

Walking In Thankfulness

Colossians 1:12-14

Pastor John Miller

Follow with me as I read Colossians 1:12-14.

Paul said, "...giving thanks to the Father..."—there's our theme—"...who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed..."—or "translated"—"...us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom..."—that is, "in Christ"—"...we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

God wants us, as His children, to be thankful. I believe that Paul understood that the greatest evidence in life of the Spirit-filled heart is thankfulness.

Are you thankful? Are you thankful for God's blessings in your life? Are you thankful for your wife? Are you thankful for your husband? Are you thankful for your children? Are you thankful for your job? Are you thankful for your health? Are you thankful that even in sickness, God is your strength? Are you thankful that God is your helper and your provider?

Notice the prayer offered in verse 12: "...giving thanks to the Father." Paul is praying for the Colossian believers. That's the context of these verses. Paul is actually saying, "I want you to have a thankful heart."

It's interesting that in James 1:17, James tells us that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning." That means that God is immutable, that God doesn't change.

But notice verse 12 says, "...giving thanks to the Father." So we are to be thankful to God our Father. We are His children, we've been born into His family, He is our Father in heaven, so we are to be thankful for His many blessings. All the good gifts come from God above.

By the way, Colossians is one of Paul's prison epistles. Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon were written by Paul during his first imprisonment. He was under house arrest in Rome awaiting trial by Caesar Nero when he wrote these letters. He wrote these letters with chains around his wrists.

What is the context of this prayer for thanksgiving, in verses 12-14? The greater context goes back to verse 9. Paul was praying for the believers in Colosse in verses 9-14. The theme of Colossians is Christ's sufficiency. Christ is adequate for all that we need. All that we need we find in Christ, so Paul is praying that the Colossian believers would be thankful.

There are two main petitions in this prayer, and the first is that the believers would know God's will. Verse 9 says, "For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for

you...”—Paul is praying for them—“...and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding.” How do we know God’s will? It’s in God’s Word. God’s will is found in God’s Word.

In the second petition, Paul says that he wants the believers to walk in a way that is worthy. Verses 10-11 say, “...that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy.” So the first petition is he wants you to know God’s will; and second, he wants them to walk in God’s ways.

If you break down the second petition—walking in God’s ways—it involves a “pleasing” walk, verse 10; it involves a “fruitful” walk; it involves a growing walk—“increasing in the knowledge of God”; it involves a “powerful” walk, verse 11—“strengthened with all might...[in] power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy”; and it involves a thankful walk, verse 12—“giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us...”—or “made us fit”—for heaven. So Paul wants them to know God’s will, he wants them to walk in God’s Word and in His ways in obedience. As they walk in God’s ways, they are pleasing God, they are bearing fruit, they are growing and they are experiencing God’s power. Then it all overflows, verses 12-14, resulting in a thankful heart.

Why does Paul then move in the prayer from petitions to praise, from asking God for blessings to thanking God for His blessings? I think the reason is that Paul knows a thankful heart is the chief characteristic of the Spirit-filled life. You always know that you’re not walking in the Spirit when you are grumbling and when you are complaining and when you are griping. I do that. I can always point out what isn’t right: too hot, too cold, this is wrong, that’s wrong. Whenever I’m like that—and it happens to me a lot—pray for me. That’s when I know that I’m not walking in the Spirit or in the joy of the Lord.

So I love that Paul starts with petition, and he ends with praise. “I want you to have a thankful heart.” Then he goes on to list the things that God has done for us and the reasons we should be thankful.

In Colossians 2:6-7, Paul says, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” Isn’t that great? He’s saying, “I want you to be rooted, grounded and growing, but I want your life to be overflowing, like a river overflowing its banks, with thanksgiving.”

Ephesians 5:20 is a parallel reference to the book of Colossians. In Ephesians 5:18, Paul says, “Be filled with the Spirit.” He says that the result will be “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” So the evident sign of a Spirit-filled heart is the overflow of thankfulness.

Someone said, “Do you know how to tell if you are carrying a full bucket? Your feet get wet.” I

like that. Do you know how to tell if your life is overflowing with the Lord? It's because joy comes out of your heart; a thankful heart is an indication of a Spirit-filled heart. So Paul is praying that we would be and will be thankful for all the blessings we have been given from God the Father through God the Son.

