

Col. 1:12-20, The Thanksgiving
May 10, 1995
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Overview

1. The three verbs in 1:3,4 summarize the entire prayer, which continues through 1:20.
 - a) "We give thanks" --> 1:12, "giving thanks to the Father."
 - b) "Praying always for you" --> 1:9, "we ... do not cease to pray for you"
 - c) "Having heard" introduces a summary of their condition that extends through 1:8, and motivates (1:9 *dio*) the following prayer and thanksgiving.
2. The four participles in 9-12 may all be part of the prayer. Alternatively, the last may resume "praying and asking" in 9, and thus introduce Paul's thanksgiving. Probably there is some of both: he is giving thanks, and at the same time desires that the Colossians would join him in this thanksgiving.
3. Starts with thanks to the Father as the source of our salvation, then transitions to a description of the Son, the agent through whom the Father has achieved this work of salvation.

A. 1:12-14, The Father

Summary-amplification. Two ideas introduced in v.12, then amplified successively in 13 and 14.

1. 13 amplifies "made us meet"
 - a) 12 "Meet" here means "sufficient" or "capable," not "worthy" (which would be *axios*, as in v.10). Without the work of Christ we are not even able to enjoy heaven's blessings. We would be like a blind man at a painting gallery, a deaf man at a symphony. The two amplifications show us in what sense we were not capable of partaking of heaven's blessings.
 - b) 13a, We were under an authority, the authority of darkness. cf. Luke 22:53, "this is your hour and your power--the hour of darkness and the power of darkness." cf. Acts 26:18, Paul's mission "to turn [people] from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God." We involuntarily were subject to the same dark power to which our Lord, for our sakes, subjected himself in Gethsemene.
 - c) "Translated us" *meqisthmi*--used in Josephus Ant. 9.235 of what Tiglath-Pileser did to the northern kingdom in 722 B.C.: "he translated them to his own kingdom." Suggests that the power of darkness held us in bondage to a kingdom, from which God has deported us.
 - d) Note the contrasts:

- 1) "Power" vs. "kingdom." Now, there certainly is power in an effective kingdom, but not every power structure follows the responsibilities laid down for a king in Deut. 17:14-20. As sinners, we were slaves in a system maintained by brute force. As believers, we are citizens in a kingdom governed by principles and responsibility.
- 2) "Darkness" vs. "his dear son" (literally "the son of his love"). The Father loves the Son, and it is this love, rather than darkness, that permeates and sets the tone for our new environment.

2. 14, amplifies "inheritance of the saints in light"

- a) Redemption. Distinguish four groups of words translated "redeem" or "redemption" in the NT.

- 1) Two roots:

- a> *lutrow*, "to set free [a slave or captive] by paying a price." Emphasis on the price paid and the transition from bondage to freedom.
- b> *agorazw*, "to purchase in the market." Again a price is involved, but now the payment secures, not freedom, but obligation to the purchaser.

- 2) Optional addition of a preposition. Both prepositions have the sense of "from" or "removal," and strengthen the notion of deliverance by emphasizing removal from the previous state.

- a> *apolutrwsis* with *apo-* "away from." Survey of usage reveals little distinction from plain *lutr-*; in fact, the difference seems to be Paul vs. others. Paul always uses the root with *apo-*, usually compounded, once (Tit. 2:14) adverbially. Luke and Heb. use both.
- b> *exagorazw* with *ek-* "out of." The distinction here does seem to be stronger; cf. unstrengthened form in 2 Pet. 2:1 (which, however, 1 Cor and Rev use *simpliciter* for full redemption). Purchase for one's own use as opposed to buy and sell in trading?

- 3) Our word here is *apolutrwsis*, the strengthened form of the word that refers to the loosing of captives. We have been set free through the payment of a price. While redemption does make us the slaves of God, that is not the theme of this passage. The "inheritance of the saints in light" is freedom, perfect and complete release from bondage.

Based on v.13, this bondage would be Satan's rule. We have been purchased out of his service and set free.

- b) Forgiveness. So far we have considered the power that held us and the release that God has purchased for us, but we have not considered the mechanism that led to our bondage. Satan did not arbitrarily overpower us, like the USSR running through

Poland at the end of WWII. We placed ourselves in bondage to him by joining him in rebellion against God. In delivering us, God has not only canceled out the effect of our rebellion (the bondage), but also forgiven the cause (our sin), leaving us with a clean conscience. No need for guilt.

Now we turn attention to the Son and what he has done to achieve the Father's purposes of love toward us. Paul considers him in two characters: as Creator of angels and as Redeemer of men. Thus he sets himself against the gnostic notion that the redeemer himself must be a created being.

Structure: chiasm. Outer two members (15-16, 18b-20) begin with titles of Christ ("who is") and continue with justification with those titles ("for") that end with "whether ... or" The center combines the two themes in an alternation, marked by "all things ... and he"

B. 15-16a, Christ the Creator

First "who is ... whether ..."

