



## INTRODUCTION

Colossians 1:11b-14 is the second of three sections of the long Greek sentence found in 1:9-20.<sup>1</sup> As the second sentence in the letter, this sentence represents a transition from the Praescriptio (1:1-2) and the Proem (1:3-8, the 1st sentence) into the letter body (1:9-4:6). The central theme of the sentence is established in the main clause, “we do not cease praying for you and asking” (οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι) in verse 9b. The topic is defined as intercessory prayer. The content of the prayer is specified by the ἵνα clause in 1:9c-20. The core prayer content is a request to God to fill the Colossians with the knowledge of God’s will (πληρωθῆτε τὴν ἐπίγνωσιν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ). The purpose of such an expansion of understanding is so that the Colossians may walk worthy of the Lord (περιπατῆσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου, verse 10a). The parameters of such a worthy lifestyle are defined then by four participial phrases in verses 10b-20): “bearing fruit,” “growing,” “being empowered,” and “giving thanks.” This last participial phrase picks up in verse 11b and continues through verse 20. In verses 15-20, the remnants of early Christian confession and/or hymn are attached to this participial phrase.

This is the context for our passage in 1:11b-14. It is against this backdrop that our study will be developed. The context is critical for establishing limits of meaning for the text. This passage of 1:11b-14 defines thanksgiving as an essential element of a Christian lifestyle that is worth of the Lord’s blessing. The participle “giving thanks” (εὐχαριστοῦντες) is the core element around which substantial expansion is developed.

The methodology to be used for exploring the historical meaning of this text includes the following items:

<sup>1</sup>For a visual presentation of this sentence that highlights the primary and secondary ideas in the sentence, see the Block Diagrams of both [the Greek text](#) and also of [the English translation](#) of this text.

## 1.0 HISTORICAL

### 1.1 External Aspects

#### 1.1.1 Compositional Aspects

#### 1.1.2 Transcriptional Aspects

### 1.2 Internal Aspects

#### 1.2.1 People

#### 1.2.2 Places

#### 1.2.3 Times

#### 1.2.4 Events

## 2.0 LITERARY

### 2.1 External: Literary Forms

#### 2.1.1 Identify the literary forms

#### 2.1.2 Analyze the role of the literary forms

### 2.2 Internal: Literary Structure

#### 2.2.1 Develop an understanding of the wording.

#### 2.2.2 Assess the literary arrangement of the text.

This is consistent with the other studies in the revised BIC commentary series.<sup>2</sup> At the end of the study, a historical picture will be presented in a narrative format that summarizes the conclusions of the study.

What did the Colossian believers understand Paul and Timothy to be saying through the words of our text?

## **1.0 HISTORICAL**

With the ‘historical’ we will attempt to go back in time to the late 50s of the first Christian century, and to the Roman city of Colossae located in the Lycus River Valley on the eastern side of the Roman province of Asia.<sup>3</sup> When Timothy and the group from Paul showed up in

<sup>2</sup>Note the twofold approach centering on the historical and literary aspects of the text. Each of these is divided into the external and internal aspects. Then, relevant subdivisions are developed for analysis of each set. This approach will provide a solid way of probing the most likely meaning of the text to those who first heard this letter read to them in a church gathering. Out of this foundational understanding can come legitimate applications of the text to our modern time.

<sup>3</sup>Much of the initial analysis has already been done and is presented in the study of the first two pericopes of 1:1-2 and 1:3-8. Check [these studies](#) for details at the BIC revised commentary series at [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com).

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the various house church groups scattered about the river valley region, these believers gathered together in excitement in anticipation of hearing a message from the highly revered apostle directed to them. Paul was currently under the control of the Roman authorities in Caesarea and thus not able to come to them. So he dictated a letter to them to Timothy as his writing secretary. Timothy was then sent with others to Colossae to deliver this written message to the believers there. To be sure, this letter was but one of three letters to be read to each group. Ephesians, as a cover letter, was read first, and then Colossians and Philemon. Upon being read, the original letter was presented to the leadership of the community of believers. With Timothy having actually written out the letters, he could answer well any questions from the groups of believers about what Paul meant by his words.

western coast of the province. Wherever there was a community of believers along this 100 plus mile trip, they would stop and present the contents of these letters to the assembled groups. One can only imagine the excitement created by news of the coming of this group from Paul with these letters to be presented to the churches.

### 1.1 External Aspects

In trying to get back to this historical setting through the written document of the letter itself, one needs to look first at the circumstances surrounding the creation of the letter. Then, how faithfully it was copied by successive generations to become a document in the canonical New Testament. Since we do not have access to any original document in the New Testament, the challenge is to examine the history of this document from every possible angle, which can provide a factual basis for drawing our historical conclusions about its meaning.

#### 1.1.1 Compositional Aspects

Every indication from the available ancient sources suggests the typical situation for composing letters was followed by the apostle Paul. As treated in the first study on 1:1-2, the uncertainty from lack of clear data is the location of Paul when the letter was composed. Church tradition, largely Roman Catholic in orientation, has posited Rome as the location. But, logistics, ge-



A map of the Roman Province of Asia

Immediately, a copy of these three letters would be created and given to Timothy to take to the next group. Timothy and his group made their way through all of the house church groups in the Lycus Valley including those at Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea. This would have taken some time to cover all of the groups. Then following the major road westward they made their way across the province to Ephesus on the



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ography, along with other factors, have led me to the conviction that Caesarea is a more likely location.

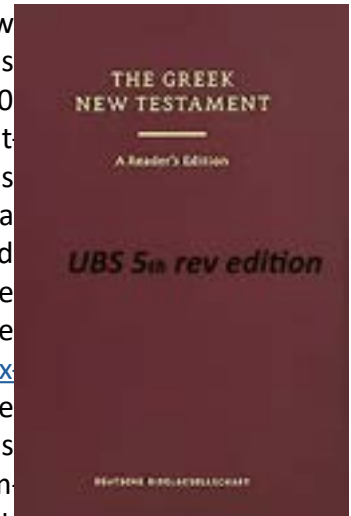
In the assumption of Caesarea as the location, the letter was composed during Paul's two plus years confinement during the time period of AD 57-60. Acts 23:23-27:1 provide insight into this experience of Paul.<sup>4</sup> Timothy was with Paul while helping the believers in Caesarea take care of Paul's needs while he was under arrest in the governor's palace jail. This situation makes the theme of thanksgiving in the letter all the more significant. Thankfulness does not depend on one's situation. It is something far more profound than one's physical situation. Such was also the case for the Colossians at this point in time. Being a part of a religion classified by Rome as *religio illicita* (illegal religion) put one in a precarious position with the Roman authorities. By Roman law, you were considered to be in treason against the government. This gave an open hand to the governor to arrest and execute even a Roman citizen practicing such a religion. Most of the believers at Colossae did not enjoy the privileges and protections of Roman citizenship. So they were even more vulnerable to persecution. Thus Paul's admonitions about being grateful to God take on more challenge.

### 1.1.2 Transcriptional Aspects

With copies being made of this letter from the outset, the question arises of how reliable these copies were to the original wording of the contents of the letter. Modern scholars are faced with this question since the earliest available copies of this document only go back to the late 300s and early 400s AD. The highly technical and complex procedure labeled "Form Criticism" has emerged in the last century and enables the scholar

to carefully evaluate the now existing copies of Colossians found among the 5,600 plus manuscripts.<sup>5</sup> One outgrowth of this research has been the development of a [Critical Apparatus](#) included in the print editions of the Greek New Testament.<sup>6</sup> The scholarly discipline of [Textual Criticism](#) is used as the evaluative tool here. This will be utilized here in examining the wording of our text.

The Critical Apparatus of The Greek New Testament (UBS 5th rev. edition) will serve as the launchpad into the analysis of the text.<sup>7</sup>



<sup>5</sup>Though now greatly modified from its beginnings in the late 1800s, it does provide avenues into determining the most likely wording of the original text of the Greek New Testament. Note the description in the [Encyclopedia Britannica](#): "Form criticism, a method of biblical criticism that seeks to classify units of scripture into literary patterns (such as love poems, parables, sayings, elegies, legends) and that attempts to trace each type to its period of oral transmission. The purpose is to determine the original form and the relationship of the life and thought of the period to the development of the literary tradition." For a listing of publications treating Form Criticism, see Edgar McKnight, "New Testament Studies: Form Criticism," [Yale library.edu](#). Accessed on Jan. 4, 2024.

