

Thankfulness for the Power of God

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[0 : 00] Well, friends, do turn in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1. You'll find this on page 983 in our hardback Bibles.

I'm going to read the same passage that we've had this last few weeks, but we'll be looking particularly at verses 12, 13, and 14 of Colossians 1 today. So Colossians chapter 1, beginning at the beginning.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy, our brother, to the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae. Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.

Of this you have heard before in the word of truth, the gospel, which has come to you as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and growing, as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras, our beloved fellow servant.

[1 : 20] He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf and has made known to us your love in the Spirit. And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will, in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Amen. Well, today we have the last in this short series of talks from Colossians 1, and as I said a moment ago, I want to focus on verses 12, 13, and 14 today.

Now, over the last couple of weeks, we've been studying particularly verses 9, 10, and 11, where Paul is telling the Colossians about the things that he's asking God to give them.

[2 : 42] And we noticed several things. First of all, in verse 9, we saw that Paul asks that they should be filled with the knowledge of God's will, so that, secondly, from verse 10, they should walk, they should live, in a manner worthy of the Lord, pleasing to him, bearing fruit in good works, and increasing in the knowledge of God.

And third, Paul asks in verse 11, that they should be strengthened with what he calls all power, not so as to achieve things, but so as to endure, to keep going as Christians, in a world that doesn't much like the gospel.

Now, this brings us to verse 12, where Paul says, giving thanks to the Father. Now, if you look at that phrase carefully, in its context, you'll see that Paul is not, at this point, himself thanking the Father.

That phrase, giving thanks to the Father, is actually part of what Paul is praying for, for the Colossians. He's praying that, as they are strengthened with all power, according to God's glorious might, and as they learn to endure, with patience and joy, they should be simultaneously, thanking the Father.

So that thankfulness, in verse 12, is in Paul's thinking, inevitably, going to accompany all the blessings, of verses 9, 10, and 11. And it stands to reason, Christians who are, being filled with the knowledge of God's will, who are learning to walk, in a manner pleasing to the Lord, who are being,

day after day after day, strengthened to endure, to endure the slings and arrows, of outrageous fortune, not to mention the hostility, of the world, the flesh and the devil.

[4 : 25] Christians like that, inevitably, are going to be filled, with a great sense of thankfulness, to God the Father. You can't experience, that level of blessing, and then, so to speak, go walking down Bath Street, with your hands in your pockets, whistling an empty tune, as though nothing good, has happened to you.

You're bound, surely, to begin to thank God. Now, we need to see, how different, verses 9, 10, and 11 are, from verses 12, 13, and 14.

There's a change of gear here. In verses 9, 10, and 11, Paul is telling the Colossians, what he is asking God for, as he prays for them. So he's asking God, to bless them, with things, that they don't yet possess, at least, not fully.

So in verses 9, to 11, Paul is saying to God, please, Father, will you do this, and this, and this, for the Colossians. But in verses 12, to 14, he's describing, the things that God, has already done, for the Colossians.

Verses 12, to 14, list, what God has already, accomplished. And the verbs, in those two little sections, show this difference, clearly. So verse 9, asking that you may be filled, more and more, in the future.

[5 : 39] Verse 11, may you be strengthened, in the future. But from verses 12, to 14, it's all about, what God has done. Verse 12, who has qualified you.

Verse 13, he has delivered us. It's done. Verse 14, we have redemption. So if you take, the six verses together, 9 to 14, you see Paul, looking both, into the future, and back into the past.

He's asking God, for blessings, yet to be given. And he's teaching, the Colossians also, to thank God, for blessings, that have already, been given, and have been received, by them.

Now this is, this helps us to see, what the prayer, life of Christians, is always going to be like. It combines, earnest requests, for the future, with delighted thanks, for what God, has already done.

So let's turn, to verses 12, 13 and 14, to see what these blessings are, that God has already given, and which Paul is encouraging, the Colossians, to thank God for. I think there are, three main ideas here.

[6 : 40] First in verse 12, Paul writes of, a new inheritance. Then second in verse 13, of a new kingdom, to belong to. And then in verse 14, of a new relationship.

So we'll take these, one by one. First of all, verse 12, a new inheritance. Let me read that verse again. giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you, you Christians, to share, in the inheritance, of the saints in light.

The Father has, qualified you, to share, in this glorious inheritance. That's the message, to the Colossians, and of course, it's the message, to every Christian, in every generation.

