

The Thanksgiving Celebration Instituted by God Himself

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

This evening we are gathered around the real Thanksgiving Table.

Long before 1621 Pilgrim Thanksgiving feast, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself instituted a Table of Thanksgiving. We call this event the Last Supper and the Lord's Table.

The First Thanksgiving Meal Was Started by God

As we open to the accounts in the Gospels we find one word that stands out in each account, they all say: "gave thanks". That word is the description of the manner of Christ's preparation for celebrating communion. He first gave thanks. Paul confirms this in his explanation of communion given to the church in 1 Cor. 11:23-24 (NKJV), turn there and follow along with me:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

Throughout Church History the word that describes what Jesus did, that is in each of the Gospel accounts, has been used to describe communion. The word is ***eucharisteo***, and many of us have heard this word used for communion when it is called the Eucharist. Eucharist is the transliteration into English, of this Greek word.

So what does Jesus say should be our manner? When we come to celebrate His death in our place, His suffering for our sins, and His sacrifice accepted by God and confirmed through His resurrection? One word: give thanks. That makes each communion:

The Greatest, Truest & Most Precious Thanksgiving Table

Communion, every time it is celebrated by Christ's church is the greatest, the truest, and the most precious Thanksgiving Table, Thanksgiving Meal, and Thanksgiving Gathering.

No matter where we are in the world, each time saints of Christ's church come to celebrate this memorial, they are celebrating the true and powerful Thanksgiving Event.

What is amazing is that Christ's Thanksgiving Table works even when everything is going wrong. One of the records from Church History has found its way into our hymnbooks.

It is the testimony of a young widowed father who was also a local church pastor. This man, Martin Rinkart, wrote a table grace for his family as they ate their meals alone after the death of his wife and their mother.

Please turn to #556 with me, and as you look at these amazing words, listen to the backdrop of this hymn.

Now Thank we All Our God

Martin Rinkart was a pastor at Eilenberg, Saxony during the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648). Because Eilenberg was a walled city, it became a severely overcrowded refuge for political and military fugitives from far and near.

As a result, the entire city suffered from famine and disease. By the middle of the 30-Years War, in 1637, a plague swept through the city, resulting in the death of some thousands, including Rinkart's wife.

When she died Martin was 41, widowed and the only minister in Eilenberg because the others had either died or fled. Rinkart alone conducted the burial services for 4,480 people, sometimes as many as 40 or 50 a day! But none of the horrors of that time of loss find their way into his hymn. Was he seared by pain? No, rather he confesses he was kept by grace, so that his:

Thanksgiving Flows from Trusting God

Pastor Martin had simply come to believe that God's providence is always good, no matter how much we are tempted to doubt it. Just be thankful in everything as Paul said to the Thessalonians (1Th. 5:18).

- **Thanksgiving is a display of godly humility:** Our mark as Spirit-filled believer is we are to always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father.

We are "anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving [lets his] requests be made known to God" (Phil. 4:6).

We are “overflowing with gratitude” (Col. 2:7) and we continually offer up a “sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name” (Heb. 13:15).

We are the only ones who can genuinely give thanks for all things because we know that we deserve nothing, so we give thanks even for the smallest things.

- **Thanklessness is a display of godless depravity** (Rom. 1:21): The lack of thankfulness comes from pride, from the conviction that people deserve something better than they have. Pride convinces people us that their job, their health, their spouse, and most of what they have is not as good as they deserve. Thanklessness is a display of depravity.

That’s why the early believers celebrated communion so often. They knew that:

Thanksgiving Prepares us For Uncertainties

In the unclear world of tomorrow, it is entirely possible that we may experience great difficulty, persecution, and even war and death. As believers, we should prepare ourselves and our families for troubles coming, so that when they come, we can face them in spiritual confidence, giving testimony that God is Whom we trust.

Martin Rinkart's hymn, illustrates the words of one of the often-quoted Bible verses, Romans 8.28 (NKJV): "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Tonight we gather to declare that we really believe this assurance. Tonight we can use Rinkart’s words to affirm the same trust as that pastor of long ago. No matter what life brings we want to say: “Now thank we all our God”.

Applying This Hymn’s Biblical Message

Note three truths we can apply from the title.

1. “Now” is the timing of thankfulness. It is the first word, and it speaks to when we are to be thankful: **now**. Not someday, not after we get something we want or like, but now. Thanksgiving is always to be in the present tense in the life of a believer.
2. Second is the action: “thank we all”. The call from God through His Word, and affirmed by this hymn is that each of us, (note the scope is “all”), are to offer the sacrifice of thanking God from our hearts and with our own voices.

3. Finally the object of this offering is stated as "our God". We don't thank our good fortunes, or our great jobs, or our many friends, we thank our God. This is very personal. Only those who have a personal connection to God can offer thanks. Only those who claim God as their very own Creator and Redeemer are really able to offer thanks.

The Words of a Thanksgiving-filled Heart

Now thank we all our God
With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom His world rejoices;
Who, from our mother's arms,
Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace,
And guide us when perplexed,
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns
With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now,
And shall be evermore.

Martin Rinkart (1586-1649)

So what Should We do Tomorrow?

Men, if you have a family, why not bring your Bible to the table, and plan on reading a brief scripture and leading the prayer at your Thursday meal.

Ladies, if you do not have a godly husband (or even any husband) take the lead and read God's Word, and pray at the Thanksgiving Meal.

If you don't know where to start ask any of the godly saints around you at church tonight what they read at Thanksgiving; and try to pattern yours after theirs. The key is to pause and let God into your meal! And one more thing, once you get started this Thanksgiving, why not just renew your desire to do something from the Word of God and prayer each day with your family!