

November 21, 2004 by Steve Brandon



Thanksgiving

Colossians 3:17

1. Thanksgiving should saturate your life.
2. Thanksgiving should be governed by Jesus.
3. Thanksgiving should be expressed through Jesus.

Four days from today, our country will celebrate Thanksgiving. This holiday means different things to different people. To some, it means family and friends. To others, it means turkey and football. To others, it means loneliness and depression. Throughout the day, our gatherings and activities will point to one common theme of thankfulness. And so, this morning, I would like for us to focus our attention upon a passage of Scripture that will fuel our giving of thanks. I want to spend our time this morning reflecting on Colossians 3:17. My aim is simple: I want you to have an overwhelming sense of how thankful you ought to be for Christ Jesus. Let's read our verse, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Col. 3:17).

There are three main points about thanksgiving that I want to cover this morning. Each point flows from this verse. My first point is ...

1. Thanksgiving should saturate your life.

I trust that one of the first things that you noticed about this verse when I read it was how exhaustive this verse is. It begins by setting the scope of application of the principle put forth, "Whatever you do in word or deed." It deals with every aspect of your life! It is inclusive of all that you do. There is nothing in our lives that escape the boundaries set forth in Colossians 3:17. You simply cannot get outside, "whatever you do in word or deed." Let me illustrate this. We live here upon this earth. To escape the gravitational pull of the earth, you need to send a rocket in the air at 25,000 miles per hour, which is called "escape velocity." That velocity is extremely high. It is seven miles per second. To escape the earth is difficult, but possible. It is very, very difficult. But you can do it. If you look again at our text this morning, you'll see that we cannot escape the boundaries of this verse. It doesn't matter what you do. You can't escape it. You may be eating your breakfast, driving to work, golfing on a golf course, sewing a dress on your sewing machine, talking to a friend on a the phone, or attending a church service. Whatever you are doing, this verse is to be applied in how you go about doing these things. Paul says that you need to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father." This is more than a one day holiday pronounced by the government. This is every day, and all the time. Nowadays, people like to refer to that as 24/7 activity.

The Bible is full of expressions of thanks. Over and over again, the writers of the Psalms say things like, ...

- "I will give thanks to the LORD" (Psalm 7:17).
- "I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart" (Ps. 9:1).
- "I will give You thanks forever" (Ps. 52:9).
- "I will give thanks to You ... with all my heart" (Ps. 86:12).

Over and over again, the writers of Scripture command us to give thanks to the Lord.

- "Give thanks to His holy name" (Ps. 30:4).
- "Give thanks to the LORD for He is good" (Ps. 107:1; 118:1).
- "Give thanks to the God of gods, for His lovingkindness is everlasting" (Ps. 136:2).
- "Give thanks to the Lord of lords, for His lovingkindness is everlasting" (Ps. 136:3).

And we are told, that "It is good to give thanks to the LORD" (Ps. 92:1). I don't think that I need to work very hard to convince you of the necessity of being thankful. But, perhaps you have never before seen how **dominate** a theme this ought to be in your life. "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, **giving thanks** through Him to God the Father."

As a child of God, one thing that ought to characterize you above all others is that you are eminently a thankful person. Additionally, your thankfulness is demonstrated in everything that you do. Are you a thankful person? Do you find yourself often thanking God for the things that He has done for you and given to you? Do you find yourself thanking God for the things that others do for you? Do you express your thanks to others? Do you express thanks all of the time? These questions are important. One of the characteristics of those who hate God is that they are unthankful (Rom. 1:21). The things that they have received from the hand of God have been received gladly, without any expression of gratitude to the One who gave it.

A characteristic of those who love God is that they are thankful. Paul puts forth a great example of his own thankfulness in this epistle to the Colossians. I love the way that Paul practices what he preaches. Right at the beginning of this epistle, Paul expresses his thanks to God. Look back at Colossians 1:3-4. Immediately after his introductory comments, Paul begins with expressing his thanks to God. "We give thanks

to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and the love which you have for all the saints" (Col. 1:3-4). Here is Paul, expressing his own thankfulness to God for the salvation of these Colossian believers. They had believed in Christ Jesus and had expressed their faith in their love for all the saints. Paul didn't shy away from expressing such thanks. This is very typical of Paul's methodology, and in many other epistles he did the exact same thing (for examples read Rom. 1:8; 1 Cor. 1:4; Phil. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2; 2 Thess. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:3; Philemon 4).