This is the most important thing you can get from this message: All of these blessings—there are four of them—are true of all Christians. All Christians equally share these blessings. They are yours the moment you are born again or saved. Number one, God the Father has qualified us for heaven. Verse 12 says, "...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us..."—or "made us fit"—"...to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light." God the Father has qualified us to inherit heaven.

A very important point about this is that this is not our practice; this is our position in Christ. Everything we read about these blessings are ours not because we live a good life, or we are holy or devoted, or we work hard, or we pray, or we read our Bibles, or we go to church, or we take communion, or because we are diligent about the Christian life. They are ours because we've trusted Jesus Christ, we've been born of the Spirit, we belong to Him and we are part of the family of God. This is our spiritual position in Christ.

Now you have to understand the difference between your practice and your position. Every Christian shares equally the same position in Christ, which is perfectly righteous, and perfectly holy, because the righteousness of Christ is given to you. You stand in Him complete.

Remember in Romans 8:1 it says, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." Period. That's where this verse stops. Verse 1 doesn't say, "...who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" until you get down to verse 4 of Romans 8. All verse 1 says is, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." Period. There can't be any qualification added to that verse, because you have the righteousness of Christ; it's your position. I like to call it your standing. It doesn't change. It's yours the moment you are born again or regenerated, and it never changes. The rest of that verse deals with your practice.

So don't let the devil beat you up, put you down or tell you that you aren't worthy, because positionally you're standing in Christ, and that qualifies you fit for heaven. That's good news.

Now what is your practice? It is your growth in holiness, your growth in righteousness. It's how you live the Christian life. It's what we call "sanctification." So positionally, we're justified or declared righteous. Practically, we're being—present tense—sanctified or made more righteous. Some Christians are farther along than other Christians in their sanctification process.

Then the third stage of salvation is glorification. When we die, we go to heaven and we have a new body. That's when we will be perfectly righteous. So we are declared righteous, positionally; that's our spiritual standing, which doesn't change. Every Christian shares that

equally. We are being made righteous, practically; that's our sanctification, which is progressive and is a life-long process. It means being made more like Jesus. Then one day we will be perfectly righteous in glorification, when we are in the presence of the Lord. It's so important to understand these truths in order to understand the Christian life.

The moment you were saved—that's a Biblical term by the way—or born again, we were made fit or qualified for heaven. In John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus that he must be "born again."

Sometimes you might think, I don't think I'm really a good Christian. I'm not really a spiritual person. I don't think I deserve to go to heaven. You're right. (I just thought I'd encourage you.) But God has done something for you that you couldn't do for yourself. Verse 12 of our text indicates that. It says, "...the Father, who has qualified us." Who did it to us? God. You can't do it yourself. You can't qualify yourself for heaven. You can't merit, earn or deserve heaven, but God made you fit. God qualified you for heaven. It is God's work, and only God can do that. The Greek here in this statement indicates that it is a settled fact. So all Christians are made fit or are qualified, and it is a settled fact that cannot change.

In 2 Corinthians 5:21, Paul says, "For He made Him..."—that is, "God the Father made God the Son"—"...who knew no sin..."—referring to Christ—"...to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." So Jesus knew no sin, but God the Father made Jesus sin for us on the Cross, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. It speaks of His death on the Cross and His righteousness imputed to us.

Now what do we qualify for? Notice in verse 12 it says, "to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light." I believe Paul is talking about heaven. So the moment you are born again or saved, you are fit or qualified or ready to go to heaven.

In the Old Testament, Israel had an inheritance in the Promised Land. When they went into the Promised Land, each tribe had a designated area. Their families would go in and possess the land. This was their inheritance. Now you have an inheritance; it's called heaven. God is your Father in heaven, and you inherit that place.

The moment you are born again, you get the Holy Spirit and you enter the kingdom of heaven. It's a little foretaste what God is going to do. You have heaven on earth right now; you are living in the kingdom of God. But that will be completed or fulfilled in that last stage, glorification, when you get to heaven. So you go from justification to sanctification to glorification. But you are made fit because of your standing or position, which is in Jesus Christ. So for the Christian, we are made fit for heaven.

