

**Paul's Epistle to the Colossians (19):
"Put on..."**

We are working through the third chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Colossians. The last time we were together we stopped rather abruptly while addressing the paragraph of Colossians 3:12 through 17. Here Christians are instructed in practical ways how they may put into practice their Christian faith. Here is a partial outline that we have followed in this portion of Paul's epistle.

IV. The Christian Life in Christ (3:5-4:6)

1. "Put off" (3:5-11)
2. "Put on" (3:12-17)
3. "Be subject" (3:18-4:1)
4. "Watch and Pray" (4:2-6)

Today we will continue with...

2. "Put on" (3:12-17)

Let us read the paragraph once again.

¹²Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶Let 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 in your hearts to God. ¹⁷And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Depending on how these many words and phrases are organized, we could say there are at least 11 directives or commands for us in these six verses. We have addressed the first seven of these: "Put on then... (1) compassionate hearts, (2) kindness, (3) humility, (4) meekness, (5) and patience, (6) bearing with one another and forgiving each other; (7) and above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. Let us now consider the next command that the Holy Spirit has given us through the hand of the apostle Paul.

(8) *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.* (3:15a)

We should first consider a variant in the Greek text that stands behind our English translation. We may recognize it by comparing different English translations.

^{ESV} And let the peace *of Christ* rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

^{NIV} Let the peace *of Christ* rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

^{NAS} And let the peace *of Christ* rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful.

^{KJV} And let the peace *of God* rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

^{NKJ} And let the peace *of God* rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.

This difference in the Greek text occurred when a scribe copying the text, much later than the first century, changed either inadvertently or purposely “the peace of Christ” to “the peace of God.” Paul probably had originally written “the peace of Christ.”¹

In order to understand precisely what the Lord would have us understand of this verse, let us break it down into its basic parts.

A. First, let us consider the *subject of the verse, which is the expression, “the peace of Christ.”*

Now what is meant by the expression, “the peace of Christ?” The grammar can be interpreted in several ways. (1) *It could be speaking of the state of peace that Christ secured for His people between them and their God.* All Christians are at peace with God through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is commonly referred to as God’s *objective* peace between God and the believer. Through our Lord’s life, death, and resurrection, God has brought us into a state of peace with the Father. This state of peace is the same for all true believers in Jesus Christ. This is what Paul was writing about in Romans 5:1, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” When Paul wrote of this peace between God and His people, he would have done so in accordance of the Old Testament idea and meaning of the Hebrew word for peace, *shalom*. The idea of shalom is the rest or peace that will be experienced by those who have salvation. This state of peace, or shalom, is what the Old Testament prophets declared would appear in “the last days.”

This background defines for us what Paul means by “peace with God”: not an inner sense of well-being, or “feeling at peace” (what we might call the “peace of God” [cf. Phil. 4:7]), but the outward situation of being in a relationship of peace with God.²

Before we came to Christ as our Lord and Savior, we were not at peace with God. Our very beings were opposed to God. We were His enemies; we to Him and He to us. We were opposed to His rule over us, just as the people of Israel were opposed to His rule over them. But Christ as the Prince of Peace ended that hostility between God and ourselves. He gained peace for us by dying on the cross for us. This appeased God’s wrath that was upon us, and as a consequence a state of peace was secured for believers. We read of this objective peace that Christ secured for His people in Colossians 1:21,

And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

This objective peace, this state of peace, belongs only to those who have been reconciled to God through faith in Jesus Christ, for He alone may be the basis and securer of peace for sinners.

¹ I find it interestingly that one of the most commonly used Greek texts, *The Greek New Testament*, third edition, edited by Kurt Aland, et. al., and published by the United Bible Society, did not footnote or rate this variant. This suggests that there was no question whatsoever in the minds of the editors that Paul had originally written, “the peace of Christ.”

² This was Moo’s assessment of Paul’s use of the word, “peace” in Romans 5:1. See Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Eerdmans, 1996), p. 299.

