

Father, may the words of my lips and the meditations of all our hearts conform to your will and your Word. Amen.

Let's consider the visit of the Wise Men to Jesus' home in Nazareth.

- Legend has it that the Wise Men were 3... or 30. Matthew doesn't say.
- They came from present-day Iran OR were descended from Adam's son Seth and started their journey in present-day China (biblearchaeology.org)
- Their gifts were traditional honors for a King or for the burial of a King... or even for the arthritis of a King (biblearchaeology.org)... or all three
- The Magi were "the silent ones" who were always in prayer OR were astrologers... or both.



At any rate, whoever they were, specifically, they had the courage of their convictions – the conviction that a Savior would come born of a Woman who would crush Evil's head and reap a harvest of Mankind. They had a philosophy – a doctrine – of who the newborn King would be and they had a practice that they actually followed.

So, here at the beginning of 2021, what are your convictions? What are your practices? The theme of this sermon is 'Gratefulness'. We will talk just a little bit about gratefulness and then transition into a discussion of Doctrine and Practice; what Christians should be grateful for and grateful to and how Christians should express that gratitude.

Currently, in Psychology and [Neuroscience](#), not to mention New Age Humanism or [Pantheism](#), 'gratefulness' is an emotion you should cough up so that you can access higher levels of vibrations – really – and higher vibrating emotions all associated with the [Law of Attraction](#) or Karma.

These scientists and quacks are not exposing new and better ways of living, but perhaps exposing how God has made us and why Love and Gratefulness not only honor Him, but have a corresponding effect on us personally. It might also explain why people can be so easily deluded, but it does not show that our love for Christ is just an accident of our brain chemistry!

I will not be talking about a new age trick to counter bad vibrations because gratefulness is not a metaphysical trick, it is a human emotion that must be conferred upon another being. Gratefulness is not just a way to trick your own brain into flooding you with tasty chemicals – that is what a lost humanist would tell you – No, we, as Christians, are grateful to a Person and that gratefulness carries a lovely burden of responsibility that needs to be expressed in our feelings, in our thoughts, and actions – our *practices* to honor the One we are grateful to.

So, too Paul in the Book of Ephesians. The first three chapters of Ephesians cover Doctrine or WHY we should be grateful; – the last three are about Practice, or HOW to be grateful.

There is no compelling doctrine without practice and no practice worthy of the name without a doctrine behind it.

For example: an acquaintance of mine has a remarkable *practice* – each day he is “grateful”; grateful for his life, his family, his health, & his business. I asked, “To *whom* are you grateful?” He didn’t know. He supposed he was grateful to the universe – he wasn’t really sure.

His *practice* of being ‘grateful’ has no coherent *doctrine* or philosophy behind it, so it is just feeling about what he should do. If a Christian thinks and reads only the practices of his belief (the second half of Ephesians) without the beautiful promises of the doctrine in the first, he or she will eventually reject the practices of:

1. Speaking truth
2. Submitting to one’s husband
3. Avoiding immorality
4. Obeying parents
5. Obeying masters

...all practices that demand discipline and a higher purpose than just what we might think is a “good idea”; otherwise why would you engage in such inconvenient practices??

1. Speaking truth is one of the most difficult practices to bring into your life
2. We submit to no one! This has even been removed from most marriage vows
3. Immorality? What, exactly is immoral?
4. Obey parents and masters? Are you kidding? They must earn my respect first! (But that is not what scripture says – quite the opposite)

There must be a compelling and substantial doctrine with a higher purpose behind the practices!

So, back to being grateful: Gratefulness is reciprocal – there is no reason to be *grateful* to your Christmas Tree. It didn’t grow for you, it had no intention of being cut down, it cannot think or wish or hope.

Gratefulness is personal: so, to Whom are we grateful and why would be grateful?

In chapter 3, we see Paul talks about the Mystery (*mysterion*) of Christ. This is a mystery that can be found in the Genesis story all the way through the Gospels: that there would be two Seeds – one of the Serpent and one of the Woman and that the Seed of the Woman would bring an end to the Serpent and repair the tear that Sin has made in the fabric of Gods plans.