<sup>6</sup>See "Textual Criticism" in the [Britannica Encyclopedia](#): "Textual criticism, the technique of restoring texts as nearly as possible to their original form. Texts in this connection are defined as writings other than formal documents, inscribed or printed on paper, parchment, papyrus, or similar materials."

<sup>7</sup>**The Greek New Testament, 5th ed.** (UBS5) with Critical Apparatus is designed for translators and students. Like NA28, this is the leading edition of the original text of the New Testament. It contains the same Greek text as NA28, differing only in some details of punctuation and paragraphing." [["What is UBS 5 with critical apparatus?"](#)]

<sup>4</sup>The [first study on Colossians 1:1-2](#) goes into detailed exploration of time and place markers inside the letter that point to the when and the where questions of composition. Additional sources, both inside and beyond the New Testament, are examined.

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Only two variations in text wording is listed in the UBS 5th rev. edition text for 1:11-14. They are both found in verse 12. The segmentation issue in verse 11 has to do with the modification of the prepositional phrase Μετὰ χαρᾶς, “with joy.” Does it qualify the “being empowered” participle before it. Or, does it modify the subsequent participle, “giving thanks”? Most likely the latter. Here is the critical apparatus data:<sup>8</sup>

### Colossians 1:11

NO C: NAmg TR WH GNB<sup>mg</sup> NBS<sup>mg</sup> TOB<sup>mg</sup>  
C: NAmg TR WH GNB<sup>mg</sup> REB<sup>mg</sup> NBS<sup>mg</sup> TOB<sup>mg</sup>

ἐν ... αὐτοῦ Eph 1:19; 3:16

### Colossians 1:12

<sup>4</sup>{B} τῷ πατρὶ P<sup>61</sup> A C\* D Ψ 33 81\* 424 1175 1241 1739\* 1852 1912 1962 2200\* 2464 Byz [K L P] it<sup>b, d, mon</sup> vg<sup>ww, st</sup> syr<sup>pal</sup> cop<sup>sams, bo</sup> geo Origen Basil Didymus<sup>dub2/3</sup> Theodore<sup>lat</sup> Cyril<sup>il4/7</sup>; Ambrosiaster Augustine // ἅμα τῷ πατρὶ P<sup>46</sup> B // τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ κ (F G θεῷ τῷ πατρὶ) it<sup>f, g</sup> vg<sup>cl</sup> syr<sup>p</sup> cop<sup>sams, BOMS</sup> arm Origen<sup>lat</sup>; Speculum // τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ C<sup>3</sup> 075 0150 6 81<sup>c</sup> 104 256 263 365 436 459 1319 1573 1739<sup>c</sup> 2127 2200<sup>c</sup> Lect it<sup>ar, o</sup> vg<sup>mss</sup> syr<sup>h</sup> with \* slav Athanasius Didymus<sup>dub1/3</sup> Cyril<sup>il3/7</sup> Theodore<sup>lem</sup>; Pelagius Varimadum // omit 1881

<sup>5</sup>{B} ἰκανῶσαντι P<sup>46, 61vid</sup> κ A C D1 I Ψ 075 0150 6 81 104 256 263 365 424 459 1241 1319 1573 1739 1852 1881 1912 1962 2127 2200 2464 Byz [K L P] Lect vg syr<sup>p, h, pal</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> eth geo Origen<sup>gr, lat</sup> Athanasius Basil Didymus<sup>dub2/3</sup> Chrysostom Theodore<sup>lat</sup> Cyril; Augustine // καλέσαντι D\*, 2 F G 33 436 1175 it<sup>b, d, f, g, mon, o</sup> vg<sup>ms</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> arm slav Didymus<sup>dub1/3</sup>; Ambrosiaster Pelagius Paulinus-Nola Speculum Varimadum // καλέσαντι καὶ ἰκανῶσαντι B (it<sup>ar</sup>)

<sup>6</sup>{B} ὑμᾶς κ B 104 256 263 365 459 1175 1319 1573 1739 1881 2127 I 1441 vg<sup>mss</sup> syr<sup>hmg, pal</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> arm slav Didymus<sup>dub1/3</sup> Theodore<sup>lat</sup>; Ambrosiaster Pelagius // ἡμᾶς A C D F G Ψ 075 0150 6 33 81<sup>vid</sup> 424 436 1241 1852 1912 1962 2200 2464 Byz [K L P] Lect it<sup>ar, b, d, f, g, mon, o</sup> vg syr<sup>p, h</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> eth geo Origen<sup>gr, lat</sup> Athanasius Basil Didymus<sup>dub2/3</sup> Chrysostom Cyril; Augustine Paulinus-Nola Speculum Varimadum

τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων Eph 1:18

### Colossians 1:13

<sup>8</sup>Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament: Apparatus*, Fifth Revised Edition. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; American Bible Society; United Bible Societies, 2014), 664–665. For considerations of space, the numerous endnotes in the following three quotations are not included in the citations.

τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους Lk 22:53; Eph 2:2; 6:12  
τοῦ υἱοῦ ... αὐτοῦ Mt 3:17; Eph 1:6

### Colossians 1:14

<sup>7</sup>{A} ἀπολύτρωσιν κ A B C D F G Ψ 075 0150 6 33 81 104 256 263 365 436 459 1175 1241 1319 1573 1739 1852 1881 1962 2127 Byz [K L P] Lect it<sup>ar, b, d, f, g, mon, o</sup> vg<sup>ww, st</sup> syr<sup>p, pal</sup> cop<sup>sa, bo</sup> eth geo Athanasius Didymus<sup>dub</sup> Chrysostom Theodore<sup>lat</sup> Cyril; Ambrosiaster Ambrose Pelagius Augustine // ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ (see Eph 1:7) 424 1912 2200 2464 I 147 I 590 I 592 I 593 I 1159 vg<sup>cl</sup> syr<sup>h</sup> arm slav Gregory-Nyssa; Victorinus-Rome Cassiodorus

A very helpful discussion of these variant readings is found in *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*:<sup>9</sup>

### 1:12 ἰκανῶσαντι {B}

Instead of ἰκανῶσαντι, which is strongly supported by P<sup>46</sup> κ A C D<sup>c</sup> K L P most minuscules vg syr<sup>p, h</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> al, several witnesses, chiefly Western (D\* F G 33 436 1175 it<sup>d, g</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> goth arm eth), substitute καλέσαντι. The latter reading arose either accidentally in transcription (confusion between τωικανῶσαντι and τωκαλέσαντι would be easy), or deliberately as a substitution of a familiar for an unusual expression (ἰκανῶ occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in 2 Cor 3:6). The reading of B is an early conflation of both variants (καλέσαντι καὶ ἰκανῶσαντι).

### 1:12 ὑμᾶς {B}

A majority of the Committee preferred ὑμᾶς (κ B 1739 syr<sup>hmg</sup> cop<sup>sa</sup> goth arm eth) regarding ἡμᾶς (A C D G K P Ψ 33 614 Byz Lect it vg syr<sup>p, h</sup> cop<sup>bo</sup> al) as an assimilation to ver. 13.

This discussion is supplemented in *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament*:<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Bruce Manning Metzger, United Bible Societies, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, Second Edition a Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (4th Rev. Ed.) (London; New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 553–554.

<sup>10</sup>Roger L. Omanson and Bruce Manning Metzger, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce* Page 4

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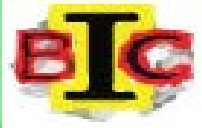
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### 1:11 Segmentation

If a break is made before the words μετὰ χαρᾶς (with joy), as in the text, the words μετὰ χαρᾶς go with what follows and indicate the attitude one is to have when giving thanks, as in NRSV, “while joyfully giving thanks.” If, however, the break is made after these words, μετὰ χαρᾶς go with what precedes and indicate the attitude one is to have while enduring and having patience, as in RSV, “for all endurance and patience with joy ...”

### 1:12 τῷ πατρί (to the Father) {B}

This verse presents a number of variant readings (see also the following comments on other places in this verse). The reading that best explains the origin of the others is τῷ πατρί, which is supported by a varied group of witnesses. Copyists no doubt found it strange that God is referred to simply as “the Father” when Christ has not been named in the immediate context. So they added either τοῦ Χριστοῦ (of Christ) or [τῷ] θεῷ (God), either in apposition to τῷ πατρί (to God the Father [so FC]) or connected to τῷ πατρί with the conjunction καί (to the God and Father). The agreement of P<sup>46</sup> and manuscript B in prefixing ἅμα (together with) is remarkable, but unlikely to be correct.

