

# BIBLICAL INSIGHTS COMMENTARY

Exposition: English  
Part Two: Exposition

Volume 15, Pericope 4

Colossians 1:11b-14



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### INTRODUCTION

The relevance of Colossians 1:11b-14 to today's world is rather obvious. The central theme of giving thanks to God, which is established by the core structure of this participial phrase with the Greek participle εὐχαριστοῦντες, is sufficiently broad enough in scope to cover a number of modern situations in church life. And yet, the larger context of the participial phrase in the sentence (1:9-20) imposes some limits on its application to modern church life. It stands as the fourth mark of a worthy walk before the Lord. Being perpetually grateful to God clearly is an indication of genuine Christian commitment. But, in Colossians, it is but one of four indicators of genuineness, even though perhaps the most important one of the four.

Now, we need to sort out the details of the scripture text in order to determine how to best apply this text to a modern setting. Five study areas should enable us to make that determination. These are:

#### 1.0 Identify the Central Idea of the Text

#### 2.0 Develop an Exegetical Outline of the Text.

#### 3.0 Develop a Semantic Outline of the Text.

#### 4.0 Develop a Sermon Brief of the Text.

#### 5.0 Develop a Teaching Outline of the Text.

Again, what I am attempting to do here is not to define the exclusive relevancy of the text to today's world. Such would be an impossibility even to try. Rather, I want to provide an example of how to make the transition from the historical meaning to the modern day application. Hopefully, this will enable you to set up your own exposition of the text for application to some setting in your ministry.

This methodology builds on the foundation of [the](#)

[exegesis of the text](#) established in Part One. The perceived historical meaning provides the boundaries of potential relevancy of this passage. Thus finding a modern setting that matches that found in the text is the crucial point in moving from the 'then' meaning to the 'now' application. Of course, a 100% match is not possible. But we should be able to find modern settings in which the spiritual values of the text are relevant. It is here that we face the greatest danger of failure in our handling of the scripture text. Points 1.0 and 2.0 are intended to help us gain a clear sense of the historical meaning in its potential for modern application. Point 3.0 pushes us into that shift out of the 'then' meaning and into the 'now' aspect of legitimate application. Then, points 4.0 and 5.0 provide opportunities to make that application specifically either in a preaching or teaching situation.

Now, we need to be challenged by the visual and audio encounter with the original words of Paul and Timothy to the believing communities at mid-first century Colossae:

Μετὰ χαρᾶς 12 εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ τῷ ἰκανώσαντι 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·

The literal meaning of these ancient Greek words is as follows:

“With joy, 12 giving thanks to the Father who qualified us for a share of the inheritance of the saints in Light, 13, who rescued us out of the power of darkness and who transferred us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son, 14 in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

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From the block diagram of this text in either [ancient Greek](#) or [modern English](#), we can clearly see the context of this participial phrase in 1:11b-14 in relation to the rest of the sentence in 1:9-20. The sentence stands as the promise of Paul and Timothy to the Colossians to lift them up to God on a daily basis in intercessory prayer. The heart of that praying is defined in the subordinate ἵνα clause in 1:9b-20 as asking God to fill the Colossians with ever expanding knowledge of His will (verse 9b), so that they would live their lives in a manner worthy of the Lord (verse 10a). This worthy walk is then defined by four participial phrases: “bearing fruit,” (verse 10b); “growing,” (verse 10c); “being divinely empowered,” (verse 11), and “giving thanks,” (verses 12-20). This last participial phrase is our text, but only the first part of it. In verses 15-20, Paul attaches a citation from preformed-formed Christian tradition to his words as a further affirmation of praise to Christ. This we will examine in the next study of this sentence. In the present study we will limit our focus to 1:11b-14.

Obviously, the participle εὐχαριστοῦντες establishes the theme of giving thanks for this fourth pericope of the letter to the Colossians. But this thanksgiving is itself defined as a mark of true Christian living. And it is a part of what Paul is asking God to make known to the Colossians. Such a historical setting for this text should suggest possible modern settings where the spiritual values of the text can be applied.

Let me propose the following modern setting. I am pastoring a church with a lot of struggles as it approaches the American holiday of Thanksgiving. So many dynamics are pushing the members toward negativism and a critical spirit. How can I challenge them to adopt a genuine posture of gratitude? I long for them to be genuinely thankful both to God and to others. Not just for the short time through the holiday. But for them to adopt the spirit of thanksgiving as an important part of their daily living all the time. This

text clearly addresses such a need.