The red thread of the Mystery of Christ can be seen through all of scripture and it was manifest and accomplished in Christ Jesus and His atoning and sacrificial work. This was revealed since the foundations of the world.

But there was a second mystery revealed to Paul: this is the mystery that he speaks of in verse six: “This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs *together with Israel*, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 4:6) Here is a mystery kept since before the foundation of the world!

This does not mean that God’s promises of blessing and purposes for His people Israel are null and void. But this does mean that there is no Greek or Jew in Christ, just as there is no male and female in Christ, (Galatians 3:28) even though there are obviously males and females with their complementary God-given roles.

God revealing His mysteries is one thing, but to reveal them to the dogs and sinners – the Gentiles, those without ‘fathers’ that they would be considered as first-born sons with full rights to inheritance – well, if we didn’t read it in scripture we would have to say that it is too good to be true.

In other words, if that was not revealed Doctrine, - revealed Truth – we would never have thought up the Practice that goes with it.

In Ephesians chapters one to three, Paul lays out a philosophy, a Hope, and a Calling that no one’s wildest dreams had approached... We are to be seated in Heavenly Realms far above all rule and authority, power and dominion?! ...and in the chapters following our reading today, he spells out how we are to stand with Christ, the relationships of Husband and Wife as a reflection of Christ and His Church, Master, Slave, and Elder while simultaneously standing by the assertion that we are all one – in Unity – with Christ in God!

This is a doctrine, a philosophy, that feels like it is too good to be true. It has, not only a higher purpose, but THE High Purpose as its object and we – like the Wise Men – are obliged to put the purposes of our doctrine into practice for the Most High God...

And this is how we can show our gratefulness to the Person of God and the reasons, the truth, and the doctrine he revealed to Paul in order to live a life worthy of this calling. It starts the next chapter in Ephesians (Ephesians 4:2):

- To be completely humble and gentle; without sacrificing the demands our Lord puts on us by submitting to the forces of a society that glories in its sin.
 - C.S. Lewis said, *“Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but it’s thinking of yourself less.”*
- To be patient, bearing with one another in love; keeping in mind that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength (Mark 12:30-31); never using a humanistic love to justify a weak stand for the doctrine and practice our Lord has provided us.
 - Ellicot’s Biblical [commentary](#) tells us that the word ‘bearing’ – “bearing with one another in love” – is a Greek word expressing “intensity” of thought and exertion to secure a thing not easily obtained. There is struggle in this practice!
- And finally: To make every effort to keep the Unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace; again, peace between brothers and sisters that never compromises the Hope of our calling or violates God’s clear will in His Word.
 - The evangelical Christian author and speaker, Joni Eareckson Tada says: *“Believers are never told to become one; we already are one and are expected to act like it.”*

Humility, Gentleness, Patience, Love all in a Unity glued together by Peace.

This is what God asks of you and of me and in our gratefulness it should be our *pleasure* to struggle towards these practices. They are the height of Wisdom, they flows from a Doctrine ‘to good to be true’, and they deserve to be practiced by those who would call themselves followers of Christ!

Let us pray:

Father, we follow your Christ and we are so very grateful for the gifts He brings us. We would do these things and show our gratefulness to You for the salvation made available to us. Help us through Your Word and Your Holy Spirit to follow these practices:

- Help us to be humble, when we most want to be haughty.... And we know with whom we need to be more humble
- Help us to be Gentle, even to those we think don't deserve it.
- Help us to be Patient, in a world that prods us to go ever faster.
- Help us to Love – Love You, *first and foremost* – above all else
- Help us to Love our Brothers and Sisters in Christ and keep the Unity through Peace that so typifies the practice of rightly following the blessed doctrine of Your Word

Father, send us in to this New Year with a renewed sense of the glories of Your Word and the responsibility of following that Word. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.