I believe that it is appropriate for me as a pastor to express my own thankfulness to God for what He has done in the lives of those in our church. This text has convicted me that I don't do that as often as I ought to. But, I do give thanks to God for your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all the saints. This week, I went through our church directory and listed things that I am thankful about each one of you. I am thankful that the Bashaws are committed to trust the Lord in difficulty. I am thankful that the Bells have a heart for prayer, and the Belongers have a heart for missions. I am thankful that the Bilangs have find joy in difficulty. I am thankful that the Boonzaayers have a wonderful theological grounding. I am thankful that Yvonne Brandon, my wife, has an untiring devotion to making our family look good. I am thankful that Robert Crowe has great zeal in what he does. I am thankful for Susan Del Re and the sweetness of her countenance. I am thankful for the Duncans, our faithful neighbors who are ready to help during crisis. I am thankful for the Fuscus and the genuineness about them. I am thankful for the Fraynes and for God's grace in their lives. I am thankful for the Gardens and for the example of trust that they show during difficulties. I am thankful for Lisa Gentry and her commitment to the Lord throughout incredible difficulties. I am thank for the Goles, for their heart for others, and for their perspective of what is important in life. I am thankful for the Guskes, for their practical service to the church, and for feedback that they have given to me. I am thankful for the Hernandez family, for the changes they have sought to make in their home. I am thankful for the Hilberts' commitment to the truth and gift of discernment. I am thankful for John and Judy Iversen, for their commitment to the church. I am thankful for the younger Iversens, for Tim's adventurous spirit, and for Wendy's commitment to motherhood even when she's very capable of doing many other things. I am thankful for the Kolochs--their integrity and their example of walking in purity. I am thankful for the Krauss family, who has been joyful in difficulty. I am thankful for the Larsen family, for their hunger for truth. I am thankful for the Larsons, who have grown in their faith in recent days. I am thankful for the Miltons, for their consistency and steadiness, and that they are above reproach. I am thankful that we can trust Lance with the church finances, and that he handles it well. I am thankful for the Pearsons and their faithful service to this church, and for Carol's testimony through cancer, always giving praise to God. I am thankful for the Plowmans who are constantly encouraging me with kind words. I am thankful for the Robyns and their utter willingness to do whatever is needed. I am thankful for the Scotts, who serve the church greatly behind the scenes. I am thankful for the Sosnowskis, the servants of the church. I am thankful for the faithful attendance of the Wiczoreks. I am thankful for the Wriedts' heart for missions and heart to help others. I am thankful for the Youngs--for their tenderheartedness and desire to help others, even those in jail without the gospel.

We are told in several other places in this epistle how to express our thanks.

a) In the community of believers (Col. 3:15)

In chapter 3, Paul is speaking about how Christians ought to live. Verses 12-15 give a good summary.

And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. And beyond all these things [put on] love, which is the perfect bond of unity. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col.3:12-15)

All of these actions are social actions. They all pertain to how you deal with one another. They address how to respond to those who sin against you. They speak of how to be united together: through love. And then, this section closes with a simple admonition. "... and be thankful." Thanksgiving should be expressed, in the community of believers (Col. 3:15).

b) In our worship (Col. 3:16)

Thanksgiving should be expressed in our worship. Look at verse 16, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." Our time of singing this morning was so appropriate, as we focused upon our thankfulness to God. This ought to characterize our singing. This ought to characterize our worship. And it should not be limited to when we are gathered together. There should be singing in your hearts.

c) In our prayers (Col. 4:2)