1. 1:15, His Titles

a) "Image of the invisible God"

- 1) "invisible God": The one the Scriptures call the Father is invisible. See 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16. Invisible, not like minerals deeply buried in the earth, but like the sun; we cannot endure its brightness.
- 2) "image": not just a similarity, but a derived likeness that implies an archetype and a causal relation between archetype and image. Used in the OT in two ways, both related to the "invisible God."
 - a> man, who is created *kata eikon* or *en eikoni geou* (but never actually said to be *eikwn geou*). Thus the LJC is the perfect man, completing what our humanity can only approximate. He is what we ought to be; cf. Ps. 8.
 - b> False idols, and most prominently the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar erected in Dan. 3. As objects of worship, these were also understood as *eikwn geou*. God forbade them, not because we didn't need an image, but because he would provide his own in due time. We desperately need an image to show us what God is like, and the LJC is the only one worthy of our attention.
- 3) Thus he is "the brightness of God's glory and the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3). "It pleased [the godhead] that in him should all the fulness dwell" (v.19). He is "the Word made flesh" (John 1:14). "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9).

b) "Firstborn of all creation"

Arian (JW) view: Christ is the first piece of creation to be born, just as in Rom. 8:29 he is one of the brethren among whom he is first, and in v.18 (Rev. 1:5 for genitive in TR) he is firstborn of the dead among whom he was. But:

- 1) In these other cases, the class among which he was is described in the plural. He is one among many brethren; one among the dead ones. Here, the class is singular, "all creation," not "all creatures." (For lack of article, cf. Eph. 2:21.)
- 2) The very next verse shows that the author does not consider Christ a created being, for "by him were all things created."
- 3) Not described as "first created of all creation," but figuratively, "firstborn." In its literal sense the term refers to the relation of child to MOTHER, not to FATHER. Yet it would trivialize the term here to say that it means only that Christ was Mary's first child. So must be figurative.
- 4) The expression elsewhere is used as a title of preeminence rather than origin or priority.
 - a> Job 18:13 describes a terrible malady as "the firstborn of death," death's preeminent agent. Cf. Isa. 14:30, "first-born of the poor."
 - b> Exod 4:22, Moses to tell Pharaoh, "Israel is my son, my firstborn," though they were hardly the first nation created; cf. Jer. 31:9, "Ephraim is my firstborn."
 - c> Psa. 89:27, "I will make him [the promised Messiah] my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth." A position of preeminence into which he is placed, not an accident of birth.
 - d> Heb. 12:23, "church of the firstborn ones [plural]." The title belongs to us all, not because all of us were first in time, but in view of the special position of favor into which God has brought us.
- 5) Conclude: The term is used in such a way here. Christ has the firstborn's position of preeminence and preference over all creation.

2. 1:16 Justification for these Titles

- a) His role: "by [lit 'in'] him were all things created." He is the source of the creation; it originated "in" him and was his idea. This is a role usually assigned to the Father in Scripture, but Paul is emphasizing here the unity between the Father and the Son (in order to counter the protognostic teaching), and as the Son participates in the eternal counsels, Paul can ascribe the origin of creation to him.

- b) His Scope: three statements emphasize the breadth of his role, and work up to the point that so far from being a created angelic being as protognosticism maintained, he himself is the creator of the angels.
 - 1) In heaven and upon earth. Not limited to physical things around us. (Opens the door to the angels, since they are in heaven.)
 - 2) Seen and unseen. (Homes in on angels.)
 - 3) Thrones, dominions, principalities, powers (these are various ranks of angelic beings; cf. Eph. 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high [places].")

C. 16b-18a, Christ the Creator-Redeemer

The hinge that moves us from the physical creation to the church. Alternation in *ta panta ... kai autos estin ... ta panta ... kai autos estin*.

- 1. 16b, "All things stand created [perfect tense] through him and unto him." More than just a repeat of the beginning of the verse:
 - a) The tense of the verb is different. In 16a we have the aorist, looking back to the moment of original creation. Here we have the perfect, emphasizing the continuing state established by his activity. The present world around us testifies to his power.
 - b) Two new prepositions.
 - 1) 16a AV "by" is *en* "in," indicating the *source* of the creation. It has its origin IN him. It is his idea and flows out of him.
 - 2) Second AV "by" is *dia* + genitive, "through," used consistently in the NT to express Christ's role as the direct *agent* of creation in obedience to the Father.
 - 3) AV "for" is *eis* "unto," indicating him as the one for whose use the creation was done.
 - 4) Cf. Rom. 11:36, which has "of" *ek* instead of "in," but otherwise the same, and consider that for all things to come "from" him they must first be "in" him. He is the source, means, and purpose of the creation.
 - 5) Contrast 1 Cor. 8:6, which contrasts the Father as the Source with the Son as the Means, under the Father's direction. This is true, but to meet the Colossian error of downgrading our Lord's deity, Paul here emphasizes the participation of the LJC in the counsels of the godhead, according to which the creation may be said to be "in" him as well as in the Father.

