

Colossians 1:12-14
“Reasons for Thanksgiving”

Introduction:

In these verses, Paul continued to review those things for which he and Timothy thanked God. Here specifically, they were thanking God for the redemptive work that He had accomplished in the lives of the saints at Colossae. As Paul described these redemptive works and then went on to teach about the glorious nature of Christ, he was insisting that Christ was sufficient for the spiritual needs of these and all believers. In doing so Paul described Christ using the same language that under the Old Covenant was normally reserved for personified Wisdom. This image was a natural one for early Christians to use to describe Christ. This is because in the Old Testament, God’s Wisdom was figuratively personified and presented as a Divine figure. This imagery is particularly prominent in Proverbs chapter eight. This was intended to connect Christ specifically with Old Testament revelation.

I. We Have Been Qualified for an Inheritance: (vs.12)

As Paul continued listing those things for which he and Timothy were grateful, he wrote, “*giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light*” (vs.12). Grammatically, this first clause is introduced by an adjectival participle (*has qualified*) that modifies “*the Father*”, the One to whom Paul and Timothy gave thanks. In terms of syntactical function, this adjectival clause provides the reason for the gratitude they were expressing to the Father. For He was the One who had qualified these saints to have a share in the inheritance that God has provided for His people. The Greek word translated as “*qualified*” means to cause someone or something to be adequate or sufficient in some way. The idea is that God enabled these saints to meet the standard that He Himself set that defined who was worthy to participate in that inheritance. Specifically, Paul was referring to the time of their conversion, when they were declared righteous before God because of their faith in Christ’s redemptive work on their behalf. Implicit in this thanksgiving is the idea that these believers did not qualify themselves but rather received their status as being worthy, as a free gift. The aorist tense of the participle itself supports this conclusion.

The reader notices at this point that there is a change in Paul’s use of pronouns. The change is from second person plural pronouns (*ye*) to first person plural pronouns (*we*). Most likely, this was due to how Paul wanted to make clear that he and Timothy were saved in the same phenomenally gracious way as the believers at Colossae.

The reward for which the saints are qualified is designated as “*to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light*”. The two key words used here “*partakers*” and “*inheritance*”, were used together repeatedly in the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy to refer to the allotments given to the various tribes of Israel in the land of Canaan. The two terms seem to be used interchangeably in meaning. The best way to understand the relationship between these two nouns is

that the first word “*partakers*” speaks of the role for which the saints are qualified, while the second speaks of the benefit that is gained because they have that role. There were two reasons for the use here of the Old Testament language that had been applied to Israel. First, to indicate the continuity that exists between the promises related to the Gospel and those made in the Old Testament. Both relate to the overall redemptive work of the one true God. Second, it introduces the broader scope of God’s redemptive work. Israel’s “*inheritance*” under the Old Covenant, was first of all the Promised Land. But even in Jewish tradition, it was understood that this inheritance pointed toward something more than simply a temporal existence in Canaan. It pointed to the ultimate promise of God to Abraham, that his seed would inherit all that belonged to God, which meant possession of the world to come. So, here it conveyed that Christians become heirs of these same promises in Christ. It is helpful to recognize that the events of the exodus from Egypt, the conquest of Canaan, and even Judah’s return from Babylonian exile all pictured the greater ultimate work of salvation that would eventually be accomplished by Yahweh’s messianic king. The tense of the participle, which refers to a completed action, indicates that the qualification of the saints is something that the saints already possess (meaning that though the saints have not received their full inheritance yet, it is certain that the inheritance will ultimately be theirs).

The prepositional phrase “*in the light*” indicates the sphere of the believer’s inheritance. Throughout the Bible the imagery of light is used in two primary ways: as a symbolic representation of truth, and as a symbolic representation of righteousness. This means that the inheritance that the saints anticipate will be characterized by truth and righteousness.