Thanksgiving should be expressed in our prayers. Look down in Colossians 4:2. Paul writes, "Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving." Whenever you are praying (and it should be often), thankfulness ought to be sprinkled throughout your prayers. Your whole attitude and demeanor of approach toward God ought to be thanks-saturated. You lay your head upon your pillow at night and offer up a quick prayer to God, it should be filled with thanks. You gather in your family for family worship and pray, it should be filled with thanks. You come to prayer meeting before our service to pray, and your prayers should be filled with thanks to God. Whether you find yourself among the community of believers in a worship service singing praise to God, or praying, the giving of thanks ought to saturate your life. This is what Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

2. Thanksgiving should be governed by Jesus.

A governor is one who rules. A governor is one who leads. Many of you probably know that machines often include a device called a governor. It's purpose is to help to control the machine. It keeps the machine from going to fast or too slow. It prevents the machine from getting to hot or too cold. One of the larger companies in Rockford is called *Woodward Governor* which creates these sorts of devices for airplanes.

When I say that thanksgiving should be governed by Jesus Christ, I mean that our life and our actions ought to be consistent with and driven by Jesus Christ. I believe that this is what Paul is driving at when he says, "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Christians live their lives based upon a person, not upon rules and regulations. We don't live by ideas or philosophies. We live our lives based upon a person, Jesus Christ. This is the thrust of the book of Colossians. When Paul wrote Colossians, he was fully aware of the false teaching that was taking place in the city. It was a hodge-podge of different ideas. There were elements of *Gnosticism*, which taught a mystical, experiential knowledge of God that only some could attain to. There were elements of *Judaism*, which taught that you needed to keep the law, with all of its feasts and festivals. There were elements of *asceticism*, which taught that you needed to deprive your body of earthly pleasures like food if you would be really spiritual. And the sad thing is that all of these teachers put themselves forth as "Christian" teachers.

Paul addressed each of these errors. In every instance, Paul said that the truth is bound up in a person! It's not what you experience (e.g. Gnosticism) that governs you. It's not what you do (e.g. Judaism) that governs you. It's not what you don't do (e.g. asceticism) that governs you. It is fundamentally what you believe about Jesus that governs you.

To combat the Gnostics (who place importance on an exclusive, experiential knowledge, which only a few can have), Paul deals with this in Colossians 2:1-5. Look at verse 1, "I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf, and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face." In this verse, Paul says that he is in a struggle for those at Colossae. He's in a struggle for those at Laodicea who are probably experiencing the same sorts of false teaching. Indeed, Laodicea was only 10 miles away from Colossae, and the false teachers could easily have traveled from one to the other. Paul says that he is in a struggle for all who haven't seen his face. His struggle isn't only for a few who are "in the know" as the Gnostics would have you believe. Rather, Paul is struggling for all who are in the churches. He is struggling so that (verses 2-3), "their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is Christ, Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Your hearts will be united in love and understanding when you understand and know Jesus Christ, Himself. Paul is saying that this knowledge is available to all! It's not for a select few. It's not for those who have somehow attained to this experience of God. It's for those who place their faith in Jesus Christ. In verses 4-5, Paul gives us a reason why he wrote these words. He said, "I say this in order that no one may delude you with persuasive argument. For even though I am absent in body, nevertheless I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good discipline and the stability of your faith in Christ" (verses 2-3). Stay away from those Gnostics who would teach a special knowledge of God. Rather, cling to Jesus Christ by faith.

To combat the Judaizers who wanted people to keep the Old Testament law, Paul gives a similar argument. He constantly points the Colossians back to Jesus. Look at Colossians 2:16-17, "Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day--things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ." In the Old Testament we find all kinds of strict regulations including the dietary laws, the feasts and festivals, and the Sabbath observances. All of these things are like a shadow of what's coming. A shadow isn't the substance. A shadow is fleeting and temporary. As soon as the light casting the shadow dims, the shadow is gone. But, the substance is independent of the light. It will remain whether the light is there or not. A shadow is only two dimensional. And certainly, there is a resemblance of the original substance. But, the substance is three dimensional. It is the very thing. And who's the substance? It is Jesus Christ. The dietary laws, the festivals and the Sabbaths all anticipated His coming. Now that we see Jesus, we no longer have need to focus our attention upon the laws. We focus our attention upon Jesus.