### 1.0 Identify the Central Idea of the Text.

The first item that needs to be done is to develop a clear statement of the central idea of this scripture text. I need to do this in order to have a clear perception of what the text is saying. The CIT statement will provide the anchor point for the development of the text theme. If the meaning of the text is foggy in my mind, then the chances are very great that it will be foggy in my attempts to explain the text to the congregation. To be sure, the Holy Spirit can use us as the dull hoes in chopping the Johnson grass from around the cotton plants in the field. But how much better if we are sharp hoes in His hands! God’s people are those cotton plants who need effective tending to if they are to be productive in the Kingdom.

In short, how can we summarize the historical meaning of Col. 1:11b-14 in a concise, accurate statement? Here is one possibility:

**The apostle Paul asserted that giving thanks to the Heavenly Father is an essential aspect of Christian living.**

Some observations:

1. This CIT reflects the historical sense of the text with the past tense verb in the main clause.
2. The statement is true to the meaning of the text in its context.
3. The statement is a concise expression of the central spiritual value in the text.

Now with this established anchor point, we need to ‘flesh out’ some of the details found in the text.

### 2.0 Develop an Exegetical Outline of the Text.

An outline of the scripture passage that is built around

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the above CIT summary statement of its core meaning can be developed with the same past time frame as the CIT statement. The first point will focus on the core elements of the participial phrase. And the second point will center on the expansion elements in the phrase. The participle has one adverbial modifier: Μετὰ χαρᾶς Μετὰ χαρᾶς. But most of the expansion elements are attached to the noun τῷ πατρὶ. These two points will be developed with the title of “Being Thankful.”

#### **I. Consistent, joyful giving of thanks was identified as true Christian living. (11b-12a)**

Μετὰ χαρᾶς εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ:

“with joy giving thanks to the Father.”

**A. Joyous thanksgiving was the norm.**

**B. God was to be respectfully approached as Father.**

#### **II. God as Heavenly Father has provided for core spiritual needs. (vv. 12b-14)**

##### **A. He has qualified believers for an eternal inheritance. (v. 12b)**

τῷ ἰκανώσαντι ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν μερίδα τοῦ κλήρου

τῶν ἁγίων ἐν τῷ φωτί

“who has qualified you for a share of the inheritance of the saints in Light.”

##### **B. He has rescued believers from the tyranny of spiritual darkness. (v. 13a)**

ὃς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκότους

“who rescued us out of the power of darkness.

##### **C. He has placed believers into the Kingdom of His beloved Son. (v. 13b)**

καὶ μετέστησεν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ  
τῆς ἀγάπης αὐτοῦ,

“and transferred us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son”

##### **D. In Christ believers possess redemption and forgiveness of sins. (v. 14)**

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν  
τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

“in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

#### **Observations about the outline:**

1. The two points reflect the primary and secondary elements of this participial phrase.
2. The historical setting is present via context, while the participial phrase stresses spiritual values.
3. This makes the transition into a modern application somewhat easier.
4. The spiritual values in the participial phrase are very basic ideas with a wide range of possible applications.

The theme of thanksgiving focused here in 1:11b-14 is a developed emphasis throughout the entire letter to the Colossians. From an apostolic Christian perspective thanksgiving is linked closely to divine grace. Even the words are inner connected. Note χάρις for grace coming from a common root stem with εὐχαριστία, [thanksgiving.1](#) For Christians, the receiving of divine

<sup>1</sup>And also linked is the word for joy, **χαρά**.

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grace through Christ evokes profound gratitude and expressions of thankfulness to God. Both in corporate worship (cf. Psalm 100) and individual worship (cf. Psalm 116) among the Jewish people, thanksgiving was closely related to the praise of God. “The most common Hebrew noun used for “thanks” (תודה, *todah*) derives from the verb “to praise, confess” (יָדָה, *yadah*).”<sup>2</sup> In Colossians, the word group for thanksgiving is used a total of 6 times (verb εὐχαριστέω, 3x; noun εὐχαριστία, 2x; adjective εὐχάριστος, 1x). It was a vital part of Paul’s ministry to the Colossians (1:3), as well as to be crucial to the Christian lives of the Colossians (1:11 et als.). From the above outline, it is obvious that the thanksgiving offered up to the Heavenly Father is mostly focused on what God has done to meet fundamental needs in the lives of His people.