It's a wonderful inheritance, that will be fully enjoyed, in the future. And yet already, we're beginning to enjoy it, in the present. Let me draw a simple parallel, about this present, and future business.

Imagine you received, a letter from a solicitor, one day. And this letter tells you, that your great aunt, Philomena, has recently died, in Florida. And she has left you, a beautiful house.

[7 : 46] A house which looks out, onto the ocean, on one side, and backs onto a lovely, golf course, on the other side. And the house, is yours. It's yours, from the moment, that Aunt Philomena died.

It's worth a lot of money, and it's your inheritance. It's fully yours. You're not quite yet, enjoying it, but it's fully yours. Now in the same way, all Christians, have an inheritance.

Something which is, already ours, but is to be fully enjoyed, in the long term future. Now let's see, what Paul says about this, in verse 12. The first thing is, that the father, has qualified, all Christians, to share in this inheritance.

We don't have to, earn our qualifications, because the father, has already provided them. Now, that goes very much, against our natural thinking. You just think about, that word qualified.

Qualifications, are normally something, that we have to earn, by hard labor. So for example, you become, a qualified driver, only after you've done, a lot of driving lessons, and practice, around the roads.

[8 : 52] Or you become qualified, as a nurse, or an accountant, only by studying hard, and then passing, a lot of very difficult exams. Or think of tennis. You have to go through, all kinds of horrors, don't you, to qualify, for a big tennis championship, like the Wimbledon tournament.

You can't just turn up, on the first Monday, of the first week, with your racket in your hand, wearing your white shorts, saying, may I join in please? No, you've got to qualify, haven't you? So qualifications, in this world, always have to be earned.

That's the way, we think about them. If you qualify, in something, you've worked hard, and you've got reason, to congratulate yourself. That's why, Paul's verse 12 here, can be rather hard, to take in.

Because Paul is telling us here, that the father, has already qualified Christians, to share, in the inheritance, of the saints in light. We're inclined to say, but surely, I must do something, to secure my inheritance.

Surely, I must commit myself, to, for example, a rigorous program, of prayer, and good works. I'll be a missionary. I'll build a school, in Africa. I'll leave all my money, to gospel work.

[10:00] I'll even, run a nursing home, for retired ministers, and make sure, they get something, better than baked beans, on toast. Now that would be, a good vision to have. I look forward, to being part of that.

But, but none of those things, will qualify, any of us, to share, in the inheritance, of the saints, in light. The gospel, is, free. God, has done, everything necessary, in order to qualify us, for this glorious inheritance.

He has provided, the necessary sacrifice, for our sins. It wasn't you, or I, who sent the son of God, into the world, so that he should bear, the penalty, due to our sins. It was God, who in the words, of Romans chapter 3, put forward his son, as the propitiation, for our sins, by his blood.

You and I, could never have done that. But God did it, because he was determined, to rescue, those, who could not, rescue, ourselves. So let's thank God, often, that he has qualified, every Christian, to share, in a better inheritance, than a house in Florida.

How does Paul, describe it? It's the inheritance, of the saints, and of course, the word saints, in the New Testament, doesn't mean special Christians, it means all Christians.

[11:18] So it's the inheritance, of the saints, in light. And light, describes the place, of God's own dwelling. Glorious, radiant light, too bright, for our eyes, to be able, to gaze at now, but not too bright, for us to gaze at, when our redemption, is complete.

And of course, there's a moral quality, to this light, as well as a physical one. Because God is light, in a moral sense, that means that there is, no moral darkness, in his wonderful home.

No sin, no death, nothing that disturbs, or damages, or destroys, human beings, and their happy friendship, with each other. Nothing, that creates anguish, and tears, and frustration.

I wonder friends, are you beginning, if you're a Christian, are you beginning, to look forward, to sharing, that glorious inheritance, owned, but not earned. Remember how Peter, describes it in his first letter, as an inheritance, imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept, in heaven, for you.

Well, let's thank God often, that he has qualified, every Christian, to share, in such a wonderful future. Now secondly, from verse 13, Paul shows us, that if we're Christians, we have a new kingdom, we belong to a new kingdom.

[12:40] And verse 13, you'll see, turns on the contrast, between, two domains. Let me read the verse again. He has delivered us, from the domain, of darkness, the realm, or kingdom of darkness, and transferred us, to the kingdom, of his beloved son.