In some languages, it will be necessary to add a possessive pronoun to the words “the Father” even though the reading in the text is followed.

### 1:12 ἱκανώσαντι (who has enabled/qualified) {B}

A variety of witnesses strongly support the participle ἱκανώσαντι. Several witnesses, chiefly Western, substitute the participle καλέσαντι (who has P<sup>412</sup> called). This variant reading may have arisen accidentally when a copyist confused τωικανωσαντι (who has enabled) for τωκαλεσαντι (who has called), which would have been easy to do. Or the variant reading may have arisen deliberately when the familiar expression “who has called” was substituted for an unusual expression (the verb ἱκανώ occurs elsewhere in the New Testament only in 2 Cor 3:6). The reading of manuscript B is an early combining of both readings (καλέσαντι καὶ ἱκανώσαντι).

### 1:12 ὑμᾶς (you) {B}

The reading of the second person plural ὑμᾶς is probably original but was changed to the first person plural pronoun ἡμᾶς (us) to agree with v. 13 (“who has rescued us”).

*M. Metzger's Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006), 411–412.

### 1:14 ἀπολύτρωσιν (redemption) {A}

The Textus Receptus, following several secondary witnesses, inserts the words διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ (through his blood) from Eph 1:7. If the phrase had been present originally, there would have been no reason for copyists to omit it.

These variations in wording have virtually no theological content.<sup>11</sup> Instead, they represent efforts by later copyists to make the text clearer to those who would read the text. One important contrast to modern thinking must be kept in mind. If a text is considered sacred in our day, we will not change the wording, even if it doesn't make clear sense. But just the opposite thinking prevailed in the early centuries of copying the New Testament text. A sacred text needed to be as clear as possible to those reading it. Thus, out of high regard for the text, the wording would be altered. Most of the time the compulsion for clarifying the text was due to the evolution of the Greek language over time. A modern example would be our compulsion to change “thee,” “thou” to “you” in the English. The rating of a confidence level of {B} or {A} for the text readings reflects a high level of certainty that the adopted readings go back to the original wording of the text.

Now that we have carefully established the most likely original wording of the Greek text, we can proceed to analyze the text to determine its historical meaning:

Μετὰ χαρᾶς 12 εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρί τῷ ἱκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί. 13 ὃς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκοτους καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ, 14 ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν.

A literal translation of this text is:

“with joy 12 giving thanks to the Father, who qualified us for a share of the inheritance of the saints in Light, 13 who res-

<sup>11</sup>The sources that are quoted uniformly follow the basics of the Text Critical methodology labeled “[Reasoned Eclecticism](#).” This is the methodology that I follow in analyzing the text variants. For details see “[Text Critical Materials](#),” at [cranfordville.com](#) under the Greek 202 Course Room.

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cued us out of the power of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of the Son, whom He loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

### 1.2 Internal Aspects

We need to look at markers that specify people, places, time, and events. These are contained in the text itself. This will enable us to develop a historical timeline of actions specified in the text. Some may show up as direct references, while other markers may be embedded in the spellings of Greek words in the text.

#### 1.2.1 People

The masculine plural spelling of the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες, “giving thanks,” reaches back to the second person plural verb πληρωθῆτε in verse 9. The “you” here refers to the Colossians. Paul affirms that the divine filling of the Colossians will be marked by the giving of thanks to God. This is confirmed by the use of the second person plural Personal Pronoun ὑμᾶς, “you,” in verse 12. A few ancient manuscripts substitute the pronoun with Κολοσσαῖς, “Colossians,” in order to clarify any potential misunderstanding.

Their prayers of thankfulness are directed to τῷ πατρὶ, “to the Father.” In 1:2, God is the Father of believers. In 1:3, He is the Father of Jesus Christ. In 3:17, He is simply designated as Father.<sup>12</sup> The substantival use of the Aorist participle τῷ ἱκανώσαντι, “to the one who qualified” plays off of Father with identification of the Father’s power. Additionally, God, as Father, is the clear

<sup>12</sup>The fatherhood of God is a frequent motif across both the Old and New Testaments. See Col 2:2, Jn 4:23, 14:6, 20:17, Ac 1:4. 1 Co 8:6. Ep 4:6. Ja 3:9. 1 Jn 1:3. Although the image of father is found among the pagan religions of this time, Paul reflects his Jewish heritage of affirming the fatherhood of God with the creation of the universe at one level of meaning, and the unique fatherhood of God with His people at another level of meaning. In Col. 1:12 it is the latter view that is in mind. But God, and especially Christ, as Creator of all is associated with fatherhood in verses 15-20.

reference in the relative pronoun ὃς, “who,” (v. 13) and the personal pronoun αὐτοῦ, “of Him,” (v. 13).

Next comes τῶν ἁγίων, “of the saints.” The literal meaning of “Holy Ones” suggests to some commentators that the phrase should be translated as “of the angels.”<sup>13</sup> Yet, the context of this letter argues persuasively for this expression to be taken as referring to believers.<sup>14</sup> The similarity of this statement in verse

<sup>13</sup>There are parallels in the biblical data (Deut 33:3; Ps 89:6; cf. 1 Thess 3:13) and the Qumran literature (especially 1QS 11:7, 8, where the motifs of inheritance, lot and holy ones are mentioned) to suggest that “holy ones” (οἱ ἅγιοι) here refers to angels, and many commentators take the expression in this way. The further point is added that the readers have their hope secure in God’s presence (“in light”) where the angels live. Paul, reflecting on his thought in chapter 1:5, is looking forward to a polemic against the cult of angels, which the false teachers were evidently practicing (2:18). So “at a single blow he dispels this veneration of the angelic powers by assuring the Colossians that they have attained a place shared by the angels (3:1)” (Martin, NCB, 54).

1QS Serek hayyahad (Rule of the Community, Manual of Discipline)  
NCB New Century Bible [Commentary] (new ed.)

[Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 26].

<sup>14</sup>However, this interpretation of “holy ones” referring to angels is less likely than the view that God’s people are being spoken about. The closely related passage of Acts 26:18 (the themes of “light,” “darkness,” “authority,” “forgiveness of sins,” “lot,” and “holy ones” are common to both passages), where words are attributed to Paul, “those who are sanctified by faith in me” (ἐν τοῖς ἡγιασμένοις πίστει φῆ εἰς ἐμέ), can only refer to believers. Furthermore, as Schweizer (47) aptly notes, all the other references to “holy ones” in this letter (1:2, 4, 22; particularly 1:26; 3:12) are to church members. κληρος τῶν ἁγίων is thus understood as a reference to the inheritance allotted to God’s people (cf. Dibelius-Greeven, 8, and many English-speaking commentators). [Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 26.]

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12 to Acts 26:18, where Paul's words are presented by Luke argues for God's people here. Plus, every other instance of this expression in Colossians (1:2, 4, 22, 26; 3:12) clearly refers to believers. The first person personal pronoun ἡμᾶς, "us," (v. 13) refers collectively to God's people under redemption. Here, Paul includes himself and the Colossians in this designation as recipients of this redemption.

Beginning with τοῦ υιοῦ, "of the Son," (v. 13) the references focus mostly on Christ.<sup>15</sup> This is the case with ἐν

<sup>15</sup>This is the only time in the letter that Christ is explicitly described as God's Son, and in the unusual formula, "Son of his love," a Semitic form<sup>31</sup> equivalent to "beloved son" (cf. Eph. 1:6: "the beloved"). The nearest equivalent comes in the Gospels' talk of Jesus as God's "beloved son" (Mark 1:11; 9:7; cf. 12:6; also Matt. 22:2 and Luke 22:29). The usage reflects something of the range of relationship to God that could be expressed by this category, including especially Israel, Israel's king, or the righteous (e.g., Deut. 33:12; Neh. 13:26; Isa. 41:8; 43:4; Wis. 4:10; Sir. 17:18; Psalms of Solomon 13:8; 18:4). That is to say, the metaphor of sonship to God denoted different degrees of closeness to God or favor and acknowledgment given by God, with the added "beloved" indicating a further degree of closeness. In the case of Jesus, initially this also may have been no more than a matter of degree (believers could share in Christ's sonship: Rom. 8:14–17; Gal. 4:6–7). But very quickly a note of qualitative distinction emerged, particularly through the identification of Jesus with Wisdom (see on 1:15), heightened still further in John's Gospel by the distinction of Christ as God's "only or unique (μονογενής) Son," with υἱός ("son") reserved for Jesus. "Son" was the metaphor that most effectively "caught" the relationship between God and Jesus and so became the standard way of referring to Christ in classical christology. See further my *Christology* ch. 2 and *Partings* 245–47.