### 3.0 Develop a Semantic Outline of the Text.

At this point the shift to the present application becomes dominant. The parameters of meaning derived out of the exegesis remain in place. But the emphasis centers on meeting a perceived need in the anticipated audience of either our preaching or teaching of this text. A wide array of possible situations can possibly be addressed here. The modern world tends toward self-centeredness, the primacy of the ‘me,’ that bring much negativism into living styles. In contemporary western culture this is often wrapped around a rugged individualism where little concern for others exists. And even in crisis situations where outpourings of help come to those having suffered material loss through storms etc., the giving of help is often motivated dominantly by wanting to look good in the eyes of others. Or, else by a self-serving pity for those poor people who are of lesser importance.

<sup>1</sup>Chris McKnight, “Thanksgiving,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

This text has a lot to say about authentic Christian thanksgiving as the motivation for helping others. This stands as a real distinctive for Christians that sets them apart from the world around them. It becomes a unique opportunity for witness to the power of the Gospel to transform lives.

In order to set up this focus, two things need to be done. First, the original CIT statement needs to be modified, and then an outline of the text reflecting this shift of focus needs to be created.

#### A. A modified Semantic CIT statement:

**Thanksgiving is to be one of the foundations of our Christian life.**

Observations about this CIT statement:

1. This statement brings the historical meaning of the text into a modern setting.
2. It affirms the core spiritual value contained in the text.
3. The statement is sufficiently broad enough to allow for either preaching or teaching this text.

#### B. A Semantic Outline of the Text:

Below is an outline seeking to make the transition into a modern setting while maintaining faithfulness to the ancient scripture text. This double challenge is always present at this point in the interpretative process. We deeply desire to hear God speaking through the text. And Him speaking to real needs in our modern lives. To achieve both concerns means that a genuinely biblically based application of the text has been created.

#### I. Joyful Thanksgiving is essential. (1:11b-12a)

A. Thanksgiving comes with true joy.

B. Thanksgiving must be integral to our living.

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### II. Joyful Thanksgiving reaches out to God as our Father. (1:12b-14)

- A. Your Father has qualified you for  
an inheritance. (1:12b)
- B. Your Father has rescued you. (1:13a)
- C. Your Father has put you into Christ's Kingdom.  
(1:13b)
- D. You have come to possess redemption  
in His beloved Son. (1:14)

The spiritual truths of this scripture text are now focused on a projected modern audience. The structuring of these truths follows the grammar structure of the text. And they also address real concerns in the lives of many believers in the modern world.

Now let's move into more specific application via either a preaching setting or a teaching setting. Here a specific setting will need to be visualized and addressed.

#### 4.0 Develop a Sermon Brief of the Text.

The sermon brief is a document containing all of the sermon preparation materials. It provides the needed resources for writing out a full manuscript of the sermon to be preached.<sup>3</sup> Here we will develop the sermon CIT statement and a summary outline of the sermon. This is a model intended to challenge you to develop your own sermon from this text. Included in the outline will be a summation of the three essential sub-points to the

<sup>3</sup>A more detailed [Sermon Report Form](#) is available from the Greek 202 Course Room at [cranfordville.com](#). This was the requirement for my advanced Greek students at Gardner-Webb University. For those interested in how to develop a biblical based sermon, I would recommend reading this and related materials at [cranfordville.com](#).

development of any sermon: Explanation, Illustration, and Application. The assumed scenario for the sermon is a Sunday morning worship service happening on the eve of the American thanksgiving celebration holiday.

#### A. The Sermon CIT:

I want to motivate my audience to reflect  
seriously on their motives for helping others.

The objective of the sermon is to challenge the audience to honestly look at what makes them 'tick' as a Christian. Particularly so when it comes to helping folks in need who are nearby. Impure motives blunt the usefulness of our actions to the work of the Holy Spirit in pointing others to Christ. This scripture text provides important insight into how to be properly motivated in service to others. Motivated in a way that provides the Holy Spirit maximum opportunity to bring others to Christ who can meet their needs.

#### B. The Sermon Outline:

Here is a possible sermon outline building on the above CIT statement and on the scripture text of Colossians 1:11b-14.

