

FOUR KEY REFERENCE POINTS  
OF  
CHRISTIAN THANKSGIVING  
October 6, 2013  
Romans 1:8  
Scripture: Romans 1:8-25

INTRO: We have come to the time of year in which our nation sets aside a day for thanksgiving. I am thankful that our nation still has a Thanksgiving Day. The Wikipedia says, and I quote, "The first documented thanksgiving feasts in territory currently belonging to the United States were conducted by Spaniards in the 16th century. Thanksgiving services were routine in what was to become the [Commonwealth of Virginia](#) as early as 1607, with the first permanent settlement of [Jamestown, Virginia](#) holding a thanksgiving in 1610.

"On December 4, 1619, 38 English settlers arrived at [Berkeley Hundred](#), which comprised about 8,000 acres... on the north bank of the [James River](#), near Herring Creek, in an area then known as [Charles Cittie](#), about 20 miles (32 km) upstream from [Jamestown](#), where the first permanent settlement of the [Colony of Virginia](#) had been established on May 14, 1607.

"The group's charter required that the day of arrival be observed yearly as a "day of thanksgiving" to God. On that first day, Captain John Woodlief held the service of thanksgiving. As quoted from the section of the Charter of Berkeley Hundred specifying the thanksgiving service: "We ordaine that the day of our ships arrival at the place assigned for plantacon in the land of Virginia shall be yearly and perpetually kept holy as a day of thanksgiving to [Almighty God](#)."

According to the article, On October 3, 1789, George Washington made the following proclamation and created the first Thanksgiving Day designated by the national government of the United States of America. He said in part, "Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey his will, to be grateful for his benefits, and humbly to implore his protection and favor, and whereas both Houses of Congress have by their joint Committee requested me to recommend to the People of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging

with grateful hearts the many signal favors of Almighty God especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness."

Well, it was not until 1863, after Abraham Lincoln read a series of editorials by Sarah, Josepha, Hale, that he declared that Thanksgiving became a national holiday. Then 16 years later, in November of 1879 Canada made Thanksgiving Day a national Canadian holiday. I am glad these two great nations have made a national holiday for thanksgiving to God Almighty.

I am going to take four grammatical points to show us the four crucial reference points in thanksgiving from Romans 1:8 (read). Paul said, "I", that is reference point one, the grammatical subject of the sentence, "thank my God", that is reference point two, the grammatical object, "through our Lord Jesus Christ", that is reference point 3, an adverbial phrase indicating means, and last, "for you all..." that is reference point 4, the grammatical indirect object of thanksgiving.

## I. THE SUBJECT OF THANKSGIVING

We begin with the subject of thanksgiving. Our verse is Romans 1:8 where Paul says, "First, I thank my God through our Lord Jesus Christ for you all..." The subject of this sentence is 'I'. The letter to the Romans tells us in the first word to whom 'I' refers. It was Paul. Paul said, "I thank..." In thanksgiving there has to be the one or the ones who give thanks. Without a subject, there is no thanksgiving. I wonder, this morning, are you the subject of thanksgiving?

Think about this word, 'thanksgiving'. It is thanks 'giving'. There must be a giver. We have come to thanksgiving day, and I trust that we are all the subjects of thanksgiving. We live in a farming community and some of you do not yet have your crops in, but without question, you have many things to give thanks for. I think that for us as Christians, Thanksgiving Day should come naturally.

Then, notice what the giver gives. It is 'thanks'. How would you define thanks? Well, to give thanks is

to express gratitude. It is an expression of appreciation for something received. We have a little garden in our town lot. This past week I ate the last fresh cucumbers from our garden. When I consider seeds and soil, I marvel. For example, take those tiny little carrot seeds. They are so small, I don't allow my wife to plant them because afterward it looks like you planted lawn. Those little things produce. When she plants 100, 150 grow. I mean they produce.

Let me tell you a little family joke. When I was dating Jean, I helped them plant garden one year and my job was to plant peas. I said, "How far apart do you plant them. And my wife's mother said, "Oh about an inch or two." So I got on my knees and planted them about an inch or two apart. Well, I'm about a foot or so along the row when here comes my mother-in-law in the second row like this (demonstrate). We still laugh about that.

Now look at a seed like that sometime. Then ponder it. If you plant it, it knows what to do. And if you plant it too deep, it says, "Na." It knows what to do. The soil too, is a wonder. This spring my wife said, "Well, these little onion bulbs look like most of them won't make it." They were all shriveled up and dry. They were quite old. But my wife planted them, not quite as thick as the carrots, mind you. And the sun came out, and the ground warmed up, and the moisture went to work, and almost all of them grew. That's why she has to be so careful when she plants carrots.

