

A STRONG FAMILY IS A THANKFUL FAMILY

Colossians 3: 12-17

Rev. Ed Hoekstra

Celebrating more than one thanksgiving: Why do we only celebrate Thanksgiving dinner one time each year? We can celebrate Thanksgiving any time and many times in the year! You could call it Thanksgiving dinner when your loved one has just completed a series of tests for cancer and the results were favourable! Our daughter and son in-law had a beautiful wedding and we celebrated their love. We are a thankful family. I sometimes think that we have too many times of thanksgiving. Do we celebrate too often? No - It is good to give thanks to the Lord! The words of Paul in Colossians 3: 17 encourage us to celebrate often, *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”* Paul speaks strongly about this in Colossians 3: 15 *“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you were called in the one body. And be thankful.”*

Appreciation is necessary. Certainly, one of the marks of a strong family is appreciation for one another. Paul says in verse 16, *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to God”*. In other words, when you interact with one another and sing together, do it with a heart of gratitude for the other.

Research had been done over the years to determine the effect of praise in the work place. Studies consistently show that the ratio of praise to criticism needs to be high. For example, one critical comment can negate the beneficial effects of 4 positive comments. Too often we focus on being too critical and we fail to see the positive. Appreciation is necessary for relationships to remain strong and to grow.

Certainly, parents are to give praise to their children. However, praise is not to be given in the absence of admonishing them in wisdom (verse 16) when necessary. When a parent corrects a child, the parent is to do it in love. Paul says in verse 14, *“Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”* Paul was speaking to the Colossian church, and he was teaching them how to love one another as Christ has loved them. When Paul says ‘Clothe yourselves’, I believe he is saying that similar to when we get up in the morning, we may not get dressed in our clothes immediately, but we are certainly not going to leave the house without being adequately dressed. Paul is making the comparison that similar to how we place huge priority on not leaving the house without being dressed, we are not to go about our day and meet people without being clothed in love!

What is most important? Critical comments can significantly damage a relationship. Let’s say you have a relative that wants to borrow your car. You really like this car, and over the years you have taken care of it. You have emphatically said to others, ‘This car does not owe me a dime!’ Then your nephew asks if he can borrow it for a few days. You hesitate in your mind for a bit, but you know that the right thing to do is let him use it. On the second day, you get a telephone call from your nephew saying that he

was sorry, but he hit one the light stands in the parking lot at Canadian tire. The nephew said the driver's door may need to be replaced. You start yelling at him and ask how he could do something so stupid. While you are on the phone, your spouse motions to you. You put your hand over the phone and she says this to you, "What is more important, your car or your relationship with Mike." You stop and have to think about that for a while, but she was right. Thankfulness in a family is often a matter of having a healthy perspective as to what is the most important.

The thankless spirit of our culture: We live in a society which is highly individualistic and competitive. We highly value independence, but this cultural value can cause so much loneliness. Furthermore, we live in a consumeristic culture which encourages selfishness and greed. When you think about it, we are bombarded with advertisements constantly encouraging us to buy this and that, to supposedly make us look good, and make our lives easier, and more enjoyable. The focus is on you and your needs. I believe it becomes more difficult in this environment to be thankful for others, because the focus becomes about you and your needs! Jesus' life was about building relationships of love. His life was in direct contrast to the thankless spirit of our culture.

Working on a thankful spirit: Here is a piece of advice from a man by the name of Frank Fried: *"The grass is not greener on that side of the fence. And the grass is not greener on this side of the fence. The grass is greener where you water it."*

Planting the seeds of thanksgiving plus watering and fertilizing those seeds, makes the grass greener where you are standing. In other words, we need to practice thanksgiving. At this very moment, think about someone you are thankful for and why. At coffee time, you may want to make this a point of conversation. When you are mindful of the positive impact of others in your life, a thankful spirit is nurtured. In our thankful prayers to God, we open up the influence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts to build in us a thankful spirit.

The change that occurs: A missionary by the name of Benjamin Weir was a hostage in Lebanon and was imprisoned for 16 months. In the first interview after he was released, he was asked how he spent his time and how he dealt with the boredom and despair. His response totally surprised the reporters. He simply responded by saying, "Count your blessings." "Blessings?" they responded. "Yes", he explained. "Some days I was allowed to take a shower. Sometimes there were some vegetables in my food. Furthermore, I could always be thankful for the love of my family."

Benjamin Weir knew the secret to overcoming his circumstances by learning how to be thankful. Weir was physically in bondage, but spiritually and mentally he was free. Why was this? - Because he had learned how to give thanks to the Father in spite of the terrible circumstances he was experiencing.

Be people who are known for their thankfulness. Be thankful for your family and for those you meet each day. Be clothed in love and be thankful! Amen.