A great illustration of this is when Jesus died on the Cross. He was crucified between two thieves. There were three crosses on Golgotha or Calvary that day. One thief reviled and mocked Him. Then the grace of God came to this other thief and touched his heart, and he looked at Jesus and said, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Isn't that beautiful? The man was a criminal, a thief, whose penalty was justly dying for his crimes. But

Jesus said to him, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." Isn't that awesome? Two thieves, who were equally sinful and equally wicked, hanging equally close to the Son of God. One reviles, dies and perishes, and the other turns and faces Jesus and says, "Remember me." And Jesus says, "Today you will be with Me in Paradise." This thief was perfectly suited and qualified for heaven.

Jesus could have said, "No; you haven't been baptized. Sorry, dude. You need a Christian haircut to get to heaven. You haven't gone to church. You haven't taken communion. You're not a good person. I can't take you to heaven." No. The Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." If you just call on the name of the Lord, trusting and believing in Him, He will save you. You come to Him in meekness and brokenness and humility. What a picture that is of how we cried out to Him, us guilty sinners, but He has qualified us to go to heaven.

Notice the second blessing we should be thankful for. He has delivered us, verse 13. "He has delivered us from the power of darkness." So first, He has qualified us; and secondly, He has delivered us. Another thing happened the moment you were saved: You were delivered from Satan's power and his kingdom of darkness. It is another important point. This happens to every Christian; there are no exceptions, or there are no "haves" and "have nots." This isn't just for the devout, deeper-life club. Every child of God, every born-again child of God has been qualified for heaven and has been delivered from Satan's kingdom. He's delivered from Satan's power; this is the negative. It means that man's greatest problem and need is being met.

The verb "delivered" is used only of God's work in the New Testament. Some render this "He rescued us." I love that. We were slaves and captive to sin, but God came and rescued us. Indeed, this is man's greatest need. Only God can rescue us or deliver us from Satan's power. Jesus came to rescue us from Satan's power. He said that He came "to seek and to save that which was lost." So we were living in darkness, living in Satan's kingdom and He delivered us.

The third blessing is that He has translated us, verse 13. It says, "...and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love." So He has "delivered" us from the power of Satan and darkness, which is the negative side, and then He has translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, which is the positive side. Now, again, it is true of all Christians, and it happens the moment they are saved.

Years ago, in my study of God's Word, one of the most transforming, amazing truths that gripped my life—and I've never gotten over it—is to realize all the things that happened to me the moment I was saved. It's amazing when you understand that: that I was actually qualified for heaven, I was taken out of Satan's kingdom and I was transferred into God's kingdom. And that's only the first three blessings. There are about 70 to 75 things that happen to you the moment you are saved.

But you can't enjoy what you don't know you have. A lot of Christians think, Well, I know I'm going to heaven when I die, but right now it's kind of a bummer to be a Christian. But someday

I'll get to go to heaven. They don't realize all the blessings that you have in Christ. Every one of these blessings come from God, and they are equally ours as children of God.

When I was growing up in church, we used to sing a hymn called Count Your Blessings.

"Count your blessings;

Name them one by one.

Count your many blessings;

See what God has done!"

But what we do is we count our "bummers." We name them one by one. See what God has not done.

The word "translated," "transferred" or "conveyed" is actually describing the deportation of a population from one country to another. It is the imagery of a Roman army conquering a people, and then they would be dispersed. They would deport them to different countries. Babylon, in the Old Testament, was big at this. They would conquer a nation, and then to disrupt their national life, they would transport them from their country to other countries. So when the Jews were conquered, they were deported and they were dispersed. They became the wandering Jews. Then other peoples were brought into the Jews' land from other lands. They take them from their homes. They're deported or transferred.

So we were once bound and living in Satan's kingdom in darkness. We were filled with hatred, but God opened our eyes and hearts. He took us from darkness to light. The kingdom of light is also described as "the kingdom of the Son of His love."

There is an interesting contrast in verse 12. God's kingdom is an "inheritance of the saints in the light." In verse 13, Satan's kingdom is described as "the power of darkness." We are translated from darkness to light the moment we are saved or become the children of God. So if you are a Christian, you are a child of God, you are living now in His kingdom, that is, the kingdom of His love and you are made fit for heaven.

Now here is the fourth, and last, blessing. I love it. In verse 14, the last blessing is that He has redeemed us. It says, "in whom." At the end of verse 13, we have, "the kingdom of the Son of His love." That is a reference to Jesus Christ. Then without skipping a beat, in verse 14, you have "...in whom..."—that's a reference to Jesus, God's dear Son—"...we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." That's good news! That's something to be thankful for. That's something to rejoice in. In verse 13, we were captives, but were delivered; and then in verse 14, we were slaves, but we were bought and set free.