II. We Have Been Delivered: (vs.13)

Next, Paul wrote, “*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love*” (vs.13). The opening pronoun “*He*” refers to the Father, as the one who rescues, the same one who qualified the saints. The Greek word translated here as “*delivered*”, means to rescue, to deliver, or to snatch from a sphere of danger. It is interesting to note that this same term is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament that represented the Bible of first-century Christians) in two key verses related to the exodus (Ex.6:6; 14:30), and is used in passages that speak of the promised return of Judah from Babylonian captivity (Psalm 107:2,14; Isa.42:7; 49:9). This further supports the idea of the general continuity between the promises of the Old and New Testaments. Paul was not stating that believers are gradually or progressively delivered from Satan’s power. Rather, he was teaching that when one places their faith in Christ, he or she is instantly delivered. Therefore, believers do not need any further deliverance from the dominion of sin and Satan, rather they need the Spirit’s help to choose to act like those who have experienced this deliverance. The two actions referred to here, rescue and conveyance, were concurrent. The rescue was from “*the power of darkness*”. The Greek term which is translated here as “*power*”, refers to either one who holds authority, or the sphere of that authority.

The term points to the legitimate right to rule, rather than the power necessary for ruling. This same phrase “*the power of darkness*” in Greek, appears in Luke’s account of what took place at Jesus’ arrest in Gethsemane. At that time Jesus said to the men who had come to apprehend Him, “*this is your hour, and the dominion of darkness*” (Lk.22:53). These words referred to the sinister forces marshalled against Christ in light of the decisive combat that was about to take place in the spiritual realm. At that time the dominion of darkness did indeed have its brief period of time where it held sway. That time was given to the dominion of darkness as an opportunity for it to strike against the Messiah. However, it was only for the short period of time that God had foreordained. It came to an end with Christ’s defeat of the dominion of darkness on the cross. By virtue of this conquest, Christ had gained the authority to raid the domain of darkness, and rescue those who had hitherto been in bondage to that darkness. This evil sphere or authority of darkness spoken of here, is elsewhere equated with the power of Satan (2:15; Acts 26:18; Eph.2:2). And though elsewhere Satan is depicted as the archenemy of God who possesses authority over a specific realm. Here, unlike in Ephesians, the emphasis is more on the domain of Satan’s dominion, than on him as the figure who holds power over it. In the Gospel of John, it is revealed that this darkness exists in opposition to the light that comes from God. It is a realm of moral rebellion to God, and creaturely independence (Jn.3:19-20). Here in these verses, this dominion of darkness refers to the unregenerate state. In this state human beings are dominated by the influence of the devil and indwelling sin. The forces of spiritual darkness maintain a pervasive influence over the way the world around us is governed, what is believed, what is valued, and what is pursued. It distorts and twists every aspect of life, building it around individual lusts, rather than rooting everything in our perfectly good Creator.

The Greek term translated as “*conveyed*” means to cause something to be moved from one place to another. In the Greek version of the Old Testament, this term was used to refer to the displacement of a conquered people from their homeland to another land. But though it has a negative connotation when it is used in the OT, here it is used in an entirely positive sense. It refers to the manner of the rescue that God accomplishes for those who are His in Christ. It is the fulfillment of what is pictured in the exodus from Egypt, which is, our rescue from bondage and the beginning of our pilgrimage to the ultimate promised land. The language here conveys that through Christ these saints were brought from a rebel kingdom and placed under the sovereignty of the rightful King.

The reference here to “*the kingdom*” is understood in various ways by different theological traditions. Some see it as something exclusively spiritual, and others see it as something exclusively physical and geo-political. The reality is that in the New Testament the Kingdom of God is described as both a present spiritual reality, and as an eschatological earthy reality. Here the focus is on the present manifestation of the Kingdom of God. Contrary to how some see it, the Kingdom of God is not exactly synonymous with the sphere of salvation. It is true that only believers are in these two spheres, but the focus of the first sphere is on the

authority of God and Christ, while the focus of the second sphere is on deliverance from sin and judgment. Presently, believers have been made citizens of God's Kingdom, meaning we are in a submissive relationship to the rightful king of all Creation, Christ on behalf of the Father. However, the authority of Christ, and thus the Kingdom of God itself, has not been enforced upon the earth yet. At the Second Coming of Christ this will take place, and then the Kingdom in both its spiritual and its physical geo-political forms will be in place on Earth during the Millennial Kingdom (the thousand-year reign of Christ on Earth-Rev.20). But the focus here in this statement is how believers have been incorporated into the spiritual realm of God's Kingdom.