[James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 79–80.]

ᾧ, "in whom," in verse 14. It remains so in verses 15–20.

Thus a variety of references to different individuals or groups of people are found in this text. Especially important is to keep the antecedents correctly understood in the several pronouns found here.

### 1.2.2 Places

Sorting out the place markers in this text is somewhat more complicated than with the people markers. The giving of thanks assumes an action of praying taking place in the everyday lives of the Colossian believers. This Paul assumes is actually taking place as he writes to them. Here the apostle affirms to them that such activity is an important marker of a worthily walk.

In their praying, they are to address their prayers to God as Father. Where is God when this prayer is spoken? In verse 15, God is defined as 'invisible' (τοῦ ἀόρατου). And Jesus stands as the visible image of this invisible God. But this was the earthly Jesus who returned to the Father in Heaven around 33 AD. And these words were written in the middle 50s of that century. But the clear assumption behind believers' praying is that God is close enough to them in order to both hear their words and respond to them. God as Spirit stands close to all believers simultaneously. The present tense form of the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες underscores the ongoing presence of God with believers, as they pray to Him. At this point, we are dealing not so much with location, as with the nature of existence. Two dimensions are assumed by Paul, especially in the contrastive pairs in verses 16 and 17. The material world stands as the product of God's creational action. But the immaterial world, in which God lives, is just as real and exists simultaneously with the material world. God alone has the ability to function in both dimensions. More details on this will come in the next study on Colossians 1:15–20.

The curious phrase, "the Kingdom of His beloved Son,"

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contains spatial elements. In the New Testament, there are the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom of Christ. Are these synonymous references that refer to the same dynamic? Or, is there some distinction of meaning among them? James Dunn has an excellent treatment of this topic:<sup>16</sup>

Does it make any difference that the kingdom here spoken of is “the kingdom of his [God’s] beloved son”? In comparison with talk of “God’s kingdom,” the idea of Christ’s kingdom occurs only infrequently in the New Testament (Matt. 13:41 and 25:31—the Son of Man; 1 Cor. 15:24–28; also 1 Clement 50:3; cf. Eph. 5:5: “the kingdom of Christ and of God”) and lacks clarity of conception (U. Luz, EDNT 1.204–5). It was partly, no doubt, a consequence of the strong Jewish expectation of a royal Messiah: the identification of Jesus as Messiah carried with it the overtone that as Messiah he reigned as king (cf. Gnllka, *Kolossierbrief* 49; Schweizer, *Colossians* 52; the influence of 2 Sam. 7:14 was important here; see Joel 3). The disentangling of this notion from that of national ruler over Israel (Mark 15:26!) was a delicate business that probably was sufficiently hazardous to inhibit Christian development of a christology of kingship (cf. John 18:35–37). The other main root must have been Ps. 110:1 (note 110:2) and the talk of thrones (plural) in Dan. 7:9—a fruitful source of speculation in Judaism of the time of the New Testament as to whom the extra throne(s) could be for (see my *Partings* 223–24). It was precisely the Christian claim that the full significance of Christ could be understood only if both passages were referred to him: he was the other “Lord” of Ps. 110:1 (see on 2:6); he shared sovereign rule with God (Rev. 7:17; 22:1, 3; see further on 3:1). As in 1:3, however, the thought of Christ’s kingship here is carefully hedged around: the deliverer and actor is God, and as in 1 Cor. 15:24–28, so here, it is a subordinate kingship, as implied by talk of “the kingdom of his beloved son.” Nevertheless, for Paul and Timothy it was a genuine kingship, requiring

<sup>16</sup>James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: William B. Eerdmans Publishing; Paternoster Press, 1996), 78–79.

a proper submission from his servants, even if in the last analysis it is a devotion directed to God through his Son.

Perhaps the tension between the thought of Christ’s kingdom and (by implication) God’s kingdom in this text is itself a reflection of the eschatological tension characteristic of most New Testament writings. A somewhat similar tension is present in Jesus’ teaching on the kingdom of God as preserved in the Synoptic Gospels; for example, Jesus bids his disciples pray “May your kingdom come” (Matt. 6:10/Luke 11:2), but he also claims that in his ministry of exorcism “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (Matt. 12:28/Luke 11:20). To that extent at least we may say that Jesus in his ministry embodied or enacted with executive authority the kingly rule of God. In turn, in the Paulines, the Spirit, that is, the Spirit of Christ, is understood as the first installment of the full share (inheritance) in God’s kingdom (Rom. 8:15–17; 1 Cor. 6:9–11; 15:44–50; Gal. 3:29–4:7; 5:16–21; Eph. 1:13–14). The kingdom of Christ, insofar as it is to be distinguished from the kingdom of God, is a further way of expressing the tension between what has already been accomplished (the kingdom of Christ) and what is still to be accomplished (the kingdom of God). This also means that participation in Christ’s kingship will always be experienced within the contradiction of a world that does not yet own the sovereign rule of God (hence, again, the joy and the need for patience and endurance, as in 1:11–12; see also 4:11).

Kingdom in biblical terms means the sovereign reign of God. In the eschatological sense, such a total reign of God will not happen until the end of times. But in the lordship of Christ, such a reign has commenced with the atoning work of Christ and when the believer acknowledges Christ as in sovereign control of his/her life. The ‘already but not yet’ tension found in the gospels exists in Paul’s understanding as well.

### 1.2.3 Times

The temporal markers in 1:11b-14 range between the present tense and the aorist tense verbal expressions.



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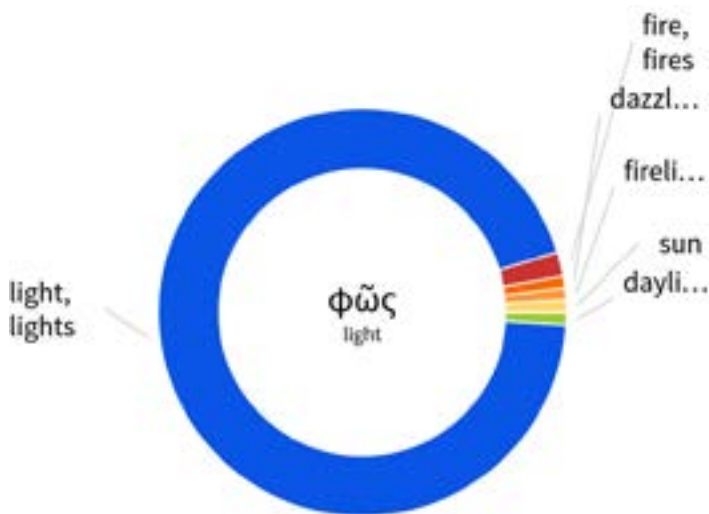


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The present tense participle εὐχαριστοῦντες, “giving thanks,” asserts an ongoing action that will continue into future time. This same point is made with the present tense verb ἔχομεν, “we have,” in verse 14. The possessing of redemption is ongoing from the moment of acceptance of Christ.

Both the mind and the eyes are a part of the figures. Light enables one to see; darkness just the opposite. With seeing comes full awareness of one’s status before God. Darkness implies ignorance of that status.



Paul here especially targets his Gentile readers with a reminder of their paganism before Christ and their enlightenment to God’s reality after coming to Christ. This transformation meant becoming a full participant in the present reign of Christ (εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ), whether of Jewish or non-Jewish ancestry. This participation meant being divinely qualified as a recipient in the inheritance of the saints (εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων) who live in God’s enlightenment. This the Gentile converts could now anticipate in the eschatological fulfillment of the promise. The heavy Jewish background of the terms and ideas here strongly asserts the full status of Gentile converts as being God’s people. In contrast to what the false teachers were claiming (see chapter two), Paul asserts the equality of Jews and non-Jews who have come to Christ. Gentile conversion did not in any way suggest deliverance from paganism into a second class status as God’s people. Their relation to God was identical to that of Jewish Christian converts.

