

Series: The Letter to the Colossians

Title: A Most Important Memorial

Text: Colossians 1:12-14

Date: May 28, 2023

Verse 12

Paul's words in Colossians 1:12-14 were contained within a prayer (Colossians 1:9-11) he offered for the church at Colossians. They contained the thanksgiving portion of his prayer. The apostle knew, as he indicated elsewhere (Philippians 4:6-7), that gratitude is to be a regular part of prayer. In fact, the apostle told the church at Ephesus that thanksgiving is to be a constant attitude and activity amongst the church (Ephesians 5:20). Paul would commend the giving of thanks later in his letter to the Colossians a second time, saying, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Colossians 3:17).

In our current passage, the word translated "giving thanks" appeared in the Greek as a present active participle; thus, it depicted an ongoing, habit-of-life activity. God's people are to regularly give thanks to God for His goodness and grace in their lives. The book of Revelation reveals that gratitude is a part of our eternal destiny. When John received a vision of the redeemed in heaven, he witnessed them giving thanks to the Lord. Revelation 11:17 says, "And the twenty-four elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying, 'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign.'"

Considering the emphasis Scripture places on thanksgiving, it is no wonder that Paul shared of the way he gave thanks for the Colossians. When Epaphras visited the imprisoned apostle and shared news of how a church had been birthed at Colossae, the apostle was surely moved with gratitude. He regularly gave thanks to God in his prayers. He hadn't even visited the city, but God had graciously used his ministry in Asia Minor to set about a chain of events in which a congregation was providentially birthed in the Lycus Valley (Acts 19:10).

Paul probably listed out his prayer for his readers for a couple of reasons. First, he likely wanted them to be aware of the need to pray with thankfulness. A strong prayer life is marked by regular expressions of gratitude. Second, Paul wanted to let the church know he was grateful for them and their faith. Third, Paul most likely listed out his prayer in order to communicate important truth about the Christian faith. He knew false teachers were sowing seeds of bad doctrine. If the true believers diverted their attention from the foundational truths of Christ, they were sure to suffer spiritually.

In giving thanks for the Colossians, Paul did so "to the Father." Back in Colossians 1:3, he similarly stated that his prayers on behalf of the church were directed toward the first person of the Trinity. In the context of Colossians 1:12, it is easy to see why the apostle directed his prayer of thanksgiving in such a way. A study of Scripture reveals that each member of the Godhead has a unique role in the work of redemption. One can think of the Father administering salvation, the Son accomplishing salvation, and the Holy Spirit applying salvation. Passages like Romans

8:28-30 and Ephesians 1:3-6 highlight the Father's role in administering the conduit of salvation. Jesus Himself spoke to the Heavenly Father's governance of such things, saying, "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:37-38).

In telling of his prayer of thanksgiving, Paul spoke of how the Lord had "qualified" his readers for salvation. The word "qualified" meant "to make fit" or "to make adequate."¹ In some contexts, it meant "to authorize."² It spoke of one who was sufficient for something.³ Paul used the term in 2 Corinthians 3:6 to speak of the way the Lord had made him sufficient to minister the gospel. As used in our current passage, Paul's language indicated that the Colossians standing in Christ was "...due solely to the grace of God."⁴

The word translated "share" was used in the Old Testament to speak of land allotments. When the Israelites received their inheritance in Canaan, each tribe was given specially selected portions of land (Numbers 18:20; 31:36; Deuteronomy 10:9; 12:12; 14:28; 18:1). Paul used the word when writing to the Colossians to speak of how both Jews and Gentiles have a portion in Christ's salvation. He undoubtedly meant to provide a rebuke to Jewish legalists who touted exclusivist doctrines. The apostle used the term in a similar way when preaching before King Agrippa in the book of Acts. In describing the purpose of his apostolic ministry, he said, "...to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a *place* among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:18).

The word rendered "inheritance" undoubtedly provoked imagery of the Exodus for some of Paul's Jewish readers (Exodus 12:36). In fact, the Septuagint (LXX) used the Greek word from our text on numerous occasions to refer to the inheritance of the Promised Land (Numbers 18:20; Deuteronomy 9:26; 10:9; 12:12; 14:26; 18:1; Joshua 14:4; 15:13; 18:5, 6). The apostle knew that some were making portions of the Ceremonial Law for the Jews a requirement for salvation and godliness. He used a foundational event from Israel's history to speak of the riches associated with the work of Christ. None needed to lose confidence in what Christ had done through the cross. Ceremonial observances were no longer necessary.

Jewish believers had no right to look down on Gentile believers. Through the work of Christ, the Lord had "...broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace" (Ephesians 2:14-15).

¹ Robertson, Archibald Thomas. *Word Pictures in the New Testament: Volume IV, The Epistles of Paul*. (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931), 476.

