

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: "Are You Qualified for Heaven?"

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 9/13/2009

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Today in our study we come to Colossians chapter 1, verse 12. I want to read that verse for you in connection with the verses that follow. Colossians chapter 1, beginning at verse 12:

“...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.”

Our focus today is on verse 12: “giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.” This is something else that Paul says he is praying for, praying that this would be true in the lives of the Colossian believers. He prays that they would be thankful for their salvation, and that they would recognize the source of their salvation in God the Father.

Giving Thanks to the Father

When Paul uses the words “giving thanks,” he’s actually using a single word in the Greek. And once again, Paul is using a word that was used by the false pagan religions that were practiced all around these Colossian believers. Just as we are today, the Colossians back then were a believing minority situated within a pagan majority. And the pagan religions of that day gave thanks – the Greeks gave thanks to their gods for the things they supposedly did for them.

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And it's interesting in our day in America to see what has happened to our Thanksgiving Day holiday. It's indicative of the paganism that has gripped America today. In 1789, President George Washington set aside the fourth Thursday of November as "A Day of Public Thanksgiving and Prayer." His proclamation appointed the day "to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal [extraordinary] favors of Almighty God." And in 1863, Abraham Lincoln issued a Thanksgiving Day proclamation recognizing "the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy."

But in more recent times, Thanksgiving Day has come to be a time when people are encouraged to "give thanks" – but God is left out of the picture. And when you stop giving thanks to God, who do you give thanks to? You end up giving thanks to yourself. You end up giving thanks to other people. Or maybe you're confused enough in your thinking to give thanks to the government. But that only covers the meaning of thanksgiving in a very general way.

What's really sad to say is this: That among Bible-believing Christians today, there is too little of the specific kind of thanksgiving that Paul speaks about here in verse 12. We thank God the Father too little for our salvation. We take it so much for granted. We don't remember, as we should, the awful price that was paid to redeem us from our sins. We don't stop and fully think about what has happened to us – that we have been brought out of darkness and into the light, and that we have a glorious inheritance because of what God has done through Christ.

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And so Paul says to the Colossians, I pray that you will give thanks to the Father for what He has done. Not thanks to pagan deities, for their supposed favors, but to the one true and living God, and specifically to God the Father.

And why thanks to the Father? Turn over for a moment to Ephesians chapter one. Beginning at verse three, Paul writes these words:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

He Has Qualified Us

We need to be giving thanks to God the Father, Paul says in Colossians 1:12, because He "has qualified us" – He has made us fit – "to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light." Outside of Christ, we were unqualified. In First Corinthians chapter 15, verse 9, Paul says, in and of myself I'm not even fit to be an apostle, because I persecuted the church. I have no qualifications of my own. But in First Corinthians chapter 4, verse 1, he says, I have this ministry of preaching the Gospel as a child of God, because I have received mercy from God. I have received what I did not deserve. He qualified me to be a partaker of the inheritance.

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We are qualified because we have received Christ. John chapter one, verse twelve: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave power" – the right, the authority, the qualification – "to be called the sons of God, even to those who believe on His name."

Partakers of the Inheritance in the Light

And for what have we been qualified, as the children of God? By becoming the children of God, we have been qualified to become the partakers of a glorious inheritance. The Greek language of this verse speaks of an allotment that is ours, which is a sure and lasting possession that cannot be taken away from us.

Paul is saying here, by implication, that we have no inheritance in this world. In Second Corinthians chapter six, Paul says this explicitly, beginning at verse 14:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part [what portion, or what inheritance] has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord."

Be separate from the world and its ways and its thinking. You have no inheritance there. And in Luke chapter 10, when Jesus visited the home of Mary and Martha, and

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Martha “was cumbered about with much serving,” but Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to Him teach, Jesus said this: “Mary has chosen the good part” – the good thing to have a share in, the good inheritance. It’s the same word in the original language that we find here in Colossians chapter one.

The decisive question for you today is this: Where is your inheritance? For the Jews the decisive question in their minds was whether they had an inheritance in Moses. For the pagan Greeks, the decisive question was whether they had a portion in the allotments of the favors of the gods. For you today, listening to my voice, the decisive question is this: Do you have a portion, a share, in the eternal inheritance that is to be found only in Jesus Christ? Are you qualified to have that?