So the first, of these kingdoms, is the domain of darkness, and that's the, the kingdom, where sin rules. The one who organizes it, and manipulates it, is of course, the devil.

Jesus described him, in John's gospel, as the prince, of this world. He's in charge, of the domain of darkness. But the domain of darkness, the kingdom of darkness, is our native habitat.

The native habitat, of flies, and maggots, is corruption, and rottenness. And the native habitat, of men and women, is the domain of darkness. That's why, none of us, ever have to teach our children, how to lie, and steal, and cheat.

My parents, never had to spend a moment, teaching me, how to lie, or steal, or cheat. I was a past master, at those skills, before I'd reached the age of six.

[13:53] You discover, when you're a parent, that you have to spend, 20 years, training your children, how to behave honestly, and honorably, and truthfully. But we don't have to spend, five minutes, teaching them how to break, the Ten Commandments.

All of us, have an instinctive, mastery of the art, of breaking, the Ten Commandments. Because the domain of darkness, is our native habitat. It's what theologians, will call, original sin.

A week or two ago, I was walking down, Bath Street here, coming to church, with a member of our church, who has three daughters, aged about, 13, 11, and 9. You'd think, looking at them, that butter wouldn't melt, in their mouth.

You know, the sort of little girls, that come to church. We were chatting together, about our families, and I said to him, I won't give you his name, but I said to him, how frequently, do your three girls, show evidence, of original sin?

And he said to me, about every two minutes. Well, it just, we all know this, don't we? We were all born, in the domain of darkness.

[14:52] Now, look at this glorious verse 13. Let me read it again. He has delivered us, from the domain of darkness, and transferred us, into the kingdom, or to the kingdom, of his beloved son.

Now, what Paul means by that, is that a complete, and decisive transfer is made, when a person submits to Christ, and becomes a believer.

And we need to grasp, that this transfer, is truly decisive. And we need to grasp that, because it doesn't always feel, as if it's decisive. Are you with me?

What I mean is, that we can sometimes feel, as if we have one foot, in the kingdom of Christ, and the other foot, still in the kingdom of darkness. Temptation assails us, and sometimes we fall into it. It may be a minor thing, like a nasty word, spoken to your nearest, and dearest in the kitchen. It may be something, much more serious. But we can feel, that because we sin frequently, in thought and word and deed, we have not been fully, decisively transferred, from the domain of darkness, to the kingdom of God's, beloved son.

[16:01] But Paul teaches otherwise. And it's important, that we grasp his meaning. Paul always teaches, throughout his letters, so does the apostle John, so does the New Testament, throughout.

The teaching is that a person, is either a Christian, or is not a Christian. So in Paul's teaching, you're either in Adam, or you're in Christ. You can't be somehow, halfway between the two. When you're a Christian, you are justified, reconciled, adopted into the Lord's family, saved, redeemed, forgiven. Totally.

Here in our verse 13, we are in Paul's words, delivered, rescued, from one domain, and transferred, into another. Now if that is true, how do we understand the fact, that we continue to be tempted, and that we sometimes, give way to temptation?

Paul's answer would be, that we haven't yet, fully grasped, the decisive nature, of the change, that has taken place. The fact is, we do have a new home, described here, as the kingdom, of God's beloved son.

[17:12] And therefore, of course, we have a new allegiance, to a new master, the Lord Jesus, who is now our king. But, so accustomed are we, to obeying the dictates, of our old master, the devil and sin, that we haven't quite, fully grasped, that we now owe him, no allegiance, whatever.

We have no obligation, to him. He has no right, to command us. We belong to a new master. We've been transferred, to the kingdom, the kingly rule, of God's beloved son, and he is now, our master. Let me illustrate this. Just think, think USA, America, for a moment, as it might have been, a hundred or two hundred, years ago. There were many black people, working as slaves, in the southern states, of the United States, working for white, landowners.

And as you know, it was a dreadful business, and it was one of the causes, of the dreadful American Civil War, in the 1860s. But some of those slaves, were later set free.

They were legally, liberated, from their former masters. And yet, because they were so, deeply accustomed, to being at the beck and call, of their white, former owners, it took many of them, decades, before they began, to think of themselves, as being truly free people.

[18:33] Now, they were free, truly, fully, legally free. But it took them, a long time, before they deeply grasped, the fact, that they now owed, no allegiance, whatever, to their former owners.