#### Introduction:

Hear God's word in Colossians 1:11b-14.<sup>4</sup>

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

<sup>4</sup>Play the recording of [the reading of the Greek text](#) of Colossians 1:11b-14. It can be accessed at the [BIC1504 homepage](#) in volume 15 of the revised BIC commentary series at [cranfordville.com](#).

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Now what do these words mean to us in our language? Here is a translation of them in American English:

**“With joy, giving thanks to the Father who qualified you for a share of the inheritance of the saints who live in the Light; God rescued us out of the power of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of His beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, that is, the forgiveness of sins.”**

This interesting text stands as the second part of a long Greek sentence found in 1:9-20. The sentence is built around the assertion of Paul and Timothy that they have been faithfully praying for the Colossians believers since they first learned of their existence from Epaphras. The thrust of the intercessory prayers offered up to God is that He would fill the Colossians with an expanding knowledge of God’s will. Such knowledge would shape the daily living of the Colossians into a worthy walk before the Lord.

Now what is this? The worthy walk is defined by four participial phrases in 1:10b-20. That is, to live a life that honors the Lord means “bearing fruit in every deed,” “growing in our knowledge of God,” “being enabled by God’s power to live in patience and long-suffering,” and finally to give thanks joyfully to the Father for what He has done for us.”

It is this last trait of thanksgiving that I want to focus on today. Later this week we will celebrate the American thanksgiving holiday. Over the next few days, we will hear much about being thankful during this holiday. But how will most Americans celebrate thanksgiving? Mostly by over eating on Thursday noon, and by watching football games about all day long on their TVs. Some nebulous thoughts about being thankful may pass through our minds momentarily during the day. But that’s about the extent of our thankfulness. Not sure that much that is Christian can be found in

such a celebration.

Paul’s words to the Colossian Christians in the middle of the first century offer us insight into how to make our Thanksgiving celebration truly Christian. His concern for the Colossians was that “in every good deed” they would be fruitful (verse 10). Being truly thankful to God is an important path to this fruitfulness. This kind of gratitude is genuinely -- and distinctly -- Christian. Thus when we reach out to help others we do so motivated by this kind of gratitude to God. This American holiday presents us as believers in Christ with a wonderful opportunity to express Christian thankfulness in ministering to others.

What can we learn from Paul about true thanksgiving? I want to stress two things from our scripture text: 1) motives behind our service, and 2) a clear vision of God’s actions in our behalf. These insights can push us to genuine gratitude motivating us to minister to others in need. The title of the sermon is “Pushed to Serve.”

### I. What moves you to help others? (1:11b-12a)

#### EXPLANATION:

Notice Paul’s words in the first two verses: **“With joy, giving thanks to the Father.”** The Greek participle in the present tense spelling as εὐχαριστοῦντες, eucharistountes, sets the orientation of the entire phrase as dealing with the action of giving thanks in our prayers and in our actions toward others. The present tense form emphasizes continuing action that is repeated daily.

Later in Col. 3:17, Paul will repeat this participle in an admonition to the Colossians: καὶ πᾶν ὃ τι ἐὰν ποιῆτε 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

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the name of the Lord Jesus, *giving thanks to God the Father* through him.”

He makes it very clear that thanksgiving is foundational to our Christian existence. The posture of thanksgiving shapes every relationship that we have toward others. We minister to others, not because we expect something in return from them. We do not serve to make “brownie points” with Almighty God. True thanksgiving motivates us to want to point others to our God.

Additionally, this giving of thanks is to be done *Μετὰ χαρᾶς*, “with joy.” In biblical tones, joy is an excitement that accompanies our giving of thanks. Whether the setting is individual praying or ministry or whether it is as a congregation in worship to God, joyous excitement should shape our actions.<sup>5</sup> Our ongoing sense of gratitude to God for saving us should shape every aspect of our living. When we reach out to others in excited ministry, they will notice it and be much more open to receiving our help. This the Holy Spirit will use to bring them to God.