But a series of aorist tense verbs allude to past time moments when an action took place. The aorist participle ἰκανώσαντι, “enabled,” goes back to the conversion moment of the Colossian believer. The aorist tense verb ἔρρῦσατο, “He rescued,” and its parallel verb μετέστησεν, “He transferred,” allude to the sacrificial work of Christ in His death and resurrection. It is out of this divine action in providing salvation in Christ and then the bringing of the Colossians into this salvation that thanksgiving becomes an integral part of Christian living.

### 1.2.4 Events

The aorist tense verbal expressions (ἰκανώσαντι, ἔρρῦσατο, μετέστησεν) imply clearly two past events which mark the beginning of an ongoing relationship with God.

Thus in conversion believers are “qualified” (ἰκανώσαντι) by God to share in the inheritance of the saints. These folk are living ἐν τῷ φωτί, “in the Light,” (v. 12). Clearly to be in the Light stands in contrast to living under the control of darkness (ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκοτούς). Light and darkness stand as symbols of God and Satan.

The first event, “who qualified you,” (ἰκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς) marks the beginning of Christian experience for the Colossians believers. Does this refer to their baptism? As a few commentators have tried to claim?<sup>17</sup> Much

<sup>17</sup>The language of the text does not imply a baptismal confession of faith, as has been claimed. “A considerable and influential body of continental scholarly opinion is convinced that the prayer-report concludes with the words about patience and long-suffering in verse 11. μετὰ χαρᾶς

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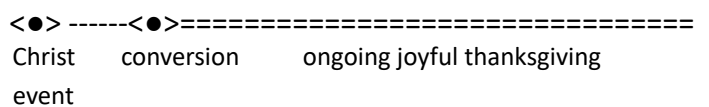
more likely, it alludes to their conversion to Christianity. To be sure, a part of this may include being baptized. But central to the event marker in the participle is a turning from paganism to Christianity in faith commitment to Christ. And a highly liturgical formal structure, found in modern church life, being pressed down on a mid-first century Christian community is very questionable.<sup>18</sup>

The second past time event is found in the parallel aorist tense verbs ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς...καὶ μετέστησεν, “who rescued us...and transferred us,” in verse 13. The shift in the direct object of both these verbs from ὑμᾶς, “you,” to ἡμᾶς, “us,” pushes the event farther back in time to the atoning work of Christ in His death and resurrection. In this event God provided for the spiritual εὐχαριστοῦντες (“joyfully giving thanks”) introduces the community’s confession of faith in Christ. On this view verses 12–20 are understood as a unit with verses 12–14 being regarded by Käsemann (*Essays*, 154, 155) and others as an introit to a baptismal liturgy (Bornkamm, *Studien*, 188–203, and N. A. Dahl, “Anamnesis. *Mémoire et Commémoration dans le Christianisme primitif*,” ST 1 [1948] 86, 87, understand the hymnic confession in a eucharistic context).” [Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 19.]<sup>18</sup>“Our criticism of this division (cf. Introductory Thanksgivings, 71–75) is threefold: first, it is not at all clear why εὐχαριστοῦντες is to be separated from the preceding participles (which we have suggested define more precisely what it means “to walk worthily of the Lord”) and understood as a summons or in an imperatival way. Second, although εὐχαριστέω was used in a wider sense than simply the giving of thanks for personal benefits received it is doubtful whether it was employed as a technical term to introduce a confession (cf. Bornkamm, *Studien*, 196, 197, and note Deichgräber’s criticisms, *Gotteshymnus*, 145, 146). Third, Käsemann’s particular view of the whole section being “an early Christian baptismal liturgy” is unproven. We do not know enough about early Christian liturgies to be able to make pronouncements with this certainty.”

[Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* vol. 44, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 19–20.]

needs of humanity, and especially His people yet to be, through the sacrifice of His beloved Son. The “us” includes Paul and the Gentile believers in the designation of God’s people (τῶν ἀγίων) in the preceding statement in verse 12. Coming out of that event is τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, “redemption.” This liberation from sin is then defined as τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν, “the forgiveness of sins.” This spiritual state can be possessed by God’s people in an ongoing manner (ἔχομεν) who are in Christ (ἐν ᾧ). The Torah of Moses does not provide salvation, as claimed by the Jews of Paul’s day. It comes only through Christ. And this provision is available to all humanity who are willing to profess Christ as Lord. On this foundation then comes the joyful thankfulness of both the individuals and the community of believers (Μετὰ χαρᾶς εὐχαριστοῦντες).

Thus the historical timeline emerging in these verses is as follows:



God provided salvation in Christ. The apostolic gospel proclaims that salvation to all who will come to Christ. The Colossians who responded to that message began experiencing joyful thanksgiving to God. Life now was lived out in the Light, and no longer did darkness have any authority over their existence. Both Jewish and Gentile believers stand together in Christ as God’s people -- free and forgiven.

### 2.0 LITERARY

The literary aspects of this text can give us additional insights into its historical meaning. The caution here, in light of many failures by modern commentators, is not to find artificial forms and patterns that prop up modern theological structures and liturgy. Because of the heavy Jewish orientation and use of many of the words and phrases in both the Old Testament and intertestamental Jewish literature, the temptation toward such

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false identification of forms is significant.

### 2.1 External: Literary Forms

From the external perspective, we look to the surrounding literature for similar patterns as are found in the text of Colossians 1:11b-14. The immediate context of the long sentence in 1:9-20 is important to keep in mind. Our text stands as the fourth element defining what living a life worthy of the Lord (περιπατήσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου) means. Grammatically, this participial phrase includes everything from verse 11b through verse 20. But verses 15-20 stand together as a unit largely via them being a citation from an early Christian hymn or confession of faith. The Christological focus of this unit is established via the relative pronoun ὃς in verse 15 going back to τοῦ υἱοῦ, “Son,” in verse 13.

With the present tense participle εὐχαριστοῦντες, “giving thanks,” as the core idea, an examination of how this verb was used becomes necessary.<sup>19</sup> The root idea is either to be grateful or to express thanksgiving. The verb εὐχαριστέω is used 38 times across the New Testament.<sup>20</sup> In the four gospels, the giving of thanks by Jesus becomes the miraculous moment of provision of

<sup>19</sup>The verb εὐχαριστέω is a compound form from εὐ + χαριστέω with the etymological sense of “giving good praise as thanks to God.” The noun for joy is χαρά and the verb χαίρω, “I am happy/express joy.” The word group of the εὐχαριστ-stem is the verb εὐχαριστέω, the noun εὐχαριστία, and the adjective εὐχάριστος, -ov. The noun is the source of the English word Eucharist. This etymological connection has produced a lot of misunderstanding about the significance of the Greek words in the New Testament.

<sup>20</sup>These include Matthew 15:36, 26:27, Mark 8:6, 14:23, Luke 17:16, 18:1, 22:17, 19, John 6:1, 23, 11:41, Acts 27:35, 28:15, Romans 1:8, 21, 14:6; 16:4, 1 Corinthians 1:4, 14, 10:30, 11:24, 14:17, 18, 2 Corinthians 1:11, Ephesians 1:16, 5:20, Philippians 1:3, **Colossians 1:3, 12, 3:17**, 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2:13, 5:18, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 2:13, Philemon 1:4, Revelation 11:17.

the bread for the assembled crowds. Or it is associated with the blessing of the bread and cup in the institution of the Lord’s Supper. The Samaritan leper expresses thanksgiving to Jesus for his healing in Luke 17:16. In a phony expression of thanksgiving, the Pharisee thanked God that he was better than the rest of mankind (Luke 18:11). In John 6:11,23, the giving of thanks is associated with the bread and fish provided to the crowds following Jesus. In Acts 27:35, Paul gave thanks before eating the bread to encourage shipwrecked passengers. While in 28:15, Paul gave thanks after the brothers met him at Three Taverns on his way to Rome. Especially noticeable is that the giving of thanks was customary before the eating of a meal. This appears to be a common pattern among Jewish people in the first century. Jesus both followed this custom and used it to especially point to the power of God to provide for the needs of His people.<sup>21</sup>

In Colossians 1:3, 12, and 3:17, the verbal form is used: **1:3**, *Εὐχαριστοῦμεν τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ πάντοτε περὶ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι*, “We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you” (NRSV).

**1:12**, *εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἰκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί*, “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light” (NRSV).

