



Thanksgiving

Rainbow Colors

A Psalm for Thank-offering.

*Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth.
Serve the Lord with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful singing.
Know that the Lord Himself is God;
It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves;
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
Enter His gates with thanksgiving
And His courts with praise.
Give thanks to Him, bless His name.
For the Lord is good;
His lovingkindness is everlasting
And His faithfulness to all generations.*

Psalm 100

THERE WAS A TIME when I drew a sharp, impermeable distinction between three aspects of our communion with God. There was a time when I would not permit the supremacy of “worship” to become diluted with the more pedestrian yet imperative “thanksgiving”; “praise,” for me, dwelt somewhere in-between. It was my considered position that these three pathways of upward expression should never intermingle. To do so would be the mark of a lazy, too-casual relationship with God.

This approach (based on Scripture, and not just my own) is incremental. Thanksgiving is the first step on the ladder rising toward heaven. It is earthy, soil-bound, bearing a faint whiff of selfishness. It expresses gratitude for what the Lord has done in a life—but is contingent on His actually *doing* something for me. It centers on the tangible, demonstrable benefits of having a relationship with an all-powerful God. Thanksgiving is a courteous, appropriate—indeed, dutiful—expression of appreciation. It is higher than, but in the same vein as saying “thank you” for a birthday gift, a helping hand, a return of change at the checkout stand.

I will give thanks to You,
for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Wonderful are Your works,
And my soul knows it very well.

Psalm 139:14

Praise is the next rung on the ladder—higher than thanksgiving, but still lower than worship. Praise is worship tinged with the gratitude of thanksgiving, or thanksgiving ratcheted higher because of the fragrant aroma of a rising offering. Praise is a lower grade of worship, based on the Lord's deeds, rather than on Him alone.

From birth I have relied on you;
you brought me forth from my mother's womb.
I will ever praise you.

Psalm 71:6 NIV

The third and highest rung on this ladder is undiluted, specific worship: pure worship, bearing no trace of appreciation for God's deeds, but focused entirely on adoration of Him. Real worship is an act of giving—giving reverence and honor and glory to a superior being. For the Christian, that superior Being is the triune Godhead. We do not worship in order to get, or because we have gotten. We do not worship out of gratitude, to say "thank you" for something pleasant and agreeable He has done for us, but we worship to adore our God strictly for *who He is*—detached from what He has done for us.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name;
worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.

Psalm 29:2 NIV

In the Old Testament, however, the words translated “thanksgiving” and “give thanks” (*todah* and *yadah*, respectively) are unambiguously associated with reverent worship. The concept of thanksgiving in the New Testament is more akin to our modern idea of “giving thanks,” but the words so translated in the Old include the picture of a supplicant worshiping with outstretched hands.

Thanksgiving and praise go together, because the Lord reveals Himself both in His perfection and acts.

Willem A. VanGemeren

[“Thus says the Lord, ‘Yet again there will be heard in this place] the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, “Give thanks to the Lord of hosts, For the Lord is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting”; and of those who bring a thank offering into the house of the Lord. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at first,’ says the Lord.”

Jeremiah 33:11

The Lord is a God of order and reason. If there were only one color to our relationship with Him, then there would be only one all-encompassing word for thanksgiving/praise/worship. But there is not. A believer's relationship with God is painted in a rainbow of hues. There are, indeed, differences between thanksgiving and praise, between praise and worship, so there are different words assigned to these separate but related concepts.

But we needlessly restrict our communion with God when we erect impermeable walls to segregate these rainbow colors, for all three have in common the same beginning point: us, and the same end: Him. Look at a rainbow; can you tell where one color ends and the next begins?

Here in the midlands of the United States the colors of Thanksgiving are warm: trees painted deep, radiant oranges and yellows, burnished umber and glowing reds. It is a time of harvest, with mounds of orange pumpkins, variegated winter squash, fields an endless stream of yellowed and parchment-dry corn waiting to be gathered in.

One cannot dwell in a land of such bounty without giving thanks. The beauty and abundance of the harvest lift us out of ourselves to express appreciation for a God so generous and kind.

But as we lift our gaze heavenward, does not our thanksgiving flow naturally into praise, and then, as we contemplate the character and holiness of a God who would so graciously pour out His blessings upon us, does not our praise rise higher, even into worship?

*Now thank we all our God,
With heart, and hands, and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom His world rejoices;
Who from our mother's arms
Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love,
And still is ours today.*

*All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns
With them in highest heaven,
The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now,
And shall be evermore.*

Martin Rinckart