But Paul's expression, "the peace of Christ", could be speaking of (2) *the assurance of peace that Christ gives His people through His grace*. This is different from the first idea, in that this is not objective, but rather *subjective*. In other words, this kind of peace is not a *state* between the Christian and God, but the Christian may *feel* or *sense* this peace in his soul. Often we read of this in the opening salutation of an epistle. Consider these verses:

1 Thessalonians 1:1. "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and *peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*."

1 Timothy 1:1, 2. "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, ²to Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and *peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord*."

Titus 1:1ff. "Paul, a bondservant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect and the acknowledgment of the truth which accords with godliness, ²in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began, ³but has in due time manifested His word through preaching, which was committed to me according to the commandment of God our Savior; ⁴to Titus, a true son in our common faith: Grace, mercy, and *peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior*."

Philemon 1:3. "Grace to you and *peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*."

Obviously, in each of these verses the peace being addressed is a sense of well-being in the soul that God is pleased to give to His people.

And so, there is a subjective peace and there is an objective peace. Both are God's gifts to His people. Subjective peace is the awareness that the believer senses in his soul that he is at peace with God. This subjective peace is what people feel. Because of our faith in Christ, we may sense peace, or a tranquillity of soul, a settling of our guilty conscience respecting sin, when we received through faith our free and full pardon of sin due to the death of the Savior. We are secure, and if we are thinking and believing rightly, we feel ourselves to be secure. In the introductions to his epistles, when Paul expressed his desire for his readers, "peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." Paul desired they would experience this subjective peace, the awareness that all is well between them and God. All disciples of Jesus Christ may enjoy a subjective peace with God. Not all Christians always experience this peace, but all may. Philippians 4:6 and 7 describe this subjective peace.

In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 4:6)

But *objective peace* is in the realm of *fact*, not feeling. As believers in Jesus Christ, nothing can change our status with God. God is always at peace with His people due to Christ. But *subjective peace* is in the realm of *feeling*. Any number of factors may cause one's sense of peace to increase or diminish--whether or not one is prayerful or prayerless, obedient or disobedient, believing or unbelieving, knowledgeable or ignorant.

The ones who are in a state of peace with God are the ones who may enjoy God's promise of peace. They are ones for whom Christ died, whereby peace with God is obtained and secured. They have an objective peace with God; that is, God is no longer at war with them. A state of peace exists between God and them. Romans 5:1, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." The reason that God is at peace with them is that they have been reconciled. This is stated later in Romans 5:11, "And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation."

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, *making peace by the blood of his cross*. And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him” (Col. 1:19-21).

Now, this blessing of peace can only be appreciated fully when we consider the state of the non-believer who is not at peace with God. We live in a world in which people will allow you to believe in any kind of God that you like, but if you say that you believe God is a God of wrath against those that are outside of Jesus Christ, you will be rejected and opposed. Paul declared, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” But what of those who are not justified by faith? They do not have peace with God, rather, the wrath of God rests upon him. John 3:36 reads, “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” People who are outside of Jesus Christ are not in a state of peace with God. There exists a state of war between God and them.

Jonathan Edwards wrote of their dreadful condition in his sermon entitled, “*Natural Men in a Dreadful Condition.*”

They are not only without God, but the wrath of God abides upon them... There is no peace between God and them, but God is angry with them every day. He is not only angry with them, but that to a dreadful degree. There is a fire kindled in God’s anger; it burns like fire. Wrath abides upon them, which if it should be executed, would plunge them into the lowest hell, and make them miserable there to all eternity. They have provoked the Holy One of Israel to anger. God has been angry with them ever since they began to sin. He has been provoked by them every day, ever since they exercised any reason. And he is provoked by them more and more every hour. The flame of his wrath is continually burning. There are many now in hell that never provoked God more than they, nor so much as many of them. Wherever they go, they go about with the dreadful wrath of God abiding on them. They eat, and drink, and sleep under wrath. How dreadful a condition therefore are they in! It is the most awful thing for the creature to have the wrath of his Creator abiding on him. The wrath of God is a thing infinitely dreadful. The wrath of a king is as the roaring of a lion. But what is the wrath of a king, who is but a worm of the dust, to the wrath of the infinitely great and dreadful God? How dreadful is it to be under the wrath of the First Being, the Being of beings, the great Creator and mighty possessor of heaven and earth! How dreadful is it for a person to go about under the wrath of God, who gave him being, and in who he lives and moves, who is everywhere present, and without whom he cannot move a step, nor draw a breath! Natural men, inasmuch as they are under wrath, are under a curse. God’s wrath and curse are continually upon them. They can have no reasonable comfort, therefore, in any of their enjoyments; for they do not know but that they are given them in wrath, and shall be curses to them, and not blessings. As it is said in Job 18:15, “Brimstone shall be scattered upon his habitation.” How can they take any comfort in their food, or in their possessions, when they do not know but all are given them to fit them for the slaughter?