In verse 14, there are five facts about the redemption of the believers. The first is that redemption is in Christ. Notice the phrase, "in whom." I already pointed out that at the end of

verse 13 there is a reference to Christ, and it carries to verse 14, "in whom we have redemption." Redemption is found in only one place, and that is in a person: Jesus Christ. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." He is the only way to get to heaven. He is our redeemer. There is no other redeemer. I can't redeem myself. I can't redeem you. You can't redeem me. Jesus came from heaven to redeem us. So redemption is in Christ.

Notice the second fact about redemption. Redemption is certainty. "We have." It speaks of the certainty of our redemption. It's not we hope to have, or we might have. Cross your fingers and hope you get to heaven. No. You can have assurance. I believe in the doctrine of assurance. If you are a child of God, you can know that you are going to heaven when you die.

I have been quoting John 3:16 a lot lately. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." There you have it. God loved the world so much He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him, who calls on Him, who trusts in Him, puts their faith in Him shall not perish. That's the certainty. They shall have everlasting life. That's good news!

When you wake up tomorrow morning, count your blessings. God has qualified you, delivered you, transferred you and now He has redeemed you. In Christ, it is certain.

Thirdly, we have the meaning of redemption, verse 14. "Redemption" means "to purchase or buy and set free by paying a price." It was used for slaves. The Roman world was gutted with slaves. The Bible never endorses slavery or commands to have slaves. It just states the fact that in the Roman world of the Bible days, a lot of Christians were slaves. So this draws from this imagery and culture. The idea is that you could actually go to the slave market and buy a slave. You pay a price, and the slave became your property.

There was what was called a "bond slave." Because your slave would fall in love with you, as the master, and you would love your slave, you would then decide you would set your slave free. You would give them their freedom and emancipate them. But the slave might said, "I love you and appreciate your love for me, so I don't want to be free. I want to serve you the rest of my life." So a hole would be put in the ear of that slave, an earring put in that ear and he would then become a "doulos" or a bond slave. That meant that he would then be a slave out of choice, because of love, and that he was a slave for life.

The Bible says that when you become a Christian, "You are not your own, for you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body." Your body belongs to Him. As Christians, we are to be His bond slaves, His doulos. We are to say, "Lord, I love You. You've rescued me, qualified me and made me fit for heaven, taken me out of darkness and put me in light and lead me by Your precious blood. I want to serve You." Then we become His doulos or His bond slaves. That's all because we love Him. Not because we have to, but because He redeemed us or bought us by His blood.

Notice the fourth fact about redemption in verse 14. It is “through His blood.” There are some translations of the Bible that omit that statement. It’s omitted in some Bibles, because of the manuscript that it uses. But that statement is Biblical and Scriptural. It is used elsewhere in the Bible. Ephesians 1:7 says, “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.” It clearly belongs in this passage. This is the price of our redemption. When Jesus bought us out of the slave market of sin, He paid for us with His life on the Cross.

By the way, when the Bible uses the words “blood of Christ,” it is talking about Jesus’ sacrificial, atoning, substitutionary death on the Cross. It’s not just talking about the physical, actual blood. It’s describing His death on the Cross, which involves a voluntary, substitutionary sacrifice, dying in our place, because He was our substitute. So in both Colossians and in Ephesians, it says “through His blood.” It is speaking of His sacrificial, substitutionary death on the Cross.

We are not saved by Jesus’ birth. We are not saved by His teachings. We are not saved by His perfect example. But we are saved by Jesus’ death. God became a man at Christmas, so He could die on a cross. God provided a body for Jesus, so He could suffer and die on the Cross for you and for me. He became a man not just so He could give us His teachings, not just so He could show us love, not so He could just be a great example. He was all of those things—and you do well to follow His example—but that isn’t what gets you to heaven.