- 6) *Notes: Prepositions with God or Christ involving creation*
- a> *John 1:3 All things were made by [dia] him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.*
 - b> *Rom 11:36 For of [ek] him, and through [dia] him, and to [eis] him, [are] all things: to whom [be] glory for ever. Amen.*
 - c> *1 Cor 8:6 But to us [there is but] one God, the Father, of [ek] whom [are] all things, and we in [eis] him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by [dia] whom [are] all things, and we by [dia] him.*
 - d> *Eph 3:9 And to make all [men] see what [is] the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by [dia] Jesus Christ:*
 - e> *Heb 1:2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by [his] Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by [dia] whom also he made the worlds;*
 - f> *Heb 2:10 For it became him, for [dia + Acc] whom [are] all things, and by [dia + Gen] whom [are] all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.*

2. 17a, "he is before all things." Reference is to time, following what is by far the most common usage in the NT. (JW's want this to mean "he is more important than all things," but *pro* is never used in the NT to express such a relation of a person to things or to other people.) Because he created all things, he antedates them, and cannot be ranked with them.

Note the tense of the verb: not "he was before all things," but "he IS before all things." Cf. John 8:58, "before Abraham was, I am." Presents him as eternal, one who is not constrained by time.

3. 17b, "all things stand together in him." He not only created them in the past, but sustains them, binds them together, keeps the whole system integrated and working, continually.
4. 18, "he is the head of the body, the church." Just as 17a results from 16b (role as creator implies priority in time), so 18 results from 17b (role as sustainer implies superiority in rank). Paul here focuses to a particular part of the creation, the church, and thus makes the transition from Christ as Creator to Christ as Redeemer.

D. **18b-20, Christ the Redeemer**

Second "who is ... whether ..."

Three statements: one about who Christ is, a second describing the purpose of the first, and a third describing the grounds for the first. Thus the temporal order is 3, 1, 2.

1. What Christ is that lets him be the head of the body: "the beginning, the firstborn from the dead ones."

- a) Beginning: cf. Rev. 21:6; 22:13, "the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last." A link back to the claims of the Creation section. Nothing comes before him.
- b) Specifying this to his redemptive work, he is firstbegotten from the dead. Here the reference is probably temporal, since "the dead" is in the role of the mother who bears the child, and Christ is the first one borne to her. Cf. Acts 2:24, "having loosed the birth pangs of death." Others were resuscitated, to die again; Christ is the first to overcome death and be set free from its claims.

2. Purpose of this priority, both in general and with regard to resurrection: "that he might become in all things the one having preeminence." Contrast the becoming here with the being in the previous clause. This gives special point to our gathering unto him alone, and our desire not to be distracted with the things that form the focus of other groups.

3. 19-20, the divine counsels that led to Christ's Being and Becoming. These two verses are extremely deep, and we must approach them with great reverence and awe.

- a) Who is pleased? "the Father" is in italics. Probably the reference is to the Godhead in general. "It was deemed pleasing." A brief glimpse into the eternal harmony of purpose that is the ongoing intercourse of Father, Son, and Spirit.
- b) What was the Godhead's pleasure in Christ?
 - 1) That all the fulness should dwell in him. Cf. 2:9. Whatever is in God, is in our Lord Jesus. It pleased the Godhead to make him the manifestation of deity to the human race.
 - 2) That by means of his work on the cross, all things in heaven and on earth might be reconciled to God (*auton* because now the reference is to the Father?). cf. v.16; "all things" especially points out the angelic beings.

A very deep verse, applying the benefits of Christ's passion to all creation. Compare 2 Pet 2:1 "denying the Lord who bought them" and 1 John 2:2 "propitiation for the whole world." Possible explanations.

- a> Universalism; yet other texts just as plainly teach an everlasting hell (cf. the Lake of Fire in Rev.).
- b> Potentialism; Christ's death makes people savable, but it's up to them to accept what Christ has done and become believers. But other texts (e.g., Rom 8:29-30; John 6:37, 44) teach that it is God who chooses us, gives us faith, justifies us, at every step of the way.

c> Perhaps (but with great caution and humility):
reconciliation, redemption, propitiation have a role
toward the nonelect as well as toward the elect. One day
every knee shall bow (Phil. 2), and the entire creation
shall be restored from its fallen state (Rom 8).
Everything will be as God has planned, from the blessed
in heaven demonstrating his love and grace to the damned
in hell demonstrating his righteousness and justice. And
that final condition of complete harmony (from God's
perspective) is grounded in the work of Christ on the
cross, not only to bring the elect to him in salvation,
but also to establish Christ as the righteous judge to
condemn the reprobate.