The argument against the ascetics is the same. The ascetics encouraged people to treat their body harshly. They encouraged those at Colossae to live strict lives of self-abasement (v.18). But it's not the things you do that make you holy. It is dying with Christ that makes you holy. Look at verses 20-23, "If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, 'Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!' (which all [refer to] things destined to perish with the using) --in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence (Col.3:20-23). It's not cutting yourself with a knife that makes you spiritual. It's not depriving your stomach of food for days that makes you spiritual. It's dying with Christ. It's setting your mind on the things above, not the things on the earth that makes you spiritual. And so, it is important that all that you do is governed by Jesus Christ.

There is a way in which we get this concept exactly right in the church. There's a story about an Australian Sunday School teacher that illustrates this point. This teacher felt she needed to make adjustments to her teaching.

"She thought she was altogether too predictable and the children were becoming bored with her story-telling and questioning of the class about what they had learned. She decided on a new tack to try to rectify matters. The next Sunday, once the preliminaries were over, she stood before the class of five-year-olds and asked, 'Who can tell me what is gray and furry and lives in a eucalyptus tree?' 'The children were completely taken by surprise by this totally unexpected and new approach. They thought there must be a catch and stared blankly at the teacher. 'Come on,' she coaxed, 'someone must know. What is gray, furry, lives in a eucalyptus tree -- has a black leathery nose and beady eyes?' Still no answer. 'Oh, surely you know. ... It lives in a eucalyptus tree; eats eucalyptus leaves; it has big beady eyes and furry ears.' Silence. She was about to switch tactics and to go on to something else when a small girl gradually raised her hand in the air with much hesitation. Delighted, the teacher asked, 'Yes, Suzie?' The child replied, 'I know it's Jesus, but it sounds like a Koala!'" (Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture, Graeme Goldsworthy, p. xi).

There is a tendency about that which is very correct about that answer. Jesus is so much our topic, that even the children pick up on how you can answer "Jesus" to any question and have a fighting chance that you will be correct! I've seen this as well. Each Sunday after I preach, I have the privilege of spending time with the children among us. Every Sunday, we go over my sermon, talking through the notes that I have prepared for them. There have been many times in which I have asked a question that was on my notes, where some of the children are confused and don't know the answer. When they are confused, they often answer by saying, "Jesus."

In many ways, this is exactly right. Jesus is the answer to every question. Jesus is the answer to every difficulty. Jesus is the solution to every problem. This is what Paul was saying. It's not mystical knowledge, it's Jesus. It's not Jewish laws, it's Jesus. It's not severe treatment of the body, it's Jesus.

In many ways, however, we can get it wrong, by emphasizing too many other peripheral things. We can focus upon what we know. We can focus upon the doctrines we teach, as if there was life in the teaching. We can focus upon what we do. We can focus upon ministry methods. We can focus upon style of music. We can focus upon the leadership structure of our church. We can focus upon our efforts at pursuing purity. It's not that these things are bad in and of themselves. In fact, they are very important. What's bad is when they become the main thing and receive the main focus. Jesus is the main thing. Every issue in the church and in our lives should be governed by Jesus Christ. That includes our thanksgiving. It should be governed by Jesus Christ.

3. Thanksgiving should be expressed through Jesus.

Thanksgiving should also be expressed through Jesus. This comes straight from Colossians 3:17, "giving thanks *through* Him to God the Father." It is through Jesus that we have access to God the Father. When we get to God, the Father, we get there through Jesus Christ. "There is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim. 3:5)

Jesus is our high priest. When we pray, He represents us before the Father. There are two reasons why we go through Jesus to the Father: because of who Jesus is, and because of what Jesus did.

a) Because of who Jesus is

I believe that there is no better place in all of the Bible to see who Jesus Christ is than in the first chapter of the book that we are in. Turn over in your Bible to Colossians 1. I want to begin reading in verse 15, ...