² Rogers Jr., Cleon and Cleon Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 460.

³ Beale, G.K. *Colossians and Philemon: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 62.

⁴ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 460.

Because of God's Covenant of Redemption all true believers in Colossae were "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ" (Romans 8:17).

In speaking of the spiritual inheritance enjoyed by God's people, Paul referred to it as belonging to "the saints in the light." For the second time in his epistle (Colossians 1:2), he used the term "saints" as a title for the people of God. He wanted the real believers in Colossae to know that they had been made holy by the work of Christ. They did not need to be discouraged or distracted by the claims of false teachers. In Christ, they had innumerable spiritual riches (Acts 20:38; 26:18; 1 Peter 1:3-4).

The reference to "light" was undoubtedly significant for Paul's readers. It seems the Gnostic heresy placed some type of emphasis on themes of "light" and "darkness" (Colossians 1:13; 1 John 1:5-7; 2:8-11). Paul likely implemented one of the Gnostics' favorite terms and applied it against them. Though they made distinctions between light and darkness, Christians were ones with a real understanding of light. In Christ, believers knew the Lord who brought light into being at the beginning of time (Genesis 1:3). They had been transformed by the One who is the "light of the world" (John 8:12) and they were destined for the eternal light of the New Heaven and the New Earth (Revelation 22:4).

Verse 13

Paul continued his prayer of gratitude by saying, "He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Colossians 1:13). Paul's frequent use of the word rendered "domain" makes it seem that the term was a popular one amongst the Gnostic heretics (Colossians 1:16; 2:10, 15). The word strictly meant "power" or "authority." However, it had a wider meaning of "liberty of action" or "freedom to do something without any hindrance."⁵ Perhaps Paul's terminology was aimed at false teachers who boasted of liberty. They bragged of spiritual progress through interaction with various "domains" of spirit beings. Additionally, they asserted that their spiritual insight gave them license to indulge in sensual acts of the flesh.

Paul's mention of "darkness" provided another allusion to the Exodus. As with the idea of an "inheritance" (Colossians 1:12), the concept of darkness was closely associated to Israel's deliverance from Egyptian slavery. In fact, the ninth plague upon the Egyptians, the plague that preceded the final plague of the death of first born sons, involved darkness over Egypt (Exodus 10:21-29). For God's people, "darkness" became a metonym for the oppressive power and values of the ungodly nation.⁶ Paul wanted the real believers at Colossae to know that the work of Christ had "delivered" them from the "domain" of the Devil and his demonic beings. Because of Christ, the people of God were delivered from judgment (2 Peter 2:7), death (2 Corinthians 1:10), and wrath to come (1 Thessalonians 1:10).

⁵ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 460.

⁶ Wright, N.T. *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon*. (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986), 62.

The word rendered “delivered” in Colossians 1:13 was a strong one. In some contexts, it could mean “to forcibly pluck away.”⁷ It frequently used by David in the Septuagint’s (LXX) rendering of the Psalms (Psalm 6:4; 7:1; 18:1, 18, 19, 29; 22:5; 31:2; 41:1; 51:16; 69:14; 71:2). In 2 Samuel 12:7, it spoke of the way the Lord delivered David from the threats of King Saul.

As implemented in Colossians 1:13, the word rendered “delivered” also made allusions to the Exodus. The term was often used in the ancient world to speak of a slave being bought out of slavery and transferred into a new status of freedom. Such is a fitting picture of Christian salvation. As it was with the Israelites in Moses’ day, Christians have been rescued from being slaves of darkness. As a result, they should have nothing to do with the ways of darkness (1 John 1:6). In writing to the Ephesians, Paul would say, “...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light...Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Ephesians 5:8, 11).

Not only had the regenerate at Colossae been rescued from Satan’s kingdom of darkness, they had also been “transferred” into the kingdom of Christ. In the first-century world, Paul’s language was used to speak of a people group being deported from one location to another. Sometimes, governments gave orders for a segment of a population to be moved in order to start a new colony in a strategic location.⁸ Paul used such things as a metaphor for what takes place in Christian conversion. Prior to Christ, one is a slave to Satan, sin, and sin’s consequences. Through the new birth, one is radically repositioned within a new kingdom.

One sees yet another allusion to the Exodus in Paul’s use of the word translated “transferred.” When the delivered Israel from Egypt, he didn’t just take them out of the land. Yes, the people were released from slavery and removed from their residence in a pagan nation; however, they were also translated to a new place — Canaan! They inherited the Promised Land that had been promised to their ancestors (Genesis 12:1-6; 15:13-16; 50:25). Paul used the Israelites possession of Canaan as an analogy for Christian salvation because he knew Jewish legalists were making some believers in Colossae feel inferior. He wanted his readers to know that a new sort of Exodus had occurred through the person and work of Christ. None needed to look to ceremonial laws or ritualistic requirements for spiritual strength or sufficiency.

