

Together: Deep Relationships of Grace

Paul is helping us journey together toward a wholeness that can be strong through real suffering and through messages of inadequacy and scarcity that often plague our lives. He starts from God's action in Jesus, the Gospel. God's loving engagement with us: choosing, loving.

Out of that comes a life of engagement, not isolation. Real relationships, not of domination and control, but kindness, patience, as God has treated us. That's often very challenging in a family or community. So many barriers set by society! So many protective masks!

And we all mess up. Thus the emphasis on forgiving, giving grace to each other. We've been graced. We imitate God in giving grace. The journey moves toward the maturity of love, the very heart of God, the center of the Trinity and all reality. The dance of all kinds of people in community together, even with our problems, becomes a sign here and now of God's heart.

In Ourselves: Transformation and Beauty

Within that community, what Paul calls “one body,” each of us lives our own journey of growth.

Paul emphasizes the rule of the Messiah's peace. God is for me. Jesus gave himself for me and is my advocate. My life is secure on a deep, powerful level, that even death can't destroy. As that reality moves deeply into my heart, peace rules, and I become thankful (well-graced).

Then there is the inexhaustible challenge of letting Jesus and all he has done “dwell in you richly.” It shapes a philosophy. It illuminates the colors, values of life with depth and wisdom to share. It is the musical score of life, the songs I sing. My heart fills with grace/thanks to God.

Action: Physical Life and Spiritual Life United

All fits together. Body and Spirit. Every time we serve a customer, analyze a contract, teach a child, act in a play, date a friend, make a purchase, diagnose a disease, etc., our identity as beloved, thankful children of God shines. We become – transformed by Jesus' actions, filled with God's Spirit, growing into the maturity of love and God's eternal life.

As ‘well-graced’ people, we can't hear the messages of scarcity and inadequacy any more. God's Grace is more than enough. We can live in gratitude.