

We have been taking a detailed look at Paul's description of the prayers that Paul and Timothy were praying for the Colossian church. Paul was in prison because of his faith. Timothy was with him at least during the period that this letter was written. And together they spent a lot of time praying for the churches. In this letter to the Colossians, we have this valuable account of the content of those prayers. This account is very valuable for us because it is a guide for our prayers but also for our lives. Paul describes his and Timothy's prayers for the Colossians to the Colossians to teach them what they should be praying for, but also what they should be trying to accomplish in their lives. So what we really have in this prayer is a description of the kind of lives that believers in Jesus should be seeking to live. And by taking the time to pay attention to all the various words and phrases that Paul uses we get a whole host of edifying perspectives on the lives we are called to live as people who are beloved of God through faith in Jesus Christ.

It is a wonderful picture that Paul paints. The life that we are called to live as Christians belongs to the salvation that is one of the main topics of the Bible. The Bible views the life that belongs to salvation in Christ in a very positive light. It is not viewed as an onerous duty, but as a tremendous blessing. It is life as it was meant to be lived. To live in this way is to be truly alive. To live as the Bible calls us to live is pleasing to God and because of that it is the most meaningful and satisfying way to live. What Paul and Timothy are praying for, for the Colossians, is a life that will please God, but will also give the Colossians joy.

In the first sermon on this section of this letter, we considered the prayer that the Colossians might be "filled with the knowledge of [God's] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." In the second sermon on this report of Paul and Timothy's prayers for the Colossians we saw that they were praying that the knowledge of God's will would lead to "walk[ing] in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him:" I noted that that part of the sentence ends with a full colon which means what follows is a filling out of what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him. Paul mentions 4 things that belong to a life that is pleasing to God. 1. "bearing fruit in every good work" 2. "increasing in the knowledge of God." 3. "being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; 4. "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

In the last sermon we considered 1 and 2. In this sermon we will consider 3 and 4. So the third characteristic of a walk that is worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him is, "being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might for all endurance and patience with joy."

Now this reference to "being strengthen with all power" is amazing and striking and very interesting. Paul is talking about God's power that is at work in Christians which enables them to live in a way that is pleasing to him. But listen to the language that he uses! This is very remarkable. "Being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might." Paul wants to emphasize as strikingly as he can the greatness of the power he is talking about. "[S]trengthened with all power according to [God's] glorious might." This is not just a

dribble of power that Paul is talking about. The power that Paul is talking about is “all power according to [God’s] glorious might.”

God’s glorious might is quite something. God created the universe by his glorious might. Jeremiah 32:17 says, “Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you.” It is easy to see how God’s power in creation is glorious, but Paul here is using the language of glorious power to describe the power by which God strengthens his people. Is that not remarkable?!!

The word “glorious” here is interesting. God is glorious. That means many things, but one thing that it means is that God’s glory provokes wonder and amazement and awe and even fear in those who perceive it. In the Christmas story when the glory of the Lord shone around the shepherds they were filled with great fear. There is more to be said about the glory of God, but I want to focus on the idea that those who see something of God’s glory are filled with wonder and amazement. And Paul is using “glory language” to describe the power of God by which he strengthens his people. We are meant to be in awe when we think of Christians “being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might.”

One of the reasons for this kind of language is that the power that strengthens Christians is new creation power. One of the ways that the Bible describes God’s whole work of salvation is in terms of a new creation. In Galatians 6:15 Paul says, “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.” God’s work of salvation in Jesus is a new creation. And God’s power is glorious both in the original creation and in the new creation. Listen to how Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 1:18ff. There Paul is describing his prayer for the Ephesians church and he tells them that he prays that they might know “what is the immeasurable greatness of his power towards us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places....”

Now think of your life as a Christian and that of the Christians around you. Think of the knowledge of sin. Think of faith in Jesus. Think of repentance. Think of desires for holiness. Think of acts of love. All of that seems so mundane and undramatic. We know that it is significant – the renewing power of God in our lives and in the lives of our fellow Christians - but would you be inclined to use the term “glorious” to describe it? And yet Paul does. Not because there is a lot of visible glory displayed, but because of its great significance. A true confession of sin – an act of love for Jesus sake – a prayer like the prayer of the publican – these are the result of the glorious new creation power of God. The power at work in the normal Christian life is glorious – it is like the power of God that created the world - it is reason for wonder and amazement and awe.

Look next at the way that Paul speaks of the result of this power in our text – what this glorious power accomplishes. “[B]eing strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience.” What a contrast! God’s glorious world-creating power – the almighty power of God – and what is it

doing? What is it accomplishing? Endurance and patience in the lives of believers. How undramatic does that seem: just continuing to be a Christian year after year after year – resisting the temptation to go with the flow and live for yourself and for pleasure – continuing to believe in God’s love when there is pain and suffering and disappointment – and bearing with one another in patience. That is what God almighty glorious power accomplishes and Paul is telling us that that is awesome! Every Christian who continues to be a Christian is reason for wonder and amazement at the glorious power of God that accomplishes that. This is the power that raised Jesus from the dead. This is the power that conquered death. This is the power by which God is at work renewing all things. And it is awesome!