### ILLUSTRATION:

Worship that is dry and ritualistic performance sends the exact wrong message to a non-believer. They do not sense the presence of God in the lives of such worshipers. Nor in their church! Remember that ritualistic performance in worship is not limited to churches utilizing high liturgical patterns of worship. Empty ritual can just as easily surface on the opposite<sup>5</sup> “In the New Testament, ‘joy’ is still used for victory, as shown by the disciples returning with joy since even the evil spirits listened to them (Luke 10:17). However, the victory focuses more on salvation (Luke 15:7)—the presence of Christ, the bridegroom, gives reason for joy (John 3:29). In the New Testament letters, joy is a desired attribute of Christians. Paul expressed frequently the joy he had regarding the salvation of those he was writing to and prayed that they might be full of joy.”

[Brenda Heyink, “Joy,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).]

end of the spectrum in a supposed spontaneous approach to worship. Excitement as the channel for expressing genuine thanksgiving is the tool sought by the Holy Spirit for reaching outsiders for salvation in Christ.

### APPLICATION:

So on the eve of this holiday celebration, the question comes to each of us: “What moves us to help others?” Is it genuine motivation? That is, excited giving of thanks to God? I challenge each of you to do a self check on your motivations for helping others. Make this Thanksgiving holiday the beginning of true Christian thankfulness that pushes you to reach out to others in the name of Christ. The scripture declares this to be the norm for God’s people. When our understanding of God’s will is being expanded, we will see the central role of thanksgiving for a vibrantly healthy Christian life.

### II. How clearly do you see God at work? (1:12b-14)

#### EXPLANATION:

How does one achieve joyous thanksgiving? Paul’s answer to the Colossians points us in the right direction. It has little or nothing to do whether the worship or ministry is highly liturgical in form, or whether it is largely spontaneous in form. It has everything to do with how clearly we see our God.

A blurred vision plagued the Jewish synagogue worship of God where Paul’s readers lived. Their twisting of the Torah into a vehicle of self-help based salvation by works reflected a phony sense of thanksgiving. Much like the Pharisee that Jesus mentioned in a parable, the dominate synagogue pattern reflected a false sense of gratitude.<sup>6</sup> And this posture can be found in Christian

<sup>6</sup>9 He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Phari-

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church life today as well.

A truism seems relevant here: the more we elevate ourselves, the blurrier becomes our vision of God. Of course, the paganistic background of most of the Colossians converts could not understand God at all (cf. Col. 1:21). But their conversion to God through Christ had put them on a path with ever expanding knowledge of God and His will. That should be our modern Christian experience as well.

What is the picture of God offered by Paul to the Colossians? In our text, four actions of God are specified that enhance our understanding of Him as our Heavenly Father. As a caring Father, God qualified us for a share in the inheritance of His people. The text focused on the Gentile converts at Colossae being given equal status as the people of God to those of Jewish descent. In the first century Jewish world such claims were considered extremely radical. And certainly to be opposed by orthodox Jews. But for the apostle Paul the coming of Christ into this world changed profoundly who could become a child of God. Judaism shouted that only Jews and proselyte converts to Judaism could claim this status before God. The apostolic Gospel loudly contradicted this claim by insisting that anyone coming to God through Christ could be considered a child of God. Thank God for our Christ!

Secondly, this Heavenly Father rescued us from the tyrannical grip of darkness over our lives. In pre-Christian days, we were enslaved to sin and it had a death grip on us. Darkness as a symbol of both evil and ignorance of God reigned supremely over

see and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank thee that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week, I give tithes of all that I get.' "

[*The Revised Standard Version* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1971), Lk 18:9–13.]

sinful humanity. A genuine helplessness leading to hopelessness prevailed. But God working through Christ rescued us out from under this power. What a Father who would do such a wonderful thing!

Thirdly, this rescue was not just out from under darkness. It also was a transfer into the Kingdom of His beloved Son. Our Heavenly Father picked us up and set us down inside the reign of Christ as our sovereign ruler. We are now under His protection and loving care.

Finally, to cap everything off we have come to possess God's redemption in Christ. This ἀπολύτρωσις, apolutrosin, meant blessed news to first century Gentiles. Not often used in their every day vocabulary, it meant a slave had been purchased from his earthly master in order to be set free in order to live out the rest of his life as a freedman. And what is central to this spiritual liberation in Christ? The cleansing of our lives from the guilt and penalty of sinfulness. The darkness of sin is snuffed out and we emerge clean and ready to live in the Light which is God's Presence, both now and for all eternity.