**3:17**, *καὶ πᾶν ὃ τι ἐὰν ποιήτε ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ, πάντα ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ, εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ δι’ αὐτοῦ*, “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” (NRSV).

The noun εὐχαριστία shows up 15 times, with 12 of

<sup>21</sup> “THANKSGIVING (תּוֹדָה, *todah*; εὐχαριστία, *eucharistia*). The act of offering thanks or being thankful, usually to God. Often connected to provision, deliverance, or God’s character. Commonly associated in Scripture with meals and worship.” [The Lexham Bible Dictionary, s.v. THANKSGIVING]

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them in Paul's letters.<sup>22</sup> It likewise can designate the posture of gratitude or the action of giving thanks. Twice it surfaces in Colossians:

**2:7**, ἐρριζωμένοι καὶ ἐποικοδομούμενοι ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ βεβαιούμενοι τῇ πίστει καθὼς ἐδιδάχθητε, περισσεύοντες ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, "rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding *in thanksgiving*" (NRSV).

**4:2**, Τῇ προσευχῇ προσκαρτερεῖτε, γρηγοροῦντες ἐν αὐτῇ ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it *with thanksgiving*" (NRSV). The prepositional phrase use ἐν εὐχαριστίᾳ, "*in thanksgiving*," underscores being in a condition of thanksgiving.

The adjective εὐχάριστος, -ον only shows up one time in the New Testament and this is in Colossians **3:15** as part of an admonition καὶ εὐχάριστοι γίνεσθε, "and be thankful." The present tense imperative mood verb stresses ongoing responsibility.

From the extensive use of εὐχαριστία in its verbal, nominal, and adjectival forms, we can conclude that thanksgiving was a very important issue for Paul in his letter to the Colossians. And that it should be a major element in one's prayer life as a Christian. Conversely, thanklessness is considered a rejection of God (Rom. 1:21).<sup>23</sup> Thus when Paul lists giving thanks as one of the four marks of a walk that is worthy of the Lord here in **1:11b-14**, we get a clear signal of its importance.<sup>24</sup> But

<sup>22</sup>These 15 instances are Acts 24:3, 1 Corinthians 14:16, 2 Corinthians 4:15, 9:11, 12, Ephesians 5:4, Philippians 4:6, **Colossians 2:7, 4:2**, 1 Thessalonians 3:9, 1 Timothy 2:1, 4:3, 4, Revelation 4:4, 9.

<sup>23</sup>διότι γνόντες τὸν θεὸν οὐχ ὡς θεὸν ἐδόξασαν ἢ **ηὐχαρίστησαν**, ἀλλ' ἐματαιώθησαν ἐν τοῖς διαλογισμοῖς αὐτῶν καὶ ἐσκοτίσθη ἡ ἀσύνετος αὐτῶν καρδιά, "for though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or **give thanks to him**, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened." (NRSV)

<sup>24</sup>To be very clear, in none of the uses of εὐχαριστία in its various forms is there any evidence of a formal liturgical

Ephesians 5:18-20

καὶ  
μὴ μεθύσκεσθε οἴνῳ  
ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶν ἀσωτία,  
ἀλλὰ  
πληροῦσθε  
ἐν πνεύματι,  
λαλοῦντες ἑαυτοῖς  
ἐν ψαλμοῖς καὶ ὕμνοις καὶ ᾠδαῖς πνευματικαῖς,  
ᾄδοντες  
καὶ  
ψάλλοντες  
τῇ καρδίᾳ ὑμῶν  
τῷ κυρίῳ,  
εὐχαριστοῦντες  
πάντοτε  
ὑπὲρ πάντων  
ἐν ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ  
τῷ θεῷ καὶ πατρὶ.

Ephesians 3:17

καὶ  
πάν ὃ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε  
ἐν λόγῳ ἢ ἐν ἔργῳ,  
(ποιεῖτε) πάντα  
ἐν ὀνόματι κυρίου Ἰησοῦ,  
εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ θεῷ πατρὶ  
δι' αὐτοῦ.

Μετὰ χαρᾶς  
εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ

Expansions following amplify τῷ πατρὶ

Ephesians 1:16

οὐ παύομαι εὐχαριστῶν  
ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν μνηστὴν ποιούμενος  
ἐπὶ τῶν προσευχῶν μοι

as to patterns of usage, the closest thing to a form is the central role of the verb εὐχαριστέω in the letter Proem of Col. 1:3; 1 Thess. 1:2, and Philm. 4. But, the infinitive is used for the Proem in 2 Thess. 1:3, Εὐχαριστεῖν ὀφείλομεν, "we ought to give thanks." Then the first person singular form Εὐχαριστῶ τῷ θεῷ, "I give thanks to God," is used in 1 Cor. 1:4; Rom. 1:8; Phil 1:3. In these instances, Paul thanks God for his readers of the meaning for the idea of thanksgiving. The term has no ceremonial sense of usage anywhere in the New Testament. Instead it specifies ongoing gratitude to God for His blessings as a clear mark of authentic Christianity.

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letters, but other expressions are available to him as well.<sup>25</sup>

The question then arises about set patterns for the use of the participial form εὐχαριστοῦντες in verse 12. Note the pattern here, in 3:17, and in Eph. 1:16 and 5:20, that are the only participial uses in the New Testament. There is no pattern established with the use of the participle, beyond the use of the Dative of Direct Object noun either as τῷ πατρὶ or τῷ θεῷ. The grammar rules for Greek participles are all that are followed. The use of the εὐχαριστία word group in the Greek Old Testament, called the Septuagint, does not reveal any set patterns of usage either: Wisdom 18:2; Judith 8:25; 2 Maccabees 1:11; 2 Maccabees 10:7; 2 Maccabees 12:31; 3 Maccabees 7:16. Only the Hebrew feminine noun תודה (tôdâ) can be used to refer to the thank offerings presented in formal worship at the temple (e.g., Lev 7:12; 2 Chr 29:31; Psa 56:12; Jer 17:26). But it also can refer to general thanksgiving expressions without liturgical overtones (Isa 51:3; Neh 12:38; Jonah 2:9; Psa 42:4).

### 2.1.1 Identify the literary forms

Outside of the Jewish worship in the temple in Jerusalem through 70 AD when it was destroyed, formal patterns of worshipping God with fixed liturgical structure did not exist in early Christianity. From 33 to 70 AD, Christianity was dominantly Jewish in orientation. But Christian Jews continued worshipping in the temple according to the formal patterns of offering sacrifices. The Christian meetings in private homes were largely modeled after the Jewish synagogue meetings on Friday evenings. These meetings centered on the reading of the Old Testament scriptures, prayer, and discussion about the relevance of the scripture text that was read. Since both the Jewish synagogue meetings and

the Christian house church meetings were both conducted in private homes through the first century, the patterns of worship were somewhat fluid and variable around these three core activities of reading, praying, and discussing. Fixed liturgical patterns of worship did not come into Christianity until after the third century when Christianity was in the process of becoming the official religion of the Roman empire, had gained the rights of private property ownership, and the mass was becoming the central element of worship. It is false interpretive methodology to push this later pattern down onto New Testament texts arising out of the first century.

### 2.1.2 Analyze the role of the literary forms

In the various admonitions for Christians to be thankful and to express it as found in the New Testament (cf. 1 Thess. 5:18, Eph. 5:20, Rom. 16:4), both an attitude of gratitude and the expression of thanksgiving were to permeate the totality of one's life.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, when gathered in groups, the worship of Christians was to be grounded in thanksgiving. The praise of God was to be anchored in thanksgiving.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup>"In the New Testament, thanksgiving is tied to the concept of "grace" (χάρις, charis). Most Greek words related to "thanks" are semantically connected, including the noun "thanksgiving" (εὐχαριστία, eucharistia), the adjective "thankful" (εὐχάριστος, eucharistos), and the verb "to give thanks, be thankful" (εὐχαριστέω, eucharisteō). People in the New Testament offer thanksgiving to God in worship (e.g., 1 Tim 2:1), individual prayer (e.g., Acts 28:15), and at meals (e.g., Matt 15:36–37). Expressions of thanksgiving appear throughout Paul's writings (e.g., Phil 1:3–8). In the New Testament, thanksgiving is often a response to the redemptive work of Jesus (e.g., Rom 7:25). Texts like Luke 24:30 indicate that thanksgiving held an important part in Jewish and Christian meals."

[Chris McKnight, "Thanksgiving," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).]

