

amazement of and appreciation for the Lord's goodness. A truly obedient, thankful person realizes that his works could never satisfy a contractual relationship between himself and God.

Isn't there still a danger inherent in gracious giving? We've all heard that if you don't work for something it won't be important to you. Sometimes parents are reluctant to *give* things to their children for fear that they won't value the gift. There is a risk in giving. That's the point that God makes in Deuteronomy 8. Thankfully, this is a risk God is willing to take.

Everything we have is a gift from him. You didn't build up your business by your own skill and sweat; God gave you success. You aren't praiseworthy because you are intelligent; your wisdom is a gift that God has given you in order that you might faintly reflect him. Don't think too highly of your morality; God has worked through you every good thing you have ever done (Heb. 13:20-21).

He has given us so much. Most importantly he has given us his own dear Son. We didn't earn Christ's righteousness. We didn't even get him because we chose him. He was given to us (Gal. 2:20). Now he says to us, especially in this Thanksgiving season, "Do not forget the Lord your God..." (v. 11).

<sup>i</sup> Russia had 12.1 million immigrants according to the World Bank. Saudi Arabian immigrants sent \$14.3 billion out of the country. Accessed on November 20, 2009 from <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPROSPECTS/Resources/334934-1181678518183/Top10.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> From "Human Development Index" on [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com).

<sup>iii</sup> According to the American Council on Exercise. Accessed on November 20, 2009 from <http://www.smartmoney.com/Investing/Economy/Giving-Thanks-for-Americas-Prosperity/>

<sup>iv</sup> *Ibid.*

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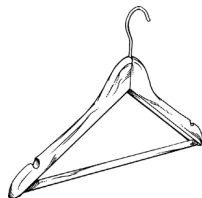
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**(Invitation to) November Events**  
@ Covenant Reformed Church

**Nov. 5 (8:30-1pm)**  
**Open Closet**

*Providing free clothes and other household items to those in need.*



**Nov. 30 (6 PM)**  
**Thanksgiving Eve Service**

*"O, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good"*  
*(Psalm 107:1).*



# PROCLAMATION

Promoting robust, religious thought in the tradition of orthodox, historic Christianity  
November 2011, Issue 29

## BLESSING THE LORD ON A FULL STOMACH: LEARNING WHAT IT MEANS TO "NEVER FORGET!"

BY WILLIAM BOEKESTEIN

Sometimes ordinary words can be transformed and infused with new meaning by epochal events in history. Take, for example, two words which have become ubiquitous on bumper stickers, shirts, hats and other memorabilia over the last ten years.

"Never Forget."

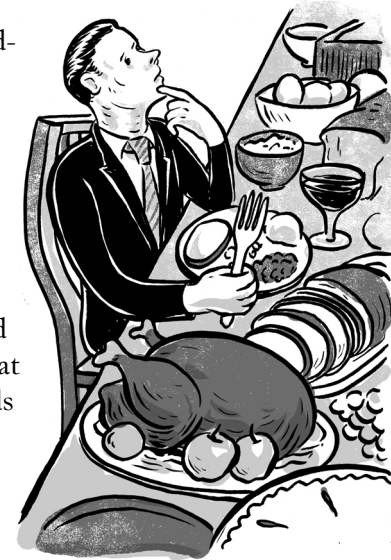
These words immediately evoke memories of the September 11 terror attacks. They serve as a rallying cry to keep fresh not only the memory of 9/11 but also the response of humanitarianism and national good will that followed. Two words can say a lot.

It's no wonder that one of the simplest messages of the Bible is: "Remember." And it's no wonder that word crystallizes a dominant theme in the book of Deuteronomy; it is used more times there than in any other Bible book except the Psalms.

The book of Deuteronomy is a record of the last words that God spoke through Moses to the people of Israel before they entered into the Promised Land. In chapter eight, God reminds the people that they were about to receive a land for which they

had not worked. God was giving the people "a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which [the people] would eat bread without scarcity, in

which [they] would lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills [the people] could dig copper" (vv. 7-9). All of this would be a gift from God.



Being infinitely wise, God knew how easy it would be for the Israelites to forget him once their “ship came in.” So he warned them, as they stood on the cusp of the Promised Land: “Never forget!”

This 3,000 year old warning to remember God is especially applicable to us this Thanksgiving season. The whole point, after all, of Thanksgiving Day is to help us “never forget.”