This is the vision we desperately need, if we are to give thanks to our Heavenly Father. The Torah of Moses did not produce such a vision, as those in the synagogue claimed. Neither did a mixture of Torah and Greek philosophy lead to such a vision, as the false teachers at work in Colossae claim (cf. chapter two). Such a vision of God as Heavenly Father as set forth in the apostolic Gospel was the only path leading to genuine giving of thanks as a motivation for service.

### ILLUSTRATION:

When you are approached to donate funds to this or that cause during these holiday times, look closely at the basis of their appeal to you. Are they attempting to put you on a guilt trip to donate by showing extra harsh pictures of need? They are trying to appeal to



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you on the basis of a phony pity for those needing help. There's nothing Christian about such an appeal. Find instead those groups who genuinely attempt to help people in need and are very transparent with their appeals for help.

### APPLICATION:

Better still, volunteer your services to help needy people directly. This provides the opportunity for a genuine witness of your thankfulness to God for His blessings. Unselfish ministry will be noticed and deeply appreciated. God can and will use such thanksgiving to draw others to Himself. Truly the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:16 will be realized: "Let your light so shine before men so that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in Heaven."

### Conclusion:

Let me conclude with this challenge: Make your Thanksgiving celebration a genuine witness to the Gospel of Christ. Truly be thankful and express it in good deeds of ministry to others in need. That will bless your life and the lives of others in marvelous ways.

### 5.0 Develop a Teaching Outline of the Text.

In this application, the text of Colossians 1:11b-14 will be taught to a Bible study group meeting at the church on Wednesday evenings. In this instance, the dominant objective is to inform the group of the biblical nature of thanksgiving as set forth by Paul in his words to the Colossian believers. The goal is to seek understanding by members of the group of what authentic thanksgiving is about. The assumption is that Paul's words declare basic insights into this important concept in the New Testament. Christians need to grasp clearly these basic ideas about giving thanks to God.

The teaching plan will be presented through the medium of a PowerPoint slide presentation. Note that

a copy of this presentation is available in [the BIC1504 homepage](http://theBIC1504homepage.com) in the revised BIC commentary series, volume 15, at [cranfordville.com](http://cranfordville.com).

### SLIDE 1: INTRODUCTION



Our study this evening will be of Paul's words to the Colossians in Colossians 1:11b-14. It is a relatively short passage of scripture. But it is packed full of very rich concepts that are an essential aspect of being Christian in our daily living. We live in a world largely ignorant of the real meaning of thanksgiving. The highly secularized holiday of Thanksgiving that is coming this week contains very little that reflects biblical based thanksgiving. As Christians, we are prone to adopt a cultural view of thanksgiving, than we are of the biblical stance. So, we greatly need to understand what God's Word says about being thankful. Let's take a look first at the setting of these words of scripture.

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### SLIDE 2: CONTEXT



Col. 1:11b-14 is grammatically a participial phrase that is a part of the long sentence in the original Greek text. It is the second sentence in Paul's letter to the Colossians and contains verses 9 through 20 in chapter one.

The first segment in 1:9-11a establishes the theme of the entire sentence as focused on intercessory prayer. Paul and Timothy affirm to the Colossians that they have been praying for the Colossians since they first learned of their existence from the report given by Epaphras at his visit with Paul while the apostle was in prison. What they have been praying is described in the very long ἵνα clause that is found in verses 9b-20. The essence of their praying is set forth in verses 9b through 10a. It is that God would fill them with an expanding knowledge of His will. This in turn would produce a "worthy walk before the Lord." That is, a quality of lifestyle would emerge which would make God proud of them.

But more specifically what constitutes a "worthy walk"? Four participial phrases found in verses 10b through 20 define the parameters of that worthy walk. The fourth participle εὐχαριστοῦντες defines that worthy walk as centered in giving thanks to the Heavenly Father. The first three participial phrase are as follows: (1) "in every good deed bearing fruit," v. 10b; (2) "growing in

the knowledge of God," v. 10c; (3) "being empowered by God's glory for patience and long-suffering," v. 11a; and (4) "giving joyful thanks to the Father," vv. 11b-20.

The extra length of this fourth phrase suggests its pivotal importance for this worthy walk. This phrase divides naturally into two sections. In verses 11b-14 the essence of giving thanks is stated. But in verses 15-20, the apostle attached elements of pre-formed Christian tradition to the phrase. These come either from an early Christian hymn, or confession of faith statement. The next study will probe this material.

