

Lesson 4

Colossians 1:3-14

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- 3 We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,
- 4 since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints^a,
- 5 because of the hope laid up^b for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel^c,
- 6 which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among^d you, since the day you heard it^e and understood the grace of God in truth,
- 7 just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant^f. He is a faithful^g minister of Christ on your^h behalf
- 8 and has made known to us your love in the Spiritⁱ.
- 9 And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge^j of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding^k,
- 10 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.
- 11 May you be strengthened with all^l power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy,
- 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you^m to share in the inheritance of the saintsⁿ in light.
- 13 He has delivered^o us from the domain^p of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom^q of his beloved Son^r,
- 14 in whom we have ^sredemption^t, the forgiveness of ^ssins.

- Notes*
- a* REB, CEB, NIV "God's people"; NJB "God's holy people"; NAB "holy ones"
- b* NJB, REB, NIV "stored up"; HCSB, NAB, CEB "reserved"
- c* KJV, ASV "the word of truth of the gospel"; REB "message of the true gospel"; CEB "true message, the good news"; NIV "true message of the gospel"
- d* KJV, ASV, NASU "in"
- e* "it" is supplied by the translator (also KJV, NRSV, NASU, HCSB, NAB, NIV). However, both verbs ('heard' and 'understood') could refer to the grace of God (ASV, NJB, REB, CEB).
- f* HCSB, CEB "slave"; NASU "bond-servant"
- g* NJB, NAB "trustworthy"; REB "trusted"
- h* ASV, NJB sim., REB, NASU, NIV "our". There is regular confusion between the Greek pronouns ἡμῶν ("our") and ὑμῶν ("your"). Besides having a similar appearance, both had the same pronunciation in later Hellenistic Greek. Although "our" has a better textual basis, the standard NA and UBS texts use "your". [Bruce, *Colossians*, fn 7, p. 40]
- i* REB "the love the Spirit has awaken in you"
- j* CEB "insight"
- k* KJV, ASV, NJB, REB, HCSB, CEB "wisdom and spiritual understanding"; NIV "through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives"
- l* NAB "every"
- m* KJV, ASV, NASU, NIV "us". Similar possible confusion between ἡμᾶς ("us") and ὑμᾶς ("you") [see *Note g* above]. NA and UBS select "you" (although the textual basis is indecisive). If so, Gentile Christians may be in view. [Bruce, *Colossians*, fn 27, p.45]
- n* REB "God's people"; NAB "holy ones"; CEB "God's holy people"; NIV "holy people"
- o* NRSV, NJB, REB, HCSB, CEB "rescued"

- p* ASV, NRSV "power"; NJB "ruling force"; CEB "control"
- q* CEB "domain"
- r* ASV, NJB "Son of his love"; NJB "Son that he loves"; HCSB "Son He loves"; CEB, NIV "Son he loves"
- s* ASV inserts "our"
- t* KJV adds "through his blood"; NJB; CEB sim. "our freedom"; REB "our release is secured"

Comments / Questions

1. Paul regularly includes a Thanksgiving Prayer at the beginning of his letters (exceptions: 2 Cor, Gal, Titus). The common letter of the day would normally include a brief health wish in the form of a prayer (see 3 John 2 for an excellent example), but Paul greatly expands on this form and will often touch on themes that will be addressed in the body of the letter.
2. Although Paul usually includes others in the opening prescript, his letters usually are written in the first-person singular ("I") starting with Thanksgiving. In this case, Paul uses the first-person plural ("we") throughout the Thanksgiving before reverting to the first-person singular in 1:23. Whether Timothy is joining Paul in expressing thanks or this is an example of an authorial 'we' is impossible to determine. Unlike the letters to the Thessalonians where Timothy and Silas were known by the recipients (the only other time "we" is used in the Thanksgiving), we have no knowledge of whether the Colossians knew Timothy.
3. Paul's thanksgiving begins in v.3 ("We always thank God..."), but it is difficult to know where it ends. Some suggest it ends in v.8 (Bruce, O'Brien, Pao, Patzia, Thompson, Weaver, Wright), others think it extends to include Paul's petitionary prayer up to v.12 (Wall) or v.14 (Gupta, Witherington), and still others think it includes Paul's portrayal of Christ through v. 23 (Dunn, Garland). For convenience, this lesson takes the middle view – through v.14.
4. As a first step in studying this passage, briefly answer the following questions:

To whom is Paul's prayer of thanksgiving addressed? (This is a constant in Paul's prayers.)