Paul and Timothy are praying that the Colossians will be “strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might” so that they will continue to live as Christians. “Endurance and patience.” The Christian life is a life of endurance and patience. That says something about the nature of the Christian life as it is described in the Bible. Endurance and patience have to do with continuing in the face of the temptation to quit. Not to endure is to give up. Not to be patient is to give up. Endurance has more to do with circumstances and patience has more to do with people. Both of them have to do with keeping-on-going in the face of the temptation to quit – to give up – to give in to a more easy way of living. The need for endurance and patience means that keeping-on-going is difficult.

The Christian life requires sustained effort over the long haul. And it takes “being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might” for that to happen.” That is an indication of how hard keeping-on-going really is. If we look at some of the things that Paul deals with in the rest of the letter, endurance and patience mean things like sticking with apostolic teaching rather than embracing all kinds of departures from apostolic teaching. One of the things that Paul deals with later on in this letter is false teaching that was tempting the Colossians to modify their understanding of the Christian life from the one that Epaphras had taught them. Endurance and patience mean sticking with biblical truth and not being influenced by the flurry of other options that confront us.

Endurance and patience also mean keeping-on-going in putting sin to death and putting on things like compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience and wives submitting to their husbands and husbands loving their wives and children obeying their parents and servants obeying their masters and masters treating their servants justly and fairly and continuing steadfastly in prayer including prayer for missionaries. These are the specifics that Paul goes on to mention in this letter when he gets into the nitty-gritty of what it means to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord fully pleasing to him. The endurance and patience that Paul is praying for are keeping-on-going in putting off the sins that Paul warns against later on in his letter and putting on the virtues that he mentions. He is talking about the ordinary stuff of purity and holiness and love and he is making the point that it takes the glorious might of God to make this endurance and patience happen.

This highlights the fact that such endurance is a very amazing thing and not to be taken for granted. Apart from the glorious might of God working in us, we would not last a second against the temptations of our own sinful natures and the temptations that come from Satan and his hordes. And so praying for endurance and patience is an important subject for our prayers.

Paul also mentions joy in this connection. “Walking in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him” includes, “being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy”

Joy in the Bible is significantly different from the way the world thinks of joy because it often speaks of joy in circumstances that do not naturally inspire joy. Here Paul is speaking about joy in connection with endurance and patience – so he is speaking about joy in the midst of struggle and difficulty. Endurance and patience are usually associated with sadness or discouragement or frustration or gritting your teeth and putting one foot in front of the other. Paul here is talking about joy in the midst of the struggle – in the midst of temptation – in the midst of the ongoing struggle with sin. This is a peculiarity of Christian joy – it is not based on outward circumstances, but on things that are not touched by outward circumstances – such as the forgiveness of sins and the love of the Father and the hope of eternal life with God.

One of the important aspects of Christian joy is the fact that we are called to have it before we are perfected. As long as we are in this life, we are far from perfect. Sin taints everything that we do. And yet we are called to rejoice even as we battle with sin. The joy is not based on how well we are doing, but on the fact that our sins are forgiven, and the fact that we are enthusiastically embraced by God with love and delight for Jesus’ sake. This is the good news that is the gospel. To use Tim Keller’s language: “We are all more sinful and flawed than we ever dared believe but more loved and welcomed than we ever dared hope....”

That is the heart of Christian joy and Paul and Timothy are praying that the Colossians will have it in the context of their enduring and patience. There is also the fact that all we really need to be joyful is a relationship with God. That is why the Bible can speak of joy in the midst of suffering. In Romans 5:3 Paul says of Christians that “we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” Christians can rejoice in sufferings because they know that sufferings make us stronger in our faith, hope and love. All of this has to do with loving God and being loved by God. The Biblical teaching about joy is that we can have it in suffering because joy is found in our relationship with God which is even enhanced by suffering.

But this is not easy or automatic. That is why Paul and Timothy are praying for it for the Colossians and that is why they are praying that the Colossians will be “strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance with patience with joy.” Joy in hard circumstances is not automatic or easy, but it is possible

because of the supreme blessedness of being loved by God and loving him back and because God's glorious might makes it happen in response to prayer.

Joy is a wonderful thing. Its something that we all long for. We can have much joy in our earthly blessings, but the deepest and most profound joy is in God himself. Joy in God can and ought to make our joy in earthly blessings God-honoring. If we rejoice in God then our joy in earthly blessings is merged with our joy in God. And if some of our earthly blessings are taken away, we can still have joy because joy in our relationship with God is possible even when we are suffering by the almighty power of God working in us.

So that is the third way that Paul elaborates on what it means to "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him." "Being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy. Number 4 is verse 12: "giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light."