Now again, our verse reads, “*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body*” (3:15a). The question we need to answer is this: Is Paul referring to the *objective* peace that we have with God or is he writing of the *subjective* peace that the Lord gives His people? In other words, was Paul saying, “Let the peace that you have between you and God govern your attitude and actions toward other Christians”? This would be understanding “peace” here to be objective. Or rather, is the apostle telling Christians they should be governed by the sense of peace they experience within their souls? The way to answer this question is to consider *the larger context* in which the expression, “the peace of Christ” is found in our text.

B. And so, let us next consider the *predicate* of our sentence, “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.”

The verb, “rule”, speaks of the standard by which one governs oneself. The rule by which one assesses matters is the standard he has established in his thinking. The apostle is saying that Christians are to have the “peace of Christ” govern them, or rule over them. The peace of God is to be the umpire of their souls that inform them and motivate them in their relationship with one another.

Now if we are to consider the two possible meanings of “the peace of Christ” as a “rule” that governs us, then either Paul was saying, first, “Let your experience or feeling of His peace be a standard by which you live.” This would be subjective peace we feel. Or he would be saying, second, “Let the peace that Christ has secured for you be a governing force in the way you live.” This would be objective peace in which we stand before God.

If the first is the correct understanding of Paul’s words then it would suggest that the Christian should ask himself when making decisions in his life, “Do I have the peace of Christ in doing this?” If not, then that action is to be avoided. And although I am somewhat sympathetic with this understanding, I have reservation whether or not this is a correct understanding of what Paul was saying. For one thing, to rely or look upon one’s feelings, even if it is a sense of peace, is so subjective that it is really not a good standard by which we may determine what is right and wrong, or good or evil. The fact is that fallen people may justify their actions by claiming they have peace about the matter, even when they are clearly violating the clear instruction and direction of Holy Scripture.

I would argue that the second explanation is the one that Paul intended for his readers to understand and embrace. The peace that God has secured for you should be the governing rule of your behavior and of your relationships with your Christian brethren. I believe that this becomes clear when we consider the next portion of the sentence.

C. We read, “And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body.”³

It is this clause, “*to which indeed you were called in one body,*” which makes it clear that the apostle was not speaking of a *subjective* peace in your heart as a rule of your behavior. The words, “to which”, refer to the word, “peace.”⁴ The expression, “in one body” refers to the church, which in this context is the local church at Colossae. Paul was saying that the fact that God has called the entire church into a state of peace, that this should govern or rule in our hearts. Paul is simply urging the brethren in the church at Colossae to govern themselves with the reality of their corporate peace that they enjoy with God through Jesus Christ.

The Reformation Study Bible reflects this understanding in its footnote to this verse, which reads,

In its practice of love, forgiveness, and graciousness, the Christian community is to be a showcase of the reconciliation Christ has brought to the universe (1:20-22; 2:14,15), and to individual sinners (vv. 11, 13; See Eph. 2:14-18).