<sup>27</sup>Thanksgiving seems to have been a regular part of the

<sup>25</sup>But Paul is not bound to use Εὐχαριστοῦμεν or Εὐχαριστῶ in the letter Proem. Note instead the use of Εὐλογητός, "praised," in 2 Cor. 1:3; Eph. 1:3. And Χάρις ἔχω, "I have praise," in 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:3.

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Although no liturgical forms for expressing thanksgiving surface inside the New Testament, the expression of gratitude to God permeated the life of Christians in the first century. It was spontaneous and genuine both in individual prayers and in collective worship. Absence of thanksgiving was considered to be a sign that one did not know God.

## 2.2 Internal: Literary Structure

Now we need to take a close look at the words contained in 1:11b-14. First we will examine each word individually through the process of parsing each one. This gives insight through the morphological aspect. Next, we will examine how those words fit together in a thought expression. This syntactical aspect will complete our examination. Then a detailed historical understanding of the passage can be developed.

### 2.2.1 Develop an understanding of the wording.

Below is listed a complete parsing<sup>28</sup> of each word in Co-

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early church's worship life (e.g., 1 Cor 14:16). Paul instructs the churches to give thanks to God for all things (Eph 5:20), which was part of God's will for them (1 Thess 5:16-18). They were to be anxious about nothing, but instead to present their requests to God with thanksgiving (Phil 4:6). First Timothy 2:1-2 notes that as part of worship, Christians should offer petitions, intercessions, prayers, and thanksgiving for all people, including earthly rulers (1 Tim 2:1-2). News of the spreading of the gospel and generosity were to result in thanksgiving overflowing toward God (2 Cor 4:14-15; 9:11-12). In the visions of Revelation, the four living creatures (Rev 4:9), the angels (Rev 7:12), and the 24 elders (Rev 11:17) in the heavenly throne room provide a model for offering thanksgiving to God."

[Chris McKnight, "Thanksgiving," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).]

lossians 1:11b-14. Some observations from this parsing will follow.

#### Verse 11b:

Μετὰ: Preposition with Genitive case noun: with.  
χαρᾶς: First declension Noun - Genitive (Association) - Feminine - Singular - χαρά, -ᾶς, ἡ - with joy.

#### Verse 12:

εὐχαριστοῦντες: Present (Descriptive) - Active - Participle (Adverbial: Modal) - Nominative - Masculine - Plural - εὐχαριστέω - giving thanks.

τῷ πατρὶ: Third Declension Noun - Dative of Direct Object - Masculine - Singular - πατήρ, πατρός, ὁ - to the Father.

τῷ ἰκανώσαντι: 1 Aorist (Constative) - Active - Participle (Adjectival: Attributive) - Dative - Masculine - Singular - ἰκανόω - who made us strong, adequate, qualified.

ὑμᾶς: Personal Pronoun - Accusative (Direct Object) - Plural - σύ - you.

εἰς: Preposition used with Accusative case object - εἰς - for.

τὴν μερίδα: Third Declension Noun - Accusative (Purpose) - Feminine - Singular - μερίς, -ίδος, ἡ - for the share, (a portion of).

τοῦ κλήρου: Second Declension Noun - Genitive (Place) - Masculine - Singular - κληρος, ου, ὁ - in the inheritance.

τῶν ἁγίων: Adjective (Substantival) - Genitive (Possession) - Masculine - Plural - ἅγιος, -ία, -ον - of the saints, holy ones.

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to simply identify the specific aspects of each Greek word in the text.

<sup>28</sup> This parsing of Colossians 1:11b-14 follows the guidelines set forth in Appendix 2: Guides to Parsing, which is found in [volume 35](#) of the **Biblical Insights Commentary**, "Tools for Using Greek" at [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com). The action of parsing is

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έν: Preposition used with Locative case object - έν - in (dwelling in).

τῷ φωτί: Third Declension Noun - Locative (Sphere) - Neuter - Singular - φῶς, φωτός, τό - in the Light.

### Verse 13:

ὃς: Relative Pronoun - Nominative (Subject) - Masculine - Singular - ὃς, ἡ, ὅ - who (connects via antecedent back to τῷ πατρὶ above.).

ἐρρύσατο: First Aorist (Constative) - Middle (Dependent) - Indicative - Third Person - Singular - ῥ(ρ)ύομαι - who rescued.

ἡμᾶς: Personal Pronoun - Accusative (Direct Object) - Plural - ἐγώ - us.

ἐκ: Preposition used with Ablative case object - ἐκ - out of, from.

τῆς ἐξουσίας: First Declension Noun - Ablative (Source) - Feminine - Singular - ἐξουσία, -ας, ἡ - out of the power, authority.

τοῦ σκότους: Second Declension Noun - Genitive (Descriptive) - Neuter - Singular - σκότος, -ους, τό - of the darkness.

καί: Coordinate conjunction linking two verbs - καί - and.

μετέστησεν: First Aorist (Constative) - Active - Indicative - Third Person - Singular - μεθίστημι - he transferred (us).

εἰς: Preposition used with the Accusative case object - εἰς - into.

τὴν βασιλείαν: First Declension Noun - Accusative (Measure) - Feminine - Singular - βασιλεία, -ας, ἡ - into the Kingdom.

τοῦ υἱοῦ: Second Declension Noun - Genitive (Posses-

sive) - Masculine - Singular - υἱός, -οῦ, ὁ - of the Son.

τῆς ἀγάπης: First Declension Noun - Genitive (Objective) - Feminine - Singular - ἀγάπη, -ης, ἡ - of love (=whom He loves).

αὐτοῦ: Personal Pronoun - Genitive (Subjective) - Masculine - Singular - αὐτός, -ή, -ὸ - His (He loves).

### Verse 14:

έν: Preposition used with locative case object - έν - in.

ᾧ: Relative Pronoun - Locative (Sphere) - Masculine - Singular - ὃς, ἡ, ὅ - in whom (connects via antecedent back to υἱοῦ).

ἔχομεν: Present (Descriptive) - Active - Indicative - First Person - Plural - ἔχω - we have.

τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν: Third Declension Noun - Accusative (Direct Object) - Feminine - Singular - ἀπολύτρωσις, -εως, ἡ - redemption (Lit., the buying back of a slave, 'making free' by payment of a ransom, λύτρον),

τὴν ἄφεσιν: Third Declension Noun - Accusative (Apposition) - Feminine - Singular - ἄφεσις, -έσεως, ἡ - ἁμαρτιῶν forgiveness of sins i.e., cancellation of the guilt of sin,

τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν: First Declension Noun - Genitive (Objective) - Feminine - Plural - ἁμαρτία, -ίας, ἡ - of sins [w. mngs. ranging fr. involuntary mistake/ error to serious offenses against a deity].

### Observations about the parsing:

1. Even though a relatively short segment of the long sentence in 1:9-20, this text is packed full of several important concepts related to the central theme of being thankful.

2. The time structure in the participial phrase builds off of two past time events, the work of Christ in His death and resurrection as reflected in ἐρρύσατο, "who rescued" and μετέστησεν, "who transferred." The

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other past time event is conversion as reflected in *ἰκανώσαντι*, “who enabled.” The distinction between these to two past time events is established by the use of *ἡμᾶς*, “us,” and *ὕμᾶς*, “you” as direct objects. The second person pronoun is used with “enabled” and this alludes to the conversion of the Colossians. But the first person *ἡμᾶς*, “us,” as the direct object of “rescued” and “transferred” generalizes the verbal actions back to the work of Christ as the action of God in providing salvation for His people, which includes Paul and the Colossians.