I’ve met people who say, “Well, I’m a Christian. I believe in Jesus. I believe His Word. I follow His example.” Well, that’s nice, but that’s not what makes you a Christian. If you haven’t been born again, you haven’t been qualified or fit for heaven. If you haven’t been born again of the Spirit, they you haven’t been taken out of Satan’s kingdom and transferred into God’s kingdom. If you haven’t been born again of the Spirit, you haven’t been redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. You’re not truly a child of God. 1 Peter 1:18-19 says, “...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

Remember in the Old Testament book of Exodus when the children of Israel were in bondage in Egypt? It’s a picture of our old life. We were slaves to Satan and to sin as shown through the judgement of God bringing in the death angel at Passover, the final plague that God brought on the Egyptians. All the Israelites took a lamb’s blood and put it on the doorposts and lintel, so when the angel of death came, it would pass over the homes of the Israelites where the blood was applied. “When I see the blood,” God said, “I will pass over.” So Jesus is our Passover Lamb. When His blood is applied to our hearts, God’s wrath and judgment passes over us. It’s a picture of our Redeemer.

Notice the fifth and last fact about redemption, in verse 14. It results in “the forgiveness of sins.” I love that. The word “forgive” means “to send away” or “to carry away.” When we say, “I’ve been forgiven,” it means that literally my sins have been carried away.

In the Old Testament, they had another picture. It's called the "scapegoat." This is where our term "scapegoat" comes from. Every year the priest would symbolically put his hands on a goat, and he would pronounce the sins of the people and of himself transferred to this goat. Then the goat would be released to run off into the distant hills and disappear. It was a picture of my sins being transferred to the goat, the goat running off, my sins having been carried away and I am forgiven. I don't know what they did when the goat came back. You're feeling pretty good about yourself, and then the next morning on the front porch, the goat is back. Chase him off.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, coming to him to be baptized, he pointed at Jesus and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away..."—or "carries away" or "bears away"—"...the sins of the world." Isn't that awesome?! God provided a lamb to carry away our sins. What a blessing to be thankful for.

David said in Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." He didn't say "the north...from the south"; he said "the east...from the west." If you go east, you'll never go west. If you go west, you'll never go east. So that's why he didn't say "the north...from the south." This verse is a description of what it means to be forgiven. God takes our sins and places them upon Jesus Christ. "For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him," 2 Corinthians 5:17. So the moment you are saved, your sins are forgiven and carried away; they are separated "as far as the east is from the west." That's something to be thankful for.

There is another great illustration of God forgiving sins. Jesus healed the man who was a paralytic; he couldn't walk, and was lame. The paralytic had four friends who wanted him healed, so they put him on a mat, and they each took a corner and carried him. They were taking him to Jesus, who was in a house teaching. The house was so crowded with everyone gathering around that they couldn't get their friend near the house. So they went up the outside stairs onto the flat roof. They tore the roof apart and lowered their friend down in front of Jesus so he could be healed. Jesus was in this house, and suddenly debris started to fall from the ceiling. Everyone looked up and a friend above waved to them. Can you imagine being in your home having a Bible study, and the roof gets torn off?

So the friends lowered the paralytic down on the mat, and the Bible says, "When He saw their faith..."—that's the faith of their friends—"...He said to him, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'" What do you think his friends on the roof thought? That's not why we brought him here! We brought him here to be healed! We brought our friend here so he could walk! What's this sins-forgiven bit?! The point is that God knows our greatest need; it's that our sins need to be forgiven.

Some of you have bodies that are sick, and you would love to have God heal you. But what's more important is that your sins be forgiven. Some of you have financial needs, and God will take care of you and provide, but what's more important than you having a job or money in the bank or more retirement money is that your sins be forgiven. Some of you are having problems

in your marriage right now. Your problem could be spiritual; you need your sins forgiven. You are having relationship problems; you need your sins forgiven. I believe man's greatest need was met in the person of Jesus Christ when He carried away our sins.

Now the Pharisees heard Jesus say this to the paralytic; they were in the room. They thought, Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone? Then Jesus, knowing their thoughts, turned to them and said, "Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'?" Obviously, it's easier to say that your sins are forgiven, because no one can tell whether or not it happened. You can walk around and say, "Hey, your sins are forgiven," but no one knows if it really happened. So Jesus then said, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power..."—or "authority"—"...on earth to forgive sins," He said to the man who was paralyzed, 'I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.'" Immediately the man stood up, took up his bed, waved goodbye and walked out of the house. The friends probably started jumping up and down on the roof, and more of the roof collapsed.

But the point is that God knows your greatest need, and that is for your sins to be forgiven. The greatest need today is the forgiveness of your sins.

Count your blessings: God has qualified you, God has delivered you, God has translated you and God has redeemed you by the blood of Jesus Christ.