And so, verse 15 is not instruction for how an individual makes personal determinations of the will of God, as he looks for a sense of peace in his soul as the rule. No, it is speaking of the state of peace that Christ has secured for His church. This state of peace should be a standard which governs us. We should seek and purpose to be at peace and live in peace with one another in the church, because it was this peace, “*to which indeed you were called in one body.*”

Matthew Henry stated the matter well:

Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, that is, God’s being at peace with you, and the comfortable sense of his acceptance and favour: or, a disposition to peace among yourselves, a peaceable spirit, that keeps the peace, and makes peace. This is called the *peace of God*, because it is of his working in all who

³ We first dealt with the *subject* of the verse, which is “the peace of Christ.” We secondly considered the *predicate* of the verse, “rule in your hearts.” And now third, we are considering, “to which indeed you were called in one body”, which is grammatically is a ‘*relative clause*’, describing further the subject, “the peace of Christ.”

⁴ This is clear from the Greek text for the word translated “to which” is a singular feminine pronoun that refers to the Greek word for “peace”, which is a singular feminine noun.

are his. *The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace* (Rom. 14:17). “Let this peace *rule in your heart*—prevail and govern there, or as an umpire decide all matters of difference among you.”—*To which you are called in one body*. We are called to this peace, to peace with God as our privilege and peace with our brethren as our duty. Being united in one body, we are called to be at peace one with another, as the members of the natural body; for *we are the body of Christ, and members in particular* (1 Cor. 12:27).⁵

Similarly **John Calvin** wrote,

He gives the name of the *peace of God* to that which God has established among us, as will appear from what follows. He would have it *reign* in our hearts. He employs, however, a very appropriate metaphor; for as among wrestlers, he who has vanquished all the others carries off the palm, so he would have the *peace of God* be superior to all carnal affections, which often hurry us on to contentions, disagreements, quarrels, secret grudges. He accordingly prohibits us from giving loose reins to corrupt affections of this kind. As, however it is difficult to restrain them, he points out also the remedy, that the *peace of God* may carry the victory, because it must be a bridle, by which carnal affections may be restrained. Hence he says, *in our hearts*; because we constantly feel *there* great conflicts, while the *flesh lusteth against the Spirit*. (Galatians 5:17.)

The clause, *to which ye are called*, intimates what manner of *peace* this is — that unity which Christ has consecrated among us under his own direction. For God has *reconciled us to himself* in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18), with this view, that we may live in entire harmony among ourselves. He adds, *in one body*, meaning by this, that we cannot be in a state of agreement with God otherwise than by being united among ourselves as members of one body.⁶

F. F. Bruce in his typical manner, set the matter before his readers in a clear and concise way:

“Let the peace of Christ arbitrate in your hearts,” he says. When hostile forces have to be kept at bay, the peace of God garrisons the believer’s heart, as in Philippians 4:7. But here the mutual relations of fellow-members of the body of Christ are in view; where differences threaten to spring up among them, the peace of Christ must be accepted as arbitrator. For if the members are subject to Him, the peace which He imparts must regulate their relations with one another. It was not to strife but to peace that God called them in the unity of the body of Christ. In a healthy body harmony prevails among its various parts. Christians who have been reconciled to God, who have peace with Him through Christ, should naturally manifest peace with one another. Strife is the inevitable result when men are out of touch with Him who is the one Source of true peace; but there is no reason why those who have accepted the peace which Christ established by His death on the cross should have any other than peaceful relations among themselves.⁷

And so, the bottom line is this: Colossians 3:15 is not advocating a subjective sense of peace to be the determiner of how you should live. It is saying that the peace that Christ has secured for His church should be a governing principle in the relationships of His people in His church.

Let us consider the next command that the apostle set forth in our text. It is a simple command.

(9) *And be thankful.* (3:15b)

Now in my opinion, our *English Standard Version* once again fails to serve us rightly. The ESV sets forth this command as a separate sentence, not entirely detached, but significantly so from what went before.

⁵ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 6 (Fleming H. Revell Company), p. 764.

⁶ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, Vol. 21 (Baker, 1993), p. 215f.

⁷ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of Paul to the Ephesians and Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (William B. Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 282.

They have it rendered as though Paul were simply adding one more separate command to this long list of commands. But actually the command, “And be thankful” is part of the sentence we have just considered.