That's much the same, for Christian people. In Paul's words here, in verse 13, God has, delivered us, from the domain, the rule, of darkness, from our former slavery, to sin.

He hasn't, half delivered us. He's done the job, fully. If you're a Christian, the domain of darkness, is no longer your home. You've been transferred, to the kingdom of Christ, fully, and permanently.

But as with those American slaves, our minds, haven't yet, quite fully comprehended, the decisiveness, of the transfer. The old allegiance, to the domain of darkness, is still, to some degree, coloring our minds, and tugging at our hearts.

But Paul, in this verse 13, is telling us, in no uncertain terms, that a decisive transfer, has taken place. We have a new home, to belong to, and it's called, the kingdom, of God's beloved son.
[19 : 43] So let's rejoice, that we belong to it, if we're Christians. And let me add this, if you want to follow this up, with a bit of further study, do turn to Romans chapter 6, at some point, in the near future.

It's quite a difficult chapter, but anyone who studies, Romans 6 carefully, will be greatly strengthened, by it. And we'll come to understand, what Paul is talking about, better.
So we have a new, inheritance in verse 12, a new kingdom, to belong to, in verse 13. And then thirdly, a new relationship, in verse 14.

So here's verse 14. In whom, that is in Jesus, we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. Now just notice there, the certainty again, the certainty, of something already, possessed by Christians. We have it. And what we have already, is what Paul calls, redemption. Now I know that, that word redeem, literally means, buying something back, at a price.

[20 : 45] But very often, in the Bible, the word redemption, simply means, rescuing something, that badly needs, to be rescued. The classic example, of redemption, in the Bible, is the rescue, of the Israelites, at the Red Sea, from their slavery, to Pharaoh, and the Egyptians.

God redeemed them. He brought them, through the Red Sea, and set them free, from their cruel bondage. Now Paul means, just the same thing here. Christians are rescued, from their former slavery, to sin, and to sin's consequences.

But you'll see, that Paul focuses up, for us in verse 14, exactly what he means, by this rescue. He's telling us, that the core feature, of our redemption, is, that our sins, are forgiven.

Sin, and sins. That has always been, the problem. Our sin, means the whole, set of our nature, our native rebellion, against God, and his authority.

And our sins, are the countless symptoms, of that underlying rebellion. But verse 14, insists, that it's in Jesus, that we have, the forgiveness of sins, the wiping away, of all sin, from our account.

[22 : 01] Let me read some words, written by Professor Don Carson, about this verse 14, which I think are very helpful. If God, had perceived, that our greatest need, was economic, he would have sent us, an economist.

If he had perceived, that our greatest need, was entertainment, he would have sent us, a comedian, or an artist. If God, had perceived, that our greatest need, was for political stability, he would have sent us, a politician.

If he had perceived, that our greatest need, was health, he would have sent us, a doctor. But he perceived, that our greatest need, involved, our sin, our alienation, from him, our profound rebellion, our death, and he sent us, a savior.

To be saved, from the consequence, and penalty, of our sin, that is the central blessing, of the gospel. When we repent, and turn to Christ, our sins, are forgiven.

How many of them? All of them. Every last one. So friends, let's join, with the Colossians, in learning to thank God, for these blessings.

[23 : 17] And let's thank God, regularly for them. We don't need to pray, for things which we already have, but it's right and fitting, that we often thank God, for them. Because these are wonderful gifts, which we haven't deserved, and yet it has pleased him, in his love for us, to give them to us.

If we're Christians, we've been qualified, by God, to share, in the inheritance, of the saints, in light. If we're Christians, we've been delivered, from the domain of darkness, and transferred, to the kingdom of God's, beloved son, where we now belong.

If we're Christians, our sins, every last one of them, are forgiven. And if we're not Christians, we must come to Christ, because there is no, other, savior.

Let's bow our heads, and we'll pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you so much, for these blessings, wonderful, wonderful blessings, the blessings of salvation.

And we pray, that you'll fill our hearts, with a deep sense of joy, and thankfulness to you, day after day, as we think of this, new relationship, into which you have brought, all those who belong, to the Lord Jesus.

[24 : 38] Jesus, help us, dear Father, to grow in our relationship, and also to grow, in our deep sense of assurance, that we now, no longer belong, to the domain of darkness, but have been decisively transferred, to the kingdom of your, beloved son.

And we pray, that you'll give us grace, and courage, to pass on this wonderful, good news, to many others. And we ask it, in Jesus name, Amen.