Thanksgiving is a very significant part of the Christian life. It is thanksgiving that ties together the gifts and the giver of the gifts. Ingratitude is to focus on the gift apart from the giver of the gift. Ingratitude is really idolatry because it prioritizes the gift over the giver of the gift at least when God is the giver. So God is the source of every good thing in our lives. The difference between idolatry and properly enjoying God's gifts is the presence or absence of thanksgiving. It is because of this fact that thanksgiving is so significant in the Christian life.

Thanksgiving makes life God-centered. Thanksgiving means that we are always acknowledging God for all that he gives us so that the gifts and the giver are inseparable. Thanksgiving is also a constant acknowledgment of our dependence upon God. When we thank God for life, we acknowledge that he gives and preserves our lives. When we thank God for salvation we acknowledge that salvation is a gift of God. It is the opposite of self-sufficiency and a spirit of independence. We can do nothing apart from God. Our very existence is his gift. Thanksgiving is an acknowledgement of this.

One writer on thanksgiving in Paul's thought says, "God, and not his gifts, is the primary focus of Pauline thanksgiving. In the constant act of thanksgiving, the relationship with God is nurtured. Through thanksgiving, the gracious acts are remembered, and the life of a person is thereby changed." (Pao, D. W. (2002).

Thanksgiving: An Investigation of a Pauline Theme.)

So thanksgiving is at the heart of how we are relate to God. One of the ways that Paul describes the world in its sinfulness in Romans 1 is in terms of ingratitude. Romans 1:21, "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him...." Honoring God as God and giving thanks to God are closely tied together and so one of the ways of summing up what it means to be a sinner is the idea of ingratitude.

So Paul in our text is saying that one of the ways that we live lives that are pleasing to God is by “giving thanks to the Father.” The reason for thanksgiving that Paul goes on to mention is that the Father “has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

The term “inheritance” is one of those many terms that tie together the Old and New Testaments. It is one of the many terms that root our understanding of salvation in Jesus in the Exodus from Egypt and the gift of the promised land. The inheritance in the OT was the promised land. It was the goal of God’s deliverance of his people from the slavery in Egypt. The land was the place where God would dwell with his people. And all of that is a foreshadowing of salvation in Jesus Christ.

One of the glorious things about the inheritance language in Scripture is that its ultimate fulfillment is life with God, not in heaven, but on a renewed earth. The foreshadowing of the promised land is fulfilled not in heaven, but in the combining of heaven and earth in the renewed creation. Think of what Jesus said in Matthew 5:5, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Jesus also speaks of inheriting eternal life which is the life of the age to come which we begin to experience in the here and now. Paul speaks of inheriting the kingdom of God which is also understood in the light of the foreshadowing of the kingdom of Israel in the promised land.

Listen to some of this OT language in Revelation 21:1-4, “¹Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”” That is what the term inheritance ultimately refers to.

The new heavens and the new earth are the fulfillment of the promised land. Jerusalem was at the heart of the promised land. Jerusalem is fulfilled in the church – a bride adorned for her husband. And the fulfillment of both the promised land and Jerusalem – “Behold the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” This is the picture that the inheritance language in Scripture invokes.

A huge part of a life that is pleasing to God is “giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified [us] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.”

The idea of being qualified to share in the inheritance has to do with the inclusion of Gentile believers in the inheritance which was originally only for the Jews and Jesus’ work of salvation is at the heart of that. Paul brings this all together when he writes in Ephesians 2:6 “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs,

members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” There you have the background to being qualified to share in the inheritance.

The inheritance is the inheritance of the saints in light. Light is associated with truth and holiness. Darkness is associated with falsehood and Satan and sin and everlasting punishment. One of the great passages on light and darkness is 1 John 1:5-7, “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as he is in the light we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.”

Paul and Timothy are praying that the Colossians will give “thanks to the Father, who has qualified [them] to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” What reason for thanksgiving! What reason for joy! If we are believers in Jesus we are qualified “to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.” Notice that being qualified is a gift that comes from the Father. We do not qualify ourselves. God the Father qualifies us and he does it through Christ and the Spirit. We are qualified for such a wonderful future on the basis of what Jesus has done for us by paying the penalty for our sins and rising from the dead so that we would be both forgiven and renewed in heart and life and so be qualified for the “inheritance of the saints in light.”

What reason for thanksgiving! And the way that thanksgiving comes is by dwelling on what God has done for us and the way to dwell on what God has done for us is to dwell on the biblical description of salvation, both in what Jesus has done and in the glorious future that awaits us. And the imagery that we get from unpacking the rich vocabulary of a passage such as this is so very helpful in stirring our hearts to joy and thanksgiving.

We have taken the time to dwell on the rich vocabulary of this passage. There is so much here to think about, and you know, one of the things that it illustrates is that Paul had spent a great deal of time studying and thinking about the OT and how it was fulfilled in Jesus. Let us follow his example of dwelling on the Scriptures and prayer so that we may enter more and more deeply into the enjoyment of our God and the life that is in Christ which is pleasing to him.