Paul had just set forth the importance of the peace of God to be the ruling principle that governs our relationship with one another. A thankful man will be a cooperative man, relating well with others who have received freely the abundance of the mercy and grace of God. We may call on **Matthew Henry** again, who tied this command with what went before.

To preserve in us this peaceable disposition, we must be thankful. The work of thanksgiving to God is such a sweet and pleasant work that it will help to make us sweet and pleasant towards all men. “Instead of envying one another upon account of any particular favours and excellence, be thankful for his mercies, which are common to all of you.”⁸

After having commanded the Christians at Colossae to be thankful, this theme of thanksgiving is repeated in the subsequent commands. The tenth command in this list reads:

(10) *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 in your hearts to God.* (Col. 1:16)

It is the word of Christ that is to inform our thinking, guide our actions, and inspire our hearts. We may assume immediately that the “word of Christ” is a reference to the Holy Scriptures. And certainly the Holy Scriptures, the Bible, should dwell in each of us richly. But Paul is directing his readers specifically to the message of Jesus Christ. Let the truth of Jesus Christ dwell in you richly.

What is it to have the word of Christ “dwell in you richly”? Let us remember the context. Paul is giving instruction to the church at Colossae, to a body of believers. We tend to individualize the Scripture, asking the question first and foremost, “What does it mean to me?” But when Paul wrote, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly”, the “you” in this verse is plural, not singular. Paul was writing to the church collectively. He was commanding the church at Colossae to “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.”

We desire that this command would be realized in our church. Jesus Christ is the heart and soul of all that we are as Christians and as a church. We desire to exalt Christ. We desire to have the “word of Christ”, that is, every truth regarding Christ, set before us and proclaimed by us to one another and to the world in which we live. And we do not desire just to have the “word of Christ dwell in us”; but rather, that the “word of Christ would dwell in us *richly!*”

How may this be realized in our church? It is set before us quite clearly in verse 16. After the initial main clause, “***Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly***”, we have three words (participles) that declare the manner by which we can have the word of Christ dwell in us richly.

1) The word of Christ may dwell in our church richly by “***teaching... one another in all wisdom.***”

We are to be teaching one another. This is certainly done from the pulpit, but it is also to be done by church members toward other church members. But “teaching” needs to be done in wisdom, properly discerning the occasion, the need, and the manner in which instruction is imparted.

2) The word of Christ may dwell in our church richly by “***admonishing one another in all wisdom.***”

To admonish is to correct, which perhaps includes the occasional rebuke of one to another in the church, when such strong exhortation is necessary. And of course, one can readily see the need for admonishing “in all wisdom.” The aim is to restore another, to assist another in growing, to correct one overtaken in a fault. Certainly this necessitates admonishing “in all wisdom.”

⁸ Henry, vol. 6, p. 764.

3) The word of Christ may dwell in our church richly by “*singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*.”

Some attempt to distinguish sharply between these three words, “*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*.” This is probably not advisable. If there is a distinction, however, the “psalms” would refer to the psalms of our Old Testament. The “hymns” would be those composed by the early Christians. The “spiritual songs” may have been spontaneous, unpremeditated words “sung in the spirit” (cf. 1 Cor. 14:15).⁹

The apostle describes the manner in which our church is to sing before the Lord. We are to do so “*with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*” Here we again see the theme of thanksgiving brought before us. It was in verse 15, and now in verse 16, and we will see it also in verse 17, which is the final command in this list that we have been considering.

(11) 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.

We live for our Lord Jesus. All that we do should be done with the desire and design to please Him, to make Him known, to lead people to regard Him as highly, more so, if possible, than how we regard Him. Here we have a principle with which a Christian can broadly apply across much of his life in making ethical and spiritual decisions.