In our present study we will focus on the essence of thanksgiving as set forth in verses 11b through 14.

### SLIDE 3: GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURE



Now, let's see how the ideas in the text are structured. A block diagram will be set forth. Note (in red print) the core idea of the participle with its direct object:

**εὐχαριστοῦντες τῷ πατρὶ**

**giving thanks to the Father.**

The participle is modified by the prepositional phrase Μετὰ χαρᾶς, with joy. But the primary expansion is centered on the actions of the Father. He qualified you, rescued us, placed us. Thus in His Son we have come to possess redemption. This is defined as the forgiveness

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of sins. The shift in verb objects from “you” to “us” is significant. The first stresses the inclusion of Gentile converts into the people of God. The “us” emphasizes the inclusion of both Paul and the Colossian converts as objects of God’s rescue and transfer. Out of these actions comes the possession of God’s redemption for all who come to God through Christ. This is a powerful affirmation of the very heart of the Apostolic Gospel message that Epaphras had proclaimed to the Colossians from the outset of his ministry to them. That message is for all because God is over all creation.

### SLIDE 4: I. GIVING THANKS: Manner (vv. 11b-12a)



Two insights are especially important to note from the participle and its adverbial modifier. First is the prepositional phrase Μετά χαράς meaning “with joy.” It stresses that the giving of thanks should be done in the posture of real joy and happiness. Thanksgiving as joyous praise to God is the point.

Second, the present tense of the Greek participle εὐχαριστοῦντες emphasizes the giving of thanks as ongoing action, rather than as a single event. Thus the living out of daily life should be characterized by continuous thanksgiving to God. Indeed, it stands as a pivotal marker of the kind of lifestyle that pleases God.

### SLIDE 5: II. GIVING THANKS: to whom? (vv. 12b-14)



The second point in this text centers on the expansion of the direct object τῷ πατρὶ, “to the Father.” God as Father is a frequent motif in the letter to the Colossians, as well as in the letters of Paul generally. The image of father in the Greco-Roman world of the Colossians was significant. In the centuries old Roman custom of the patria potestas of the father as head of the family, he had virtual life and death power over the other members of the family, that included the wife, the children and the slaves in the household. The father commanded deep respect and esteem from the members of the family. This role of father also meant that the responsibility for taking care of and providing for the family lay at his feet solely. In the pagan religious background of most of the Colossian believers, there was the virtual universal attribution to the god Zeus as father.<sup>7</sup> Paul’s emphasis upon God as Father signals a <sup>7</sup>“Since Hom. Ζεὺς is called πατήρ or πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε; Diod S 5, 72, 2 πατέρα δὲ [αὐτὸν προσαγορευθῆναι] διὰ τὴν φροντίδα καὶ τὴν εὐνοίαν τὴν εἰς ἅπαντας, ἔτι δὲ καὶ τὸ δοκεῖν ὡς περ ἀρχηγόν εἶναι τοῦ γένους τῶν ἀνθρώπων = ‘[Zeus is called] father because of his thoughtfulness and goodwill toward all humanity, and because, moreover, he is thought of as originator of the human race’, cp. 3, 61, 4; 5, 56, 4; Dio Chrys. 36 [53], 12 Zeus as π. τῶν ἀνθρώπων, not only because of his position as ruler, but also because of his love and care [ἀγαπῶν κ. προνοῶν]. Cp. Plut., Mor. 167d; Hom Hom , VIII B.C.—List 5 Diod S Diod S , I B.C.—List 5 cp.

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shift in orientation for the non-Jewish members of the Christian community. To those coming out of Judaism, God as Father was not a new idea.<sup>8</sup> But in apostolic Christianity of the first century, the contours of God as Father had been profoundly shaped by Jesus' frequent reference to God as Heavenly Father. Central to Jesus' reference to God as Father was the point that God loved and cared for His people. But this love of God was seen in His actions in behalf of His people.

For Paul, the central action of God as our Father was His provision of salvation. And the identification of this provision was to be found in the Apostolic Gospel, that had been proclaimed to the Colossians. Thus God's provision is signaled in verses 12 through 14 by three actions taken by God in behalf of His people. The first

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cp. = compare, freq. in ref. to citation fr. ancient texts Dio Chrys Dio Chrys, I-II A.D.—List 5 Plut Plut, I-II A.D.—List 5” [William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 787.]