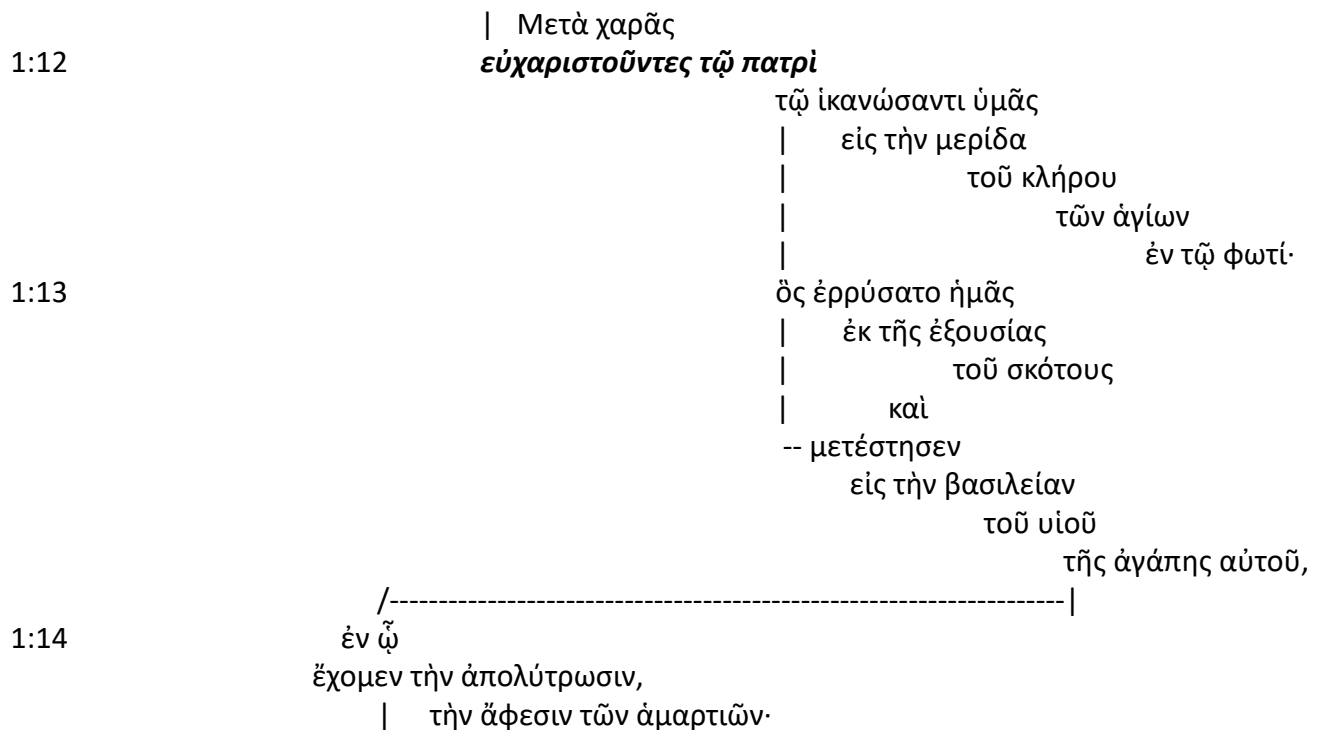
3. The references to the Colossians, to Paul and Timothy, to God’s people are somewhat complex. The *ὕμᾶς*, “you,” in verse 12 refers to the Colossians. And, as becomes clear from the use of the heavily Jewish oriented *τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί*, “participation in the inheritance of the saints in Light” phrase, the “you” emphasizes the Gentiles in the Colossians community of believers. This Paul stresses to affirm the status of the Gentile believers in Colossae as genuinely being a part of God’s people. The Christian-

izing of the term *τῶν ἁγίων*, “of the saints,” includes not exclusively Jews as claimed in the synagogue, but all who come to God through Christ. This is reaffirmed with the verbs “rescued” and “transferred” with *ἡμᾶς*, “us,” as their direct object. Paul here includes himself and the Colossians as authentically included in the designation *τῶν ἁγίων*, “of the saints.” Further confirmation is seen in the first person plural verb *ἔχομεν*, “we have.”

4. The outcome of both God’s provision in Christ and the conversion of the Colossians is the ongoing posture of “giving thanks,” *εὐχαριστοῦντες*, and the possessing of redemption, *ἔχομεν*.” The present tense forms in both the participle and the verb stress continuing action.

### 2.2.2 Assess the literary arrangement of the text

The inner connections of the individual words in 1:11b-14 are most clearly represented visually in a block diagram of the text. This is followed by some observations.





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#### Observations about the diagram:

1. Everything in the lengthy participial phrase with εὐχαριστοῦντες builds off of the participle.
2. But the only adverbial modifier is the prepositional phrase Μετὰ χαρᾶς, “with joy.” It is in the pre-position in front of the participle.
3. All of the remaining expansions are attached to the direct object noun τῷ πατρὶ, “to the Father.” This pattern is rather distinctive and unique. Nothing similar shows up in the other three instances of the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες, “giving thanks” (Col. 3:17; Eph. 1:16; 3:17) in the New Testament.<sup>29</sup>
4. The expansions come in the form of an adjectivally modifying participle phrase (verse 12); a compound relative clause (verse 13); and an adverbial relative clause (verse 14). The Father is the subject of the first two, but Christ is the subject of the second relative clause in verse 14. This relative clause then sets up the citation as an additional relative clause in verses 15-20.

#### CONCLUSION

Now we can set up the historical understanding using the internal time line found in the text.

<●> -----<●>=====

Christ      conversion      ongoing joyful thanksgiving  
event

Colossians 1:11b-14 stands as the second part of the second sentence found in 1:9-20. Syntactically it is a participial phrase that includes 1:11b-20. But 1:15-20 stands as a citation attached to the participial phrase via a relative clause. Thus the main segment comes in 1:11b-14 with the participle and its expansion elements. In regard to the core clause in the sentence itself, ἡμεῖς...οὐ παύομεθα ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν προσευχόμενοι καὶ αἰτούμενοι, “we...do not stop praying for you and

<sup>29</sup>For a more detailed presentation see the block diagram of the entire sentence in 1:9-20, both in the Greek and also in English at the [BIC1504 homepage](http://BIC1504.homepage) in the BIC commentary series as [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com). Also note the collection of diagrams on [page 12](#) above.

asking” (verse 9), this participial phrase is the fourth marker defining the boundaries of περιπατήσαι ἀξίως τοῦ κυρίου, “in order to walk worthy of the Lord” (verse 10). Developed in much greater detail than the previous three participles, this marker is perhaps intended as the most important of the four.

The sentence itself in 1:9-20 contains Paul’s statement of intercessory prayer as his ministry to the Colossians. And the long ἵνα clause (1:9b-20) affirms both why and how Paul prays for the Colossians. A divine filling with greater knowledge of God’s will that produces a worthy lifestyle by the Colossians is the heart of his praying for them. The details in the ἵνα clause also set the stage for much more discussion later in the letter body. And this is particularly true for εὐχαριστοῦντες, this participial in 1:11b-20. Joyful thanksgiving lifted up the the Heavenly Father will provide a central theme for much of the material in 1:21-4:6.

As a trait of the Christian life, joyful thanksgiving centers on God as Father, and Christ as the beloved Son in 1:11b-14. They are to be thanked because of what they have done to meet the needs of the people of God. It is the Father who has enabled even Gentiles (ικανώσαντι ὑμᾶς, verse 12) to share in the inheritance of God’s saints. These folk live now in the Light of God as they anticipate eternity with the Father. This status as a saint of God is possible because God rescued His people (ὅς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς, verse 13) from the control of darkness over their lives as pagans. And He also transferred them into the Kingdom of His beloved Son (καὶ μετέστησεν, verse 13). Consequently both Jew and Gentile who comes to Christ comes to possess redemption (ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, verse 14). Redemption is itself the liberation of being set free as a slave to sin. This means fundamentally that it brings divine forgiveness from the guilt of our sins (ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν). Being in Christ gives ongoing possession of this redemption and forgiveness. If that’s not worth a life of joyous thanksgiving, I’m not sure

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what could be.

All through especially the thanksgiving section, the language of the Judaism in Paul's day is used and re-defined from a Christian perspective. Paul sought to speak especially to the Gentile believers at Colossae in order to reassure them of equal status with their Jewish Christian brothers before God their Father. This was not the message coming out of the synagogues located in Colossae. And likely neither from the false teachers at work in the Christian house church groups in the town. An apologetic tone does exist in Paul's words, but the Colossian believers were making real progress spiritually out of the apostolic Gospel that Epaphras had preached to them.

The apostle's basic intent with the letter was to solidify their commitment to this Gospel message even stronger. In 1:9-20, he asserts that this is how he was praying daily for them. Numerous subtopics mentioned in 1:11b-14 will open the door to much greater detailed discussion in the letter body. This will provide greater details about God's will. And all of it is focused on the apostolic Gospel as the exclusive way of salvation for all of humanity. We become the people of God only by being in Christ. Obedience to the Torah won't achieve this. Greek and Roman philosophy won't make us God's people. But conversion to Christ in apostolic Gospel based faith commitment will.