When the twentieth-century Christian is confronted by a moral issue, he may not find in the Bible any explicit word of Christ relating to its particular details. But he can ask himself: What is the Christian thing to do here? Can I do this without compromising my Christian confession? Can I do it (that is to say) “in the name of the Lord Jesus”? (For His reputation is at stake in the lives and conduct of His known followers.) And can I thank God the Father through Him that He has given me the opportunity to do this thing? (The repeated emphasis on thanksgiving is noteworthy.) Questions like these, honestly faced, will commonly provide surer ethical guidance than special regulations; it is not so easy to get round so comprehensive a statement of Christian duty as this verse supplies. In NT and OT alike it is insisted that our relation to God embraces and controls the whole of life, and not only those occasions which are sometimes described as “religious” in a narrower sense of the term.¹⁰

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. (1 Pet. 5:10f)

⁹ Bruce, pp. 284f.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 286.

A GODLY MAN IS A THANKFUL MAN

by Thomas Watson

(died a. 1690)

Praise and thanksgiving is the work of heaven and he (a godly man) begins that work here which he will always be doing in heaven. The Jews have a saying: ‘the world subsists by three things: the law, the worship of God and thankfulness.’ As if where thankfulness was missing, one of the pillars of the world had been taken away and it was ready to fall. The Hebrew word for ‘praise’ comes from a root that signifies ‘to shoot up’. The godly man sends up his praises like a volley of shots towards heaven. David was modelled after God’s heart and how melodiously he warbled out God’s praises! Therefore he was called ‘*the sweet psalmist of Israel*’ (2 Sam. 23:1). Take a Christian at his worst, yet he is thankful. The prophet Jonah was a man of waspish spirit. The sea was not so stirred with the tempest as Jonah’s heart was stirred with passion (Jonah 1:13). Yet through this cloud you might see grace appear. He had a thankful heart: ‘*I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed*’ (Jonah 2:9). To illustrate this more clearly, I shall lay down these four particulars:

1. *Praise and thanksgiving is a saint-like work*

We find in Scripture that the godly are still called upon to praise God: ‘*ye that fear the Lord, bless the Lord*’ (Psa. 135:20). ‘*Let the saints be joyful in glory: let the high praises of God be in their mouth*’ (Psa. 149:5, 6). Praise is a work proper to a saint:

(a) *None but the godly can praise God aright.* As all do not have the skill to play the lute, so not everyone can sound forth the harmonious praises of God. Wicked men are bound to praise God, but they are not fit to praise him. None but a living Christian can tune God’s Praise. Wicked men are dead in sin; how can they who are dead lift up God’s praises? ‘*The grave cannot praise thee*’ (Isa. 38:18). A wicked man stains and eclipses God’s praise. If an unclean hand works in damask or flowered satin, it will slur its beauty. God will say to the sinner, ‘*What hast thou to do, to take my covenant in thy mouth?*’ (Psa. 50:16).

(b) *Praise is not comely for any but the godly: ‘praise is comely for the upright’* (Psa. 33:1). A profane man stuck with God’s praises is like a dung hill stuck with flowers. Praise in the mouth of a sinner is like an oracle in the mouth of a fool. How uncomely it is for anyone to praise God if his whole life dishonours God! It is as indecent for a wicked man to praise God as it is for a usurer to talk of living by faith, or for the devil to quote Scripture. The godly alone are fit choristers in God’s Praises. It is called ‘*the garment of praise*’ (Isa. 61:3). This garment fits handsomely only on a saint’s back.

2. *Thanksgiving is a more noble part of God’s worship.*

Our wants may send us to prayer but it takes a truly honest heart to bless God. The raven cries; the lark sings. In petition we act like men; in thanksgiving we act like angels.

3. *Thanksgiving is a God-exalting work.*

‘*Whosoever offers praise glorifies me*’ (Psa. 50:23). Though nothing can add the least mite to God’s essential glory, yet praise exalts him in the eyes of others. Praise is a setting forth of God’s honour, a lifting up of his name, a displaying of the trophy of his goodness, a proclaiming of his excellence, a spreading of his renown, a breaking open of the box of ointment, whereby the sweet savour and perfume of God’s name is sent abroad into the world.