<sup>8</sup>“In the OT God is called ‘Father’ in the first place to indicate a caring relationship to the Israelite nation as a whole, or to the king as the embodiment of the nation. Only in late writers is God called the Father of the pious Israelite as an individual: Sir 23:1, 4; Tob 13:4; Wsd 2:16; 14:3; 3 Macc 5:7.—Bousset, Rel.3 377ff; EBurton, ICC Gal 1921, 384–92; RGyllenberg, Gott d. Vater im AT u. in d. Predigt Jesu: Studia Orient. I 1925, 51–60; JLeipoldt, D. Gotteserlebnis Jesu 1927; AWilliams, ‘My Father’ in Jewish Thought of the First Century: JTS 31, 1930, 42–47; TManson, The Teaching of Jesus, ’55, 89–115; HMontefiore, NTS 3, ’56/57, 31–46 [synoptics]; Biersel, ‘D. Sohn’ in den synopt. Ev., ’61, 92–116). OT OT = Old Testament Bousset, Rel. Bousset, Rel. = WB., D. Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter—List 6 ICC ICC = International Critical Commentary—List 6 JTS JTS = Journal of Theological Studies—List 6 NTS NTS = New Testament Studies—List 6”

[William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 787.]

is that the Father **has qualified you** (τῷ ικανώσαντι ὑμᾶς) for a share in the inheritance of the saints. This very Jewish terminology is applied especially to the Gentile converts at Colossae. The applicational point is the inclusiveness of the Gospel message for all people.

What does this divine qualification imply? The parallel relative clauses that follow the participle reach back to the work of Christ while on earth. Through His Son, God **rescued us** (ὃς ἐρρύσατο ἡμᾶς). The sense of delivering from harm and danger is the meaning here. Paul's switch from “you” to “us” signals the inclusion of both himself and the Colossians in this divine deliverance. The Aorist tense form of the verb used here points back to the work of Christ in his death and resurrection. In this divine act of rescue, God delivered those coming to Christ out from under the control of darkness (ἐκ τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ σκοτους). Before Christ, all of us lived as slaves to the darkness of evil. Whether realizing it or not, we were under the control of sin. The image of darkness adds the idea of ignorance to the picture.

But God's action of rescue works in tandem with transfer. He **transferred us** (μετέστησεν) as He rescued us. The verb μεθίστημι literally means to pick something up and then set it down in another place. In the work of Christ, God literally set up the possibility of picking up humanity under the tyranny of sin and setting them down in the reign of Christ (εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ υἱοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἀγαπῆς αὐτοῦ). That is, believers are placed under the protective care of God's beloved Son.

This affirmation sets up the fourth expansion in verse 14. ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν. “In whom **we have redemption**, the forgiveness of sins.” Thus in Christ who now is reigning over us as King, we have come to possess God's redemption. The noun ἀπολύτρωσις is rarely used in ancient Greek, but it designates the purchasing of a

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slave for the purpose of setting that person free from slavery. It provided a beautiful picture of the liberation from sin and death possible through Christ's work in his death and resurrection. Thus living in redemption means living free from the control of darkness. It implies a coming day of redemption at Christ's return (Eph. 4:3). Central to this liberation is the forgiveness of sins (τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν). Through Christ's shed blood we are washed clean of our guilt and corruption from sin (Eph. 1:7). Thus we join the people of God who live in the Light of God's presence. Our expectation is that this will extend throughout all eternity. This is the promised inheritance from our Heavenly Father.

for us as we try to understand God's will and then live it out in our daily lives. Central to that divine will is a lifestyle that is worthy of the Lord, that will please our Heavenly Father. One crucial aspect of that worthy walk is to make giving thanks to God an integral part of our daily life. This Paul asserted to the Colossians. It applies to all of us professing faith in Christ today as well.

Just how thankful to God are you?

### SLIDE 6: CONCLUSION



This is biblical giving thanks! It flows naturally out of our relationship to God as Father. It is motivated by profound gratitude for all that He has done for us. Its dynamic is perpetual. We live our lives daily in thanksgiving. And this kind of gratefulness is the mark that indeed we know the will of God and are living it accordingly. So I have a final question for you. How are you going to celebrate thanksgiving this week?

### CONCLUSION

Colossians 1:11b-14 may be just a participle phrase in the original Greek text. But it has a huge message