While Israel of the Old Testament enjoyed the kingdom of the Promised Land, New Testament believers enjoy a different type of kingdom. Paul would speak of such a “kingdom” later in his letter to the Colossians (Colossians 4:11). Jesus told His disciples, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33). He also told them, “...behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you” (Luke 17:21). Both Paul and Jesus revealed that New Testament believers enjoy share in a spiritual kingdom. Yes, Christ will one day inaugurate a physical kingdom upon the Earth (Revelation 19:11-20:15). In the meantime, Christians are to live with a commitment to the expansion of His spiritual

⁷ Davenant, John. *Geneva Series of Commentaries: Colossians*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), 153.

⁸ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 460.

kingdom upon the Earth. In addition, they are to enjoy their standing in such a kingdom (Matthew 6:10).

In speaking about Christ's spiritual kingdom, Paul referred to Jesus as the Lord's "beloved Son." His language was significant. It was Messianic in nature. In 2 Samuel 7:15, the Lord spoke of His "steadfast love" for David's promised descendent, the Anointed One.⁹ The gospel writers employed it during major, revelatory events in the life of Jesus. The term translated "beloved" was used in accounts of Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. In Mark 1:11, we read of Jesus' baptism: "And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my *beloved* Son; with you I am well pleased.'" Mark told of Jesus' transfiguration by saying, "And a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice came out of the cloud, 'This is my *beloved* Son; listen to him'" (Mark 9:7).

Paul employed what linguists now call a "genitive of possession." Paul's intent was to portray the kingdom in view as belonging to Christ. The mystics in the midst of the Colossians boasted of unseen kingdoms dominated by a pantheon of angelic beings. The apostle wanted the faithful to be focused on one kingdom — the one belonging to Christ.

Throughout Scripture, Christ's kingdom is referred to by various different labels. Paul referred to it as "the kingdom of his beloved Son" in Colossians 1:13 for a specific reason. The Gnostics minimized and marginalized Jesus. Their system of believe gave little credence to Him. It was centered on mystical beliefs concerning angels and aeons.¹⁰ Paul wanted to extol the supremacy, sovereignty, and salvation of Christ. All spiritual blessings are built on the person and work of God's Son.

Verse 14

Paul concluded his prayer of gratitude for the Colossians's faith by saying, "in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). The words "in whom" were significant. They highlighted truth Paul had communicated earlier in his letter. Early on, he spoke of his readers being "in Christ" (Colossians 1:3). He did so to convey the believer's union with Christ. Through the work of Christ, believers experience a oneness with Him through the indwelling presence of His Spirit in their souls. Such a reality was all together different than emphases on experiences and ceremonies at Colossae (Colossians 2:16-23). For Paul, all of the blessings of the Christian life flowed from union with the God Man, Jesus.

The word translated "redemption" was one that literally portrayed the act of one being delivered by the payment of ransom.¹¹ The root of the word meant "to purchase from the slave market."¹² It depicted, as one has said, a "complete release based on

⁹ Beale, 67.

¹⁰ Robertson, 477.

¹¹ Zodhiates, Spiros. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*. (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000), 232-233.

¹² Wright, 63.

the payment of a price.”¹³ As with previously used concepts in Colossians 1:12-13, the term had an intimate tie to the Exodus. When Israel was brought out of Egypt, they were rescued from the harsh bondage of slavery.

Metaphorically, the concept of “redemption” was used of the washing and cleansing from sin one receives at salvation.¹⁴ Through faith, Christians have complete release from the penalty of sin because of the payment Christ paid for sins with His death (see Matthew 20:28; Romans 3:24, 8:23; 1 Corinthians 1:30; and Ephesians 1:7, 14; Hebrews 9:15).¹⁵ It is for this reason that the concept of redemption was announced at Jesus’ birth: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David” (Luke 1:68-69).

Notice that Paul explained the nature of redemption with the phrase “the forgiveness of sins.” The original language of the text indicates that Paul’s intent was to make “the forgiveness of sins” a near synonym for “redemption.” The construction of the sentence makes the latter concept (“forgiveness”) an explanation of the former (“redemption”).¹⁶ “Forgiveness” is at the heart of this redemption. The prophets of the Old Covenant had prophesied of this reality (Ezekiel 36:25-27, 33-36). Such forgiveness involves pardoning, the overlooking of a transgression that leads to the payment of a ransom. Christ, not religious ceremonies or mystical experiences, was the Colossians’ hope of forgiveness of sin.

¹³ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 461.

¹⁴ Friberg, Friberg, and Miller, 70.

¹⁵ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 461.

¹⁶ Calvin, John. *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 148.