But think about it. Next time you need new tires for your vehicle, plant the old ones in the ground and see what you get. But look at that little seed. I understand they found some wheat seeds in one of those pyramids in Egypt. The seeds were several thousand years old. They planted them, and guess what, pyramid rocks grew! No, that's a lie. The laws of the seed had not changed at all. Wheat grew. Now you tell me, who made it like that? Don't ask Richard Dawkins. He is supposedly a bright man but my wife read something he said the other day. He said, "Evolution has been observed, its just that it hasn't been observed while its happening." And just think,

with that kind of brilliance he shakes his little fingers at God.

And when we consider the miracle of carrot seeds, there we are, the subjects who should give thanks, and we can pass right by it and never notice. Last year we had about 20 babies born to our church families. I am sure you have marveled at those little fingers or toes. I am sure we have no young parent here so far gone that they do not marvel and give God thanks for such a miracle. Surely we ought to be the subjects of thanksgiving.

Then think about when you hurt your body. I have a son-in-law, he nailed his finger with an air hammer. I won't tell you which one or I have to buy him lunch. But there was the nail, sticking right through the board and the finger. Well, he turned a wee bit pale when his dad, I think it was, slid his finger off the nail. Do you know what happens inside the body at a time like that? There are little things inside that know immediately that one part of the body is damaged, and immediately they send all the workers they can afford and they set to work to keep out infections. And then other little agents go to work and start to patch up the hole. So he got bandaged up, and while he kept working, little things were busy repairing the damage. Now I don't know what this son-in-law would look like by now if his body didn't do such a wonderful job fixing him up. And what does the Scripture say? "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And *that* my soul knows very well." Oh, what a thankful people we ought to be.

How about the seasons? What a beautiful fall we had again this year. Psalm 8:3-4 says, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?" Now think about it a moment. When you consider the sun and the moon and the stars, how incredible is it all? The Bible tells us what the earth hangs on. Do you know what that is? God wrote that when we did not have all the scientific information we have now. Could you tell me what keeps the earth on course? Did you know that while we sit

here we are traveling about 30 kilometers on our way around the sun every second? That means we travel about 2,492,000 kilometers a day. But to top that off, we spin, at the equator at 1,038 miles per hour. Now I ask you, what keeps us on course? What if we went off course just a wee teensy bit? Well, in not too long a time it would be all over for all of us. Surely we ought to be the subjects of thanksgiving.

We could go on and on. What keeps all the gases in the atmosphere at the right mixture? Let me quote from messages I did on creation. We were looking at day two when God created the firmament and here are my notes, "Now when we consider day one and the creation of the heaven and the earth and light, and then look at the creation of only the firmament on day two, we said earlier, maybe it's like some of our Mondays. We just didn't get that much done. But I'd like to give you some of the things that exist in this firmament. In our present atmosphere, scientists find that the constant gases, the gases that don't change, in our present atmosphere are nitrogen, 78.084%. Oxygen, 20.946%, and then the more minor gases, argon, neon, helium, methane, krypton, hydrogen and nitrous oxide. Now these are constant gases and they are there. What God did on day two as I understand it, from the things He had made already He mixed these gases and put the laws in place that would keep these gases within a certain distance of the other heavens, and would keep them in a place where man could exist. You see, all God would have to do is change these gases and we're gone. No more existence. We're dependent on Him to keep these things mixed right all the time. You know in our day is the great concern of the ozone.

"Well, there are minor gases as well. Gases which change. Gases that are higher at some times than others. They are called the variable gases. And the amount changes from time to time and place to place. And so we have rain and don't have rain, which is affected by these things. Let me give you some of these. There is water vapour, 7%. Carbon dioxide, .01%, then the ozone which is .01% and then sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide. Now these are all necessary in order for us to exist and I suggest that what God did on day two, He made the firmament. He

made this place livable. He mixed up all of this so it would be conducive to our respiratory system", end quote.

You see, we take it all for granted, but when we stop and think for a moment, we would agree with the words of Jesus, who said, "Without Me you can do nothing." We are dependent on God for everything. So George Washington said, "Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God..." It is the providence of God that keeps the gases mixed right. It is the providence of God that heals our bodies. It is the providence of God that seeds grow. We ought to be the subjects of much thanksgiving.

## II. THE OBJECT OF CHRISTIAN THANKSGIVING

We have then, next, in our verse, the object or the recipient of thanksgiving. Paul says, "First, I thank my God..." The subject is 'I'. We should all be able to say, "First, I thank my God..." Now the object of this sentence is God. So the second reference point in thanksgiving is the object, the recipient, and in our sentence, that is God. We give thanks to God. I have heard that a dilemma for an atheist is when he feels gratitude and he has no one to thank. There are things for which we can thank others for, but there are many things we can only express gratitude to God for. There is no one else. So George Washington said, "Whereas it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God..." It is Almighty God we have to give thanks to for all such things as we have mentioned and many more.