4. *Praise is a more distinguishing work*

By this a Christian excels all the infernal spirits. Do you talk of God? So can the devil; he brought Scripture to Christ. Do you profess religion? So can the devil; he transforms himself into an angel of light. Do you fast? Satan never eats. Do you believe? The devils have a faith of assent; they believe, and tremble (James 2:19). But as Moses worked such a miracle as none of the magicians could reproduce, so here is a work Christians may be doing, which none of the devils can do, and that is the work of thanksgiving. The devils blaspheme, but do not bless. Satan has his fiery darts but not his harp and viol.

Use (i.e. application of doctrine): See here the true genius and complexion of a godly man. He is much in doxologies and praises. It is a saying of Lactantius that he who is unthankful to his God cannot be a good man. A godly man is a God-exalter. The saints are temples of the Holy Ghost (1 Cor. 3:16). Where should God's praises be sounded, but in his temples? A good heart is never weary of praising God: *'his praise shall continually be in my mouth'* (Psa. 34:1). Some will be thankful while the memory of the mercy is fresh, but afterwards leave off. The Carthaginians used at first to send the tenth of their yearly revenue to Hercules, but by degrees they grew weary and left off sending. David, as long as he drew his breath, would chirp forth God's praise: *'I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being'* (Psa. 146:2). David would not now and then give God a snatch of music, and then hang up the instrument, but he would continually be celebrating God's praise. A godly man will express his thankfulness in every duty. He mingles thanksgiving with prayer: *'in every thing by prayer with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God'* (Phil. 4:6). Thanksgiving is the more divine part of prayer. In our petitions we express our own necessities; in our thanksgivings we declare God's excellencies. Prayer goes up as incense, when it is perfumed with thanksgiving.

And as a godly man expresses thankfulness in every duty, he does so in every condition. He will be thankful in adversity as well as prosperity: *'In every thing give thanks'* (1 Thess. 5:18). A gracious soul (*i.e.* one which has been saved by grace) is thankful and rejoices that he is drawn nearer to God, though it be by the cords of affliction. When it goes well with him, he praises God's mercy; when it goes badly with him, he magnifies God's justice. When God has a rod in his hand, a godly man will have a psalm in his mouth. The devil's smiting of Job was like striking a musical instrument; he sounded forth praise: *'The Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord'* (Job 1:21). When God's spiritual plants are cut and bleed, they drop thankfulness; the saints' tears cannot drown their praises.

If this is the sign of a godly man, then the number of the godly appears to be very small. Few are in the work of praise. Sinners (*i.e.* the unsaved) cut God short of his thank offering: *'Where are the nine?'* (Luke 17:17). Of ten lepers healed there was but one who returned to give praise. Most of the world are sepulchres to bury God's praise. You will hear some swearing and cursing but few who bless God. Praise is the yearly rent that men owe, but most are behindhand with their rent. God gave King Hezekiah a marvellous deliverance, *'but Hezekiah rendered not again according to the benefit done unto him'* (2 Chron. 32:25). That 'but' was a blot on his escutcheon. Some, instead of being thankful to God, *'render evil for good'*. They are the worse for mercy: *'Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise?'* (Deut. 32:6). This is like the toad that turns the most wholesome herb to poison. Where shall we find a grateful Christian? We read of the saints *'having harps in their hands'* (Rev. 5:8), which is the emblem of praise. Many have tears in their eyes and complaints in their mouths, but few have harps in their hand and are blessing and praising the name of God.

This selection was taken from Thomas Watson's *The Godly Man's Picture* (Banner of Truth, 1992), which was first published in 1666. The full title of the original work was *The Godly Man's Picture Drawn with a Scripture Pencil, or, Some Characteristic Marks of a Man who is Going to Heaven*. In this book the purpose and method and of a typical Puritan pastor/writer may be discerned: the test of a true Christian is not in what he says he believes but in what he is in his heart as evidenced by his life. In this book Watson set forth many characteristics of one who has been born from above by the Holy Spirit, by so doing he sought to encourage the true Christian unto good works, but he also sought to reveal to the nominal Christian his absence of saving grace and his need for true conversion. Watson demonstrated in this selection how even the subject of thanksgiving may be used evangelistically. -- Pastor Lars Larson