The designation of the Kingdom as "*the kingdom of the Son of His love*", refers to the spiritual realm of those who have been reconciled to God through Christ. The specific phrase "*Son of His love*", reflects a very literal translation. A clearer translation would be "*the Son, whom the Father loves*". The closest parallel to this phrase elsewhere is the Father's commendation of Christ at His baptism, where He said, "*this is My beloved Son*" (Lk.3:22). This language in turn alluded to the presentation of the messianic king that is found in Psalm 2:7-8.

III. We Have Been Redeemed: (vs.14)

Next, in verse fourteen we read, "*in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins*" (vs.14). There is a textual issue with this verse as it reads in the NKJV. The best manuscript evidence suggests that the words "*through His blood*" were not part of the original manuscript that Paul wrote. This is why many modern English translations do not include this phrase (NAS, ESV, NET, NIV). However, the identical phrase is found in Ephesians 1:7, and there it was a part of the original text.

The words "*in whom*" refer to the sphere of salvation, for eternal life is not an abstract possession, rather it is a result of the believer's union with the living Savior. The instrumental Greek preposition "*en*" points to the critical means by which God accomplishes His plan of salvation. While thanksgiving and prayer are addressed to God as the ultimate source of salvation, Paul here introduces the one who accomplishes that salvation, and in doing so begins his focus on the person and work of Christ. Starting here there is also a shift in the tense of the verbs from the aorist tense to the present tense, which further indicates a change in focus. For example, the present tense of the Greek verb translated as "*we have*" stresses that the believer's redemption and forgiveness is an abiding present possession. The term "*redemption*", in the first century, related to the slave market. The term was used to describe a payment that was made to secure the freedom of a slave. Though the price that is paid is not mentioned here (as it is in Eph.1:7), anyone at that time who heard the Greek word used here would have naturally understood that the price that was paid to emancipate a slave was to be assumed. And this reference to redemption once again connects what is expressed here to God's historic deliverance of the nation of Israel from Egyptian bondage, since that was the key term that was used in Exodus to designate that event.

The phrase “*the forgiveness of sins*” in the Greek text is in the accusative case and is used here in apposition to the word “*redemption*”, clarifying what took place as a result of this redemption. Paul was teaching here that believers have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18) to be a special possession set aside for God (Titus 2:14). Christ came to redeem sinners from their slavery to sin by offering His own life as a ransom. In addition, together these words express the two-fold nature of the bondage that believers were under before they were rescued. They dwelt in a realm characterized by darkness, that in turn trapped them in a life of sin. The Greek word translated as “*forgiveness*” means to release someone from some sort of bondage or imprisonment, or it can mean releasing someone from some sort of responsibility for wrongdoing. The latter sense was intended here. The Greek word for “*forgiveness*” literally means to send away, thus it speaks of the removal of our sins from us so that they are no longer barriers that separate us from God. The redemption referred to here is an act of liberation experienced anew, in each single case of conversion, by every person newly incorporated into Christ. It is therefore both a reference to the single summary act performed once for all in the past, and to the many applications of it throughout history.

There is a theological problem that flows from this verse. This is because the word “*forgiveness*” implies a free act of grace, while the word “*redemption*” implies the payment of an appropriate price to secure freedom. Therefore, it seems to raise the question whether God demands payment for sin and thus the satisfaction of His justice by an offender, or whether He was simply willing to forget and suffer the wrong. The answer lies in recognizing that it was God who chose to appease Himself. He did this because He was the only one qualified to satisfy His nature. If justice was to be done, He had to accomplish it. However, it was all gracious as He was under no obligation to act as He did. The sacrifice that God provided was purely an act of mercy. Therefore, at the cross God reconciled the tension between His just nature, and His gracious inclinations (Rom.3:26). We learn elsewhere in the NT that the results of Christ’s work are fully enjoyed only in Heaven, for it is there that the process of redemption is completed. Prior to this, the saints continue in that process while they are on earth (Rom.8:2-30).

Conclusion:

The wonderful truths that Paul rehearses here should also cause us to give thanks to God continually, just as he and Timothy did. For we are reminded here how profoundly and wonderfully our lives have been altered because of the goodness that God graciously accomplished in Christ for us.