



Dear Friends,

Saying “grace” before a meal is a beautiful Christian ritual. But why is the prayer before eating a meal called “grace”? Why not just call it a thanksgiving prayer? Isn’t that a more accurate description? Isn’t the term “grace” unhelpful Christian jargon?

I like that we call the thanksgiving prayer before a meal, “grace”, because it recognises that whatever we receive from God is a gift, including the food on our plates. You see, I thank the serving staff at the café when they bring me a coffee. But the coffee they set before me isn’t a gift. I’ve paid for it. I thank Kathryn for the meals she makes. But even Kathryn’s meals aren’t completely gratuitous. If Kathryn cooks, I often set the table or wash the dishes. And it’s usually me who has purchased the groceries that Kathryn then uses to prepare the meal. So, in some way, I contribute to the meal. That’s not the case when it comes to God.

In fact, everything I have is a gift from God. James 1:17 says:

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Saying thanks to God is more than being polite for a kindness he has shown us. To thank God is to confess deep truths about God, us, and our relation to God.

Giving thanks to God recognises who he is as our creator, provider and redeemer. He is our life-giver. He provides for our every need, including our daily bread. Above all else, he has gifted us with every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus so that we enjoy fellowship with the Blessed Trinity.

When I say thanks to God, I am also acknowledging who I am. I am a creature who is completely dependent upon God. The Apostle Paul expresses that idea in this way in Acts 17:28: “For in him we live and move and have our being.” Every breath, each movement, and our very lives are precious gifts from God, and apart from him, we would not be, exist or act.

So, to thank God is to speak truth about reality itself. We are not self-made. We are not self-reliant. We are not necessary to the world’s existence. We are created beings. We have limits. We need others.

John Webster says to thank God is a sign that we have been saved. It signifies we have been converted from ingratitude to thanksgiving. Above all else, to thank God is to express our gratitude to him for his amazing grace in Christ Jesus. Webster says:

Thanksgiving is thus rooted in grace: to live in gratitude to God is to live out of God’s grace. And grace is not a thing but a person and an action. It’s the personal presence and action of God...This God, in his threefold work of grace, is the one who comes to us in his great act of friendship, wiping out our sins, reconciling us to himself, restoring us to fellowship, and setting us free to be who we are made to be: God’s thankful people.

There is no such person as a thankless Christian. So, I encourage you to practice giving thanks every day to God. If you have a meal each day, there is no excuse for not thanking God each day. And while expressing gratitude for the food you’re about to eat, also thank God for his many other gifts, especially “his indescribable gift” of the Lord Jesus (2 Corinthians 9:15).

God Bless,
Mark Adams