And He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation. For by Him all things were created, [both] in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. (Col. 1:15-18)

This passage places all of creation in perspective. It speaks of the Creator. It speaks of the Creator's role in the creating. It speaks of the Creator's purpose of the creation. It speaks of the Creator's role in sustaining the creation. And then, it moves wondrously to the church. It speaks of the role of Jesus Christ in the church. It speaks of the role of Jesus in redemption. It speaks of Jesus Christ and His glorification. Let's take a few moments and pick these verses apart. Verse 15 begins, "He is the image of the invisible God." If you chase down the pronouns, you will discover that this is talking about Jesus. Jesus "is the image of the invisible God," which means that He is God. Jesus wasn't "made in the image of God" as we are. Jesus was the image of God, Himself. And yet, He came into the creation. The next phrase says that Jesus was "the first-born" of all creation. This phrase doesn't mean that Jesus was the first thing created, as the Jehovah's Witnesses would have us to believe. It means that of everything in the created order, Jesus was the supreme One. Verse 16 speaks about how everything was created by Him. Again, if you trace down the pronouns, this is Jesus. Jesus is the creator of the world. Next time you read in your Bible, Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth," you might just as easily read it, "In the beginning, Jesus created the heavens and the earth." But, it's not merely the heaven and the earth that He created. Verse 16 tells us that "by Him all things were created, both in the heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created by Him and for Him." The created realm goes far beyond what you can see and touch and hear and taste. There is another realm of this creation, which includes all of the angelic beings.

We don't know how many angels Jesus created. But, when you read the Biblical account, you get the sense that there are a vast number of them. In Revelation 5, we read of the angels worshiping the Lord around the throne of God. John simply writes that "the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands" (Rev. 5:11). When you start to do the math on this, it is incredible. Thousands of thousands is several million. Myriads of myriads is greater still. Some say that a myriad is 10,000. We are talking hundreds of millions (perhaps even billions) of angels worshiping around the throne.

Have you ever been in a giant stadium that was packed with people? I remember one time when I was living in California, I had a chance to attend a UCLA football game. They play their home games in the Rose Bowl, which seats over 106,000 people. It was the biggest assembly of people that I have ever seen. But, to get to the number of angelic beings that John was worshiping around the throne, you would need thousands of Rose Bowls to have enough seats to seat them all. I say all of that to say this: If you think that the size of our creation is big, there is another realm of existence, of which we know so very little that very well may dwarf what we can see. And those angels around the throne are all worshiping Jesus. In Revelation 5:12, we read that they were "saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.'" I hope that this gives you a sense of how great Jesus is. When you think of Jesus, you might think of Him as a man that walked upon the earth. And certainly, He was a man. But, when He walked upon the earth, the mere taking of a body was an expression of His immense humility. When the layers are peeled back, and you see Jesus for who He really is, you see that Jesus created the universe and is worthy of all glory and honor and praise.

In fact, this is the sense of the last two words of Colossians 1:16, ... "all things have been created by Him and *for Him*." Jesus is the creator. We are the created. He created us for a purpose. He created us for Himself. He was the carpenter, building his own house. He was the furniture maker, building his own chair. He was the artist, painting a canvas for his own house. He was the mechanic, putting together his own car. We have been created for Jesus. This is why it is so disgraceful for any of the creation to reject Jesus. We were created for Him. When we pursue other things, rather than the great reason we were created, it mocks our creator. This passage in Colossians 1 goes on and on and on and on about who Jesus is.

Verse 17 says the "He is before all things." This simply refers to Jesus existing before time began. Verse 17 continues, "and in Him all things hold together." Have you ever wondered how it is that our planet doesn't break up? Have you ever wondered how our ecosystem maintains its balance? It's because Jesus controls gravity. It's because Jesus holds life in place. When Paul preached to the Athenians, he said it this way, "in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Verse 18, "He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first born from the dead." Jesus not only rules over all of creation. Jesus also rules over the church. Lest you think that Rock Valley Bible Church is simply another club that likes to get together and have fun, I'm here to tell you otherwise. We are an organization that Jesus has built by willingly dying upon a cross and raising again from the dead, granting forgiveness to those who believe. He does this, "so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything" (verse 18). Jesus ought to receive the chief honor in all of our lives. Jesus ought to be the chief thought in all of our thoughts. Jesus ought to be the best song that we sing. Jesus ought to be the greatest joy that we have.