Now let me just mention here for those who may tune in on line. I know God would want me to tell you this. When we talk about Almighty God, we are talking about Jehovah God, the God of the Bible. He is not Allah. He is not the one viewed as the Great Spirit or any other god besides Jehovah God. Some may not like this but I know that Almighty God, the God of the Bible, the God the Jews worshipped in Scripture would want me to tell you that. He is the only true God. There is no other God. God Himself said in Isaiah 44:8, "Is there a God besides Me? Indeed *there is no other Rock; I know not one.*" Well, God is

omniscient, and if He knows no other God there is no other God.

Now in Romans 1 there is an important point to make on thanksgiving. Look at verses 14-17 (read). In the Gospel, the good news of Jesus' death burial and resurrection on our behalf is revealed the righteousness of God. Now the righteousness of God is twofold. There is imputed righteousness. That is the righteousness of Christ that is imputed to our account. That happens the moment we are saved. But there is that righteousness which God approves of. Let me tell you some of those. Do not lie. Do not steal. Do not kill. Work honestly etc... etc... All the things the Scriptures tell us to do and not to do reveal the righteousness of God. God wants us to live right.

Now look at verses 18-19. God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness. Included in this ungodliness is the subject of the occult we are presently dealing with in the doctrine of demons. And injustice here may refer to that which happens towards other people. Now this wrath is pointed at those who suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Unrighteousness is set against truth. That is where the heart of the issue lies. And how do such people handle truth? They suppress it by doing wrong. That is the way it always is.

Now look at verse 20 (read). At the beginning mankind had the truth. We find this in the first chapters in Genesis. And down through the ages, creation itself has pointed men back to God. But something happened, and we find it in verse 21 (read). You see, at first they knew God. They knew God. But something happened, and we find twin sins here. First, they did not glorify God as God. How do you do that? By suppressing the truth in unrighteousness. You fail to glorify God simply by doing wrong. The way to glorify God is simply by doing right.

But the twin sin is unthankfulness! Do you want to know how much you glorify God? Let me give you a self test. You can check it out yourself. How thankful to God Almighty are you? The answer to that question is a good indicator. Let me put it like this, how much

do you complain? How much do you grumble? How negative are you? Maybe you are so used to grumbling you think you are mostly thankful. Negative people are hard to be around. They tear you down.

To such people I recommend Psalm 107:22, "Let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, And declare His works with rejoicing." To such people, thanksgiving is a big sacrifice. You have to give up that sour attitude. You cannot be thankful with a sour attitude. It's like trying to mix oil and water.

Now, as I have mentioned, we are presently in the subject of demonology. I began to wonder a while ago, is homosexuality the final sin that brings about destruction or is it the occult? But look at verses 22-23 (read). Here are the steps. They once knew God. Then they began to fail to glorify God, that is they started to live in sin. And along with that, or shortly after, they became unthankful, and then they fell into the occult. When you worship false gods, you are in the occult. And when man worships false gods and is immersed in the occult, then every abominable sin is practiced. So look at verses 24-26a.

Now it seems to me that glorifying God and being thankful go hand in hand. People who glorify God, that is they live right, will also be a thankful people. And when these two go, they fall into Satan's hands. So the Lord Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil..." And that last clause, I think, can be translated, "...deliver us from the evil one..." Here is how we can be kept from being led into temptation and how to be delivered from the evil one; live right. And if you live right, you will be thankful.

So, you see, the first reference point in thanksgiving we looked at was the one who gives thanks. Without someone to give thanks, there is no thanksgiving. But then, the one who gives thanks must have someone to thank. We have such an one and it is



God Almighty. But there is a third reference point in thanksgiving and that is the object of thanksgiving.

### III. THE ADVERBIAL MEANS OF CHRISTIAN THANKSGIVING

The third reference point in thanksgiving is the adverbial means of thanksgiving. Paul said, "First, I thank my God *through Jesus Christ*..." Paul gave thanks to God, but he did it through Jesus Christ. We have been taught in the NT to pray in Jesus' name. John 14:14 says, "If you ask anything in My name, I will do it." Ephesians 5:20 says, "Giving thanks always for all things to God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Now ponder this for a moment. The unbeliever cannot say, "Our Father in heaven..." He is not their Father. They cannot say, "Our Father..." until He becomes their Father. And He does not become our Father until we submit ourselves to Him in repentance and faith. And that faith involves believing in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ on our behalf. And the moment we do that, God has become our Father, and Jesus has become our mediator. And when we have become Christians, now we can give thanks to God Almighty *through Jesus Christ*. Here is the third reference point in Christian thanksgiving.

This point may be one we can easily overlook. Did you know that if it was not for the Lord Jesus Christ as our mediator, we could not express our gratitude to God? It would be unacceptable. He makes our thanksgiving acceptable to God Almighty.