I’m going to come back to that question, but now at this point I want to skip ahead just a bit and discuss the words, “in the light” in verse twelve. And the reason I want to do that is because, in the Greek text, those words “in the light” relate to the word “inheritance” and not to “the saints.” The force of this phrase is not about “the saints in the light” but about “the saints’ inheritance which is *in* the light.”

What is the light of which Paul is speaking? It is the light of the kingdom of God. We’re going to see this in more detail as we look at verse 13, which in the original language continues the thought that we’re seeing here in verse 12. Paul says that our attitude of thanks toward God the Father is because He has taken us out of the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the light.

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And the light into which we have been brought is not simply a thing, or a place, or a situation. It is a *person*. It is the Lord Jesus Christ. In John chapter one, beginning at verse four, we read this:

In Him [that is, in Christ] was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. This man came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all through him might believe.

And over in John chapter three, beginning at verse 18, Jesus says this to Nicodemus:

He who believes in Him [that is, in God the Son, Jesus Christ] is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.

The original Greek of verse 12 would read like this: "God the Father has qualified us to be partakers of the saint's inheritance which is in the light." That is the realm in which we have our inheritance as the saints of God. And this is not something that is future only. Yes, there is future glory for the saints of God. But the saints of God walk in the light while we are here on earth.

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First John chapter one, verse seven: "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."

Proverbs chapter four, verses 18 and 19: "But the path of the just is like the shining sun, that shines ever brighter unto the perfect day. [And in contrast] The way of the wicked is like darkness; they do not [even] know what makes them stumble."

Who Are the Saints?

Before we leave this verse, we need to take up one more vital question: Who are the saints? Well, first I want to deal with the fact that there are many, many false notions about the definition of a saint.

Various pagan religions have saints. Hinduism has its saints. Hindus consider the founder of the modern Hari Krishna movement, for example, to be a saint. They often use the term "Swami" to refer to a saint, and Swami means "someone who has achieved higher knowledge and is his own master." It's the same kind of terminology that the Gnostics used to describe their counterfeit wisdom in the early days of the church.

A form of Islam, called Sufism, also has its saints. In some Muslim countries there are shrines at the tombs of the Islamic "saints." Muslims observe festival days on the anniversary of a saint's death, and Islam believes that these so-called dead saints can perform miracles on behalf of the living.

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Certain kinds of voodooism have people they call saints, and these people are sometimes worshipped as deities. The Cuban Santeria religion, which blends voodooism and Roman Catholicism, is one such religion.

And of course, Roman Catholicism practices the veneration of saints. In Roman Catholic terminology it is called the *cult of the saints*. Rome encourages a level of devotion to so-called saints that can truly be called worship, and in fact Roman Catholic literature speaks of the worship of saints. Roman Catholicism says that these 10,000 designated saints are "special friends of God," and they can be asked to intercede for those still on earth. In Roman Catholic teaching, a saint can be designated as the patron saint of a particular activity or profession. A saint can be prayed to in order to prevent disasters or heal illnesses.

There are many parallels between the Roman Catholic doctrine of saints and the pagan Greek and Roman beliefs in a pantheon of many gods who had special powers in specific areas of life. Each one needed to be prayed to, and devotion shown to them, in order to gain favor from them. The Roman Catholic doctrine of sainthood is one of many areas in which the Roman church has blended elements of paganism, both old and new, into its false version of Christianity.

High-church Anglicans venerate people they designate as saints. They say that these people have achieved sainthood not by believing in Christ, but by their own works.

Well, these are some of the false definitions of a saint. But now we turn back to the important question: What is the definition of a saint, not according to man's word, but

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according to God's Word? For the answer to that question, I want to take you back to one of our earliest studies in this series on the book of Colossians, when we looked at chapter one, verse two.

Paul addresses this epistle, in verse 2, "to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are at Colosse." Now some commentators have tried to say that these are two different classes of people – that there were the saints (the full membership of the church), and that there were the "faithful brethren" (people who were in some way more special than the others