It brings us all back to our verse, Colossians 3:17, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." We give thanks through Jesus, because of who Jesus is.

b) Because of what Jesus did

We also give thanks because of what Jesus did. Thanksgiving is an interesting thing. It is always directed toward the past. It is always directed toward the kindness of another for you. It always comes about because you feel undeserving of what you have received. It always comes when you receive something that you really want. This is the case in the cross of our Lord Jesus. What Jesus did for us on the cross took place in the past. Some 2,000 years ago to be exact. What Jesus did for us on the cross was an expression of unbelievable kindness to us. Certainly, it was all undeserved. And as we live our lives and see our failures more and more clearly, the cross becomes more and more precious to us. We really want it! If you ever get to the point where the cross of Christ becomes common place, you will be unthankful. We have a need to continually be amazed at what took place at the cross.

Let's pull some verses from Colossians that demonstrate what a great work that Jesus did for us. Turn over to chapter 2. I want for us to look at verses 13-15.

And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us [and] which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Col. 2:13-15)

The picture that Paul paints for us is pretty grim in verse 13. He said, "you were dead in your transgressions." It means that we were unresponsive to spiritual truth. It means that we loved our sin. It means that we willfully indulged the desires of the flesh. And yet, the good news comes in the next phrase, "He made you alive together with Him." This is the picture of salvation that the Bible gives us. We were dead and helpless until God made us alive in Christ. God gives life. God abolishes all accusers.

Being released from prison is not enough. God has to deal with our offenses to His glory. He has abolished all of our accusers.

i) He abolished our sins.

The sins that we had committed were wiped clean through the blood of the cross. This is unbelievably good news. If you could only see clearly how great an offense your sin is before God, you would have no problem giving thanks to the Lord for what He has done.

ii) He abolished our debt.

The law of God acts as our accuser. Every sin that we ever commit is recorded in heaven. As we live, the accumulation of this debt grows and grows and grows. If you take the name of the Lord your God in vain, it is marked down in heaven. If you lust after another man or woman, it is marked down in heaven. If you deceive another person with your words, it is marked down in heaven. According to God's law, there are all of these decrees, which are hostile to us. Every time you violate them, there is a tick-mark placed right beside the transgression, which indicates a debt that you owe to God. The debt that you owe to God for your sins is monstrous and huge. You have no hope of every paying it! It is larger than any credit card debt that you ever imagined.

But, God has wiped them away. He has erased all of the tick marks against us! They no longer accuse us. How did God do this? He did it at the cross. We read that "He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." Perhaps you remember when Jesus was crucified, Pilate had a sign made up that described the crime for which Jesus died. He was "King of the Jews" (Matt. 27:37). This was the custom of the day. The crime committed was nailed above the cross. One might say, "murderer" or "thief" or "adulterer." Thus, when you saw a victim hanging on a cross, you could simply read the offense for which the man was dying.

Now, picture this. It is beautiful! Though Jesus was put to death for being the "King of the Jews," God nailed another sign to the top of the cross. He nailed a sign including and detailing all of the sins of those who would believe on Jesus. Your sin and mine was nailed to the cross of Christ. It was there that he suffered for our sins. It was there that the Lord Jesus "became sin" so that we might "become righteous" (2 Cor. 5:21). And thus, the debt that we owed to the transgressions of the law which we have committed have been abolished! They have been taken out of the way! They have been removed.

And now I ask you, was this not an act of incredible kindness? Such an act deserves our genuine expressions of thankfulness to God. I've heard it said that when you consider your sin before God, it's not as bad as you think it is, it's far worse. And when you consider the forgiveness that we possess in Christ, it's not as good as you think it is, it's far better. May we all give thanks to Him this Thanksgiving!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 21, 2004 by Steve Brandon.
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