



# BULLETIN of THE NORTH TEXAS CHURCH OF FREETHOUGHT

The Fellowship Of Unbelievers

25 YEARS OLD !

Beginning Religion Over Again Since 1994

Volume 25 Number 11

Sunday, November 3, 2019

## GRATITUDE FOR FREETHINKERS

Lexico.com, an online dictionary, returns the following for the word “thank” and its congeners:

**THANK:** Express gratitude to (someone), especially by saying ‘Thank you.’

**THANKFUL:** Pleased and relieved. [and/or] Expressing gratitude and relief.

**THANKSGIVING:** The expression of gratitude, especially to God. [and/or] (in North America) an annual national holiday ... )

“Gratitude” and “relief” refer to these:

**GRATITUDE:** The quality of being thankful; readiness to show appreciation for and to return kindness.

**RELIEF:** A feeling of reassurance and relaxation following release from anxiety or distress.

And these terms also seem to relate:

**GRATEFUL:** Feeling or showing an appreciation for something done or received. [and/or] Received or experienced with gratitude; welcome.

**GRATIFY:** Give (someone) pleasure or satisfaction. [and/or] Indulge or satisfy (a desire)

**APPRECIATION:** Recognition and enjoyment of the good qualities of someone or something.

**SATISFACTION:** Fulfillment of one's wishes, expectations, or needs, or the pleasure derived from this.

What people mean by thanking and thankfulness are clearly complex, multifaceted – and therefore interesting! – subjects. They are much more interesting than the faith-based believers' insistence that Thanksgiving can only be about gratitude towards their deities. Indeed, since even evil and unpleasant things are “ordained by God” and “all things work together for good,” it follows that “God” should be thanked for the unwelcome as well

as the welcome. Famine, disaster, death and disease should be considered divine blessings. Yet if everything should be accepted with gratitude then there is nothing that can be appreciated or truly enjoyed.

This is only the logical consequence of theists. View that humanity's “earthly existence” is infinitesimally small – and therefore in practical terms essentially meaningless – compared to eternity. It well shows how, to paraphrase the late Christopher Hitchens, supernaturalism poisons everything.

Considered reasonably, we see that thanking and related ideas have to do with what is good and bad. They concern values. They have to do with what gives pleasure, what is satisfying, what is desirable, and/or what we conclude, after careful thought, that we ought to prefer. Thus, to be grateful is to have a recognition of our values. It is to realize what is valuable to us regardless of whether anyone else sees the same value – or any value – in it. Therefore it can be not only highly subjective but may change with time and circumstances. But a sense of gratitude need not be directed towards anyone else because it can be specific to and entirely contained within oneself.

When we are grateful to someone else it suggests a sense of shared values, that the someone to whom we are grateful recognizes and honors at least something of our own values. There are parallel meanings and significance for those who are thanked. All sorts of other things flow from these including a sense of being valued by others, of having one's value and values appreciated, of personal attachment, and even of such things as obligation, entitlement, duty, and debt. Curiously, it is possible to be grateful for what may be taken to be mistreatment by others, whether it was intended as such or not, when it turns out to have been beneficial in

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some way or we come to understand that it was not malicious. It is an instance – and there are many – in which we eventually come to have new perspectives. This is part of personal growth. Sometimes we even learn important lessons for which we are grateful at the hands of those who intended to mistreat us. Our thoughts and feelings as we experience and subsequently revisit and reinterpret such things contribute powerfully to becoming who we are and will be. They are important ingredients in following Socrates' advice to “Know Thyself.”

Scientifically, we can thank the fact that we are a highly social species for our feelings of gratitude and the inclination to express them as we do. It is part of the social glue that we need to survive as humans. Yes, it is “only,” at the most basic level, a matter of brain structure and neurotransmitters, and, evolutionarily, an adaptation to the survival strategies our primate ancestors evolved. But this does not make meaningless and should not prevent our appreciation of the subjective experience of gratitude. It may well have health benefits. More importantly, it is an intrinsic part of our humanity and one that we cannot help but try to make sense of.

It is a much greater difficulty for those who connect gratitude with the obligation to thank a deity. For it only makes sense to ask: “What does a deity need with gratitude?” We know why we humans have it and need it. But where did “God” get “his?” The more that anthropology connects with evolutionary biology including cognitive evolution, the greater the problem there is for the idea of an anthropomorphic deity in whose image humans were supposedly created. How could an uncreated eternal and omnipotent “God” have come to have a need for love, companionship, praise or worship? There are plenty of animal species that do without these needs and, importantly, their way of survival is mostly solitary and self-sufficient, just as “God’s” was for an eternity before “he” got to creating angels and people to love and glorify “him.”

Gratitude is a challenge and a puzzle, but one that Freethinkers can savor while learning to make sense of it over and over again. For theists it is a stumbling block that can never be properly understood in theological terms.

✍ Importantly, dictionaries do not define words or give their “true meanings.” Dictionaries are guides to usage, to how people use words and what they mean in using them. Dictionaries are not linguistic rule-books.

**All NTCOF events can be found through our website calendar, or our meetup page, from which you can RSVP, at: - [www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought](http://www.meetup.com/church-of-freethought) - JOIN THE NTCOF MEETUP GROUP !!!**

**Social Luncheon:** Today, immediately after our Service, join us for lunch and discussion at the Jason’s Deli on MacArthur Blvd just south of I-635, at 7707 N MacArthur Blvd, phone (972) 432-0555.

**Freethought Salon:** Discuss today’s service topic or other conundrums on most non-first Sundays of the month, over breakfast/coffee (or not)(and you can bring whatever you want to eat!), in the atrium – usually towards the back – of the Embassy Suites DFW Airport North – on Bass Pro Drive in Grapevine beginning at 10:00 AM.

**Game Night:** Most Friday nights at the IHOP on 2310 Stemmons Trail (I-35), near Northwest Highway (Loop 12). Plan to arrive at about 7:30 PM, and stay late playing Imperial 2030, Dominion, Terraforming Mars, Le Havre, Caverna, and other fun games!

**Have Another Idea?** Email or call! Read bulletins, articles and post on the FORUM under SERVICES at [www.churchoffreethought.org](http://www.churchoffreethought.org) LIKE US at [facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/](https://www.facebook.com/northtexaschurchoffreethought/) and sign up for our Twitter feed at [www.twitter.com/ntcof/](https://www.twitter.com/ntcof/) !

## PLANNED FOR NEXT MONTH “MYTHS WE LIVE BY”

> Sunday, December 1, 2019 <  
**HERE at the Hawthorn Suites  
DFW Airport North  
at 10:30 AM**

**THANK YOU !!**  
**FOR YOUR TIME and**  
**FINANCIAL SUPPORT**  
**of the NTCOF !!**  
**It is needed, appreciated**  
**and Tax-Deductible !**

### The North Texas Church of Freethought The Fellowship of Unbelievers

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