### Reason to Give Thanks

After enumerating the blessings which the Israelites are about to receive, God gives this instruction: “When you have eaten and are full, then you will bless the Lord your God...” (v. 10).

If Deuteronomy 8 applies to anyone today, it applies to residents of the United States. On a purely physical level America is the land flowing with milk and honey. Yes, there are many in our country who live on less. But when the state of America’s poor is compared with the plight of the world’s poor we get the point: We have eaten and are full!

It is no coincidence that America continues to be the world’s immigration destination of choice. In 2005 there were 38.4 million immigrants living in America. The country hosting the second most immigrants in that year had less than one third of that number. In 2006 immigrants in America sent more than \$42 billion back to their home countries, again, three times the amount of the next highest remittance sending country.<sup>i</sup> Despite the recent economic downturn the U.S. still ranked near the top of the 2010 Human Development Index

which measures and ranks life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living for countries worldwide.<sup>ii</sup>

When it comes to gauging our prosperity, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. This Thanksgiving Day the average American will consume 3,000 calories and 229 grams of fat; more than many people from other countries take in over several days.<sup>iii</sup> We have eaten and are full!

In this respect, are we not in the very position as were the Israelites of old? Sometimes the greatest roadblock to giving thanks is a failure to acknowledge what we have to be thankful for. Take a moment to take inventory of your blessings. Put yourself into the context of Deuteronomy 8.

Another roadblock to thanksgiving is a failure to recognize its importance and the dangers of forgetfulness. That’s why God follows up his instructions for thanksgiving with these words: “*Beware*, lest you forget...”

### Warning Not to Forget

Warning signs don’t always serve to reveal unknown dangers. Sometimes they function to reinforce one’s appreciation for known dangers. Recently, my wife and I were driving on a very serpentine road along the edge of a cliff. We knew it was important to pay attention to the road. But the occasional warning signs still helped keep us alert.

We are so prone to forget the source of our blessings. It is too easy for us to forget how atrocious ingratitude is. We need to be warned.

The “beware” of verse 11 is given real teeth in verse 19. “...If you by any means forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish.” Of course, the Israelites did forget God. They did serve false gods and worship idols. And God did destroy them. They were sent into exile and their wealth was consumed in conquest. In light of this, Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10 should arrest our attention. “Now these things became our example, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted...[these things] were written for our admonition, upon whom the end of the ages have come: (vv. 6,11). Are we heeding the example? Or have we forgotten?”

According to a recent article in *Smartmoney* magazine, “The prosperity enjoyed in America over the years is a direct result of a commitment to capitalism... In America, success has been earned, not taken or given away.”<sup>iv</sup> I think we understand what the writer is saying in advocating capitalism over socialism or communism. Still, it’s a bold statement that sounds a lot like God’s complaint against the ungrateful person who says, “My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth” (v. 17).

Is money, affluence and reputation the religion of this country? Coming closer to home, are they expressions of the secret religion of our own hearts? How often do we pat ourselves on the backs and say, “I’m really something.”? Do we not forget the Lord? Do our prayers reveal our

gratitude or our greed? God says, “Beware that you do not forget me.”

But what does thanksgiving look like? This question is answered in verse 11.

### How to Give Thanks

God tells us how to give thanks by describing those who don’t. Those who forget him neglect his “commandments, his judgments, and his statutes...” Conversely, God says that we demonstrate thankful hearts by obeying his voice (Deut. 8:20). Obedience shows where the heart is; it is the evidence of faith (James 2:18).

Contrary to the spirit of our age, keeping God’s law is not to be confused with legalism. Jesus condemned the legalism of the Pharisees who gave the impression of obedience only to mask the corruption that flourished within (Matt. 23:25-26) and who made the commands of men into doctrine (Matt. 15:9).

One of the marks of a Christian is a desire to serve God *according to his Word*. This means that we submit ourselves to God’s Word so that it can rebuke our sins, show us the right way to live and train us in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). Those who remember the Lord submit to his Word saying, “Not my will but thine be done.”

Far from reducing true religion to a contractual relationship of works, Deuteronomy 8 actually exalts the glories of God’s grace. He says to his people, “I am going to bless you beyond your wildest imaginations, indeed, well beyond your deserving. True obedience is the overflow of a heart that has been flooded with