For whom is Paul thankful?

Why is he thankful for them? (Note this is the exact same basis for his thanksgiving in Philemon and Ephesians.)

What is the petition Paul asks in his prayer? (v.9)

What does Paul hope will be the result of God granting his petition? (v. 10)

5. Carefully read these verses and list both the positive statements that Paul makes concerning the Colossians' status and the aspirations Paul has for them.

6. Do these verses give any indication of a problem among the Christians at Colossae?
7. It seems that Epaphras was the one who originally took the gospel to Colossae.
 - a. When and where did Epaphras likely learn the gospel himself?
 - b. Would you agree that Epaphras has recently joined Paul bringing him information about the church at Colossae?
 - c. By the way, Epaphras is a shortened form of Epaphroditus. Any reason to think that this Epaphras is the Epaphroditus mentioned in Philippians 2:25; 4:18?
8. Paul's encouragement to them to thank God uses an interesting expression for what God has done for the Colossians: v.12: "*who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.*" How has God "*qualified*" them?

Who are the "saints" (v.12, lit. 'holy ones') with whom we have been qualified to share in their inheritance?

9. For any Jew, the idea of 'deliverance' (rescue) and 'redemption' were rooted deep in their memory. Both at the Exodus and at the Return from Exile, God was said to have delivered and to have redeemed his people. Read Exodus 6:6-8; Isaiah 42:7, 16; 49:9; 62:12.

But a very helpful parallel to v.12-14 can be found in Paul's defense before Agrippa (Acts 26:12-18, esp. v. 18). Note the similarities.

Redemption

Looking at Luke's record of those who spoke of redemption is a helpful way of understanding the Jewish expectations:

*And his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied, saying, "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, ..." (1:67-69)*

*And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, ... And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the **redemption** of Jerusalem. (2:36-38)*

Jesus speaking of the Destruction of Jerusalem: "*Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your **redemption** is drawing near.*" (21:28)

Cleopas, following the resurrection: "*But we had hoped that he was the one to **redeem** Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened.*" (24:21)

Excursus: "The Kingdom of His Beloved Son"

Given the frequency that Jesus speaks of the kingdom of God as recorded in the Gospels, one might reasonably expect to find references to the kingdom frequently in the remainder of the NT writings. That is not the case. For example, Paul only mentions the kingdom about one-seventh (1/7th) as frequently as Matthew (considering the length of their writings).

It would be a mistake, however, to conclude that Paul and other NT writers minimized, replaced, or misunderstood Jesus' teaching of the kingdom. Individual words cannot totally define or encompass grand truths. For example, God is both Father and King. To say that God is our Father teaches us truths about God that cannot be taught when saying God is our King. The opposite is also true. We need both terms to get a more complete understanding.

Yet, Paul proclaims a new idea concerning the kingdom that is only hinted by Jesus (Lk 22:29-30; Jn 18:36): *the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of Christ!* Paul uses the expression 'kingdom of God' (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9-10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Col 4:11; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:5) more frequently than the 'kingdom of Christ' (1 Cor 15:24; Eph 5:5; Col 1:13; 2 Tim 4:1; 4:18 (probably)), but the fact that he speaks of both in similar ways unmistakably serves to elevate Christ.

Of the places where Paul speaks of the 'kingdom of Christ', surely this passage in Colossians 1:13-14 is the most powerful:

"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."

Paul pits Jesus against Satan. The emphasis is that the 'power' of Jesus is greater than the 'power' of Satan. He can hold and protect those entrusted to him against Satan (but note it is God who places those in the kingdom of Christ). In Jesus, there is redemption, the forgiveness of sins, and Satan cannot steal them back.

For Paul to be in "the kingdom of his Beloved Son" is the same as being "in Christ" or being "a member of his body". They all say the same thing with different connotations. They speak of those who are like Christ, who serve Christ, who follow Christ, who practice the way of Christ (righteousness), and who are blessed by Christ. In short, they speak of *Christians*.

And, in this passage, Paul uses the kingdom in the past tense. That is, we are now presently in the kingdom of Christ. Paul like Jesus and other NT writers speak of the kingdom as something now present and, also, as something yet to be obtained (Gal 5:21). This duality, sometimes spoken of as a 'tension', is common with other NT truths. For example, the NT speaks of us being saved now and as being saved in the future. The same occurs for words like eternal life, redemption, etc.

So the blessings we now have in Christ's kingdom will be so more abundantly real once Jesus delivers the kingdom to God the Father (1 Cor 15:24).