### IV. THE INDIRECT OBJECT OF CHRISTIAN THANKSGIVING

We come now to the fourth reference point, which in grammar is the indirect object. And the indirect object of thanksgiving is those things we are thankful for. We find this in Romans 1:8, "First, I thank my God through our Lord Jesus Christ *for you all*..." Paul's indirect object of thanksgiving in this letter was the believers at Rome. In the Ephesians passage we read earlier Paul said, "Giving thanks always for all things to God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Paul, as the missionary to Rome, was thankful for the believers that were there. In his letter to the Ephesians he instructed them to be thankful to God for all things. Let me make a point from that verse. It is an instruction to be thankful. There are times, especially for those of us who are Christians, when gratitude just wells up in our hearts and we give thanks to God. It should come natural for us, at least a times.

But what about those times when we do not 'feel' gratitude. As a matter of fact we may be grumpy. Maybe we are negative and depressed. What about then? Well, then you have to take hold of yourself by the scruff of the neck and say, "Now what things do I have to be thankful for?" And then you have to think about it. And if we are honest, even when we are grumpy, we have a lot of things to be thankful for.

As a matter of fact, sometimes we can climb out of the dumps by taking a moment to remember what all God has done for us. I told you about the young lady in our community who, according to the doctors, should no longer be alive because of the disease she has. But the doctors said they thought she was alive yet because of her positive attitude. Sometimes, several times a day her muscles that cause her to breath shut down and she does not know if they will start up again. I do not know of one person in this church who has to think about if they will be able to breath the next moment. And because that is the case, we fail to be thankful for it. You see, every time we see someone else suffering could be a thanksgiving moment for us.

Let me quote from a message I did just recently. "Before we eat we give thanks for our food, but has that become mundane to us as well? Do we just take it for granted and we are not focused or alert when we thank God for it? Oh the plentitude of food we have. Do we thank God for a full freezer, a full fridge, full cupboards, a full cold room?

"What about clothing. I can remember having only one pair of pants. I can remember wearing old faded shirts to school. But it is not like that any more. I

just take clothing for granted. I don't even have to be thankful for it any more.

"Have you ever thanked God for your possessions? I look around in our community and I cannot believe how rich we are. I wonder, are we thankful for them. Would we not have cause to thank God over and over again for so many things that we possess? I think of the Ethiopian man we had in our church some years ago. He said if you can be a Christian in America you can be a Christian anywhere. We think, if we could be a Christian in Ethiopia we could be a Christian anywhere. Not according to this man who had lived in both countries.

"Have we ever thanked God for two seeing eyes? Two ears? Have we ever thanked Him we can eat by ourselves? That we can walk? That we can read? Think of the many things each day requires of us that someone else would have to help us with if we did not have these seemingly simple abilities.

"Then think of our country; our province; our town and so on. Think of the freedoms we have. How many times do we complain about the price of things? But we don't stand in line to wait to get some necessary food items. We have the freedom to buy a Bible. We have the freedom to read it. We have the freedom to pray as we wish. Think of our stores and our access to doctors and medicine. Think of our freedoms to travel. Think of places like North Korea, and what it is like to be a Christian there. Think of so many Christians who live in lands where Christianity is hated and they are persecuted. Think of the clean pure air we have here.

"How do we respond when negative things happen to us? What kind of person are we? Do we grumble or complain, or have we learned to be thankful. Anyone with a Christian library of any size probably has a commentary written by Matthew Henry. One day he was robbed of his wallet. In his diary that day he wrote, "Let me be thankful first, because I was never robbed before; second, because although they took my purse, they did not take my life; third, because, although they took my all, it was not much; and fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed."

Now he could have grumbled or complained. He could have said, "Where are the police when you need them?" But he did not. Instead he found a lot of things to be thankful for. A negative event can create a lot of thanksgiving if we but take the right perspective."

CONC: So, we conclude our thoughts on the four reference points of thanksgiving. First, the subject, the one who gives thanks. I trust that speaks of all of us. Then second, the object, the recipient of that thanksgiving. That is God Almighty. I am so grateful for our forefathers who had the courage to lay down their lives through persecution from the Roman Catholic church, because they had found the true One to whom thanks is due. Though I grew up in a home where traditionalism abounded, I was taught the one thing I have hung on to ever since I became a Christian. It is this: The Bible is the Word of God. Oh how thankful I am for that.

The third reference point of thanksgiving is our Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. We could have given the whole message to that topic. Oh Lord God Almighty, we thank You for Jesus Christ.

And the fourth and last reference point is those things we are thankful for. There is no thanksgiving if there are not specific things to give thanks for. And of all the people in the world, we have so many things to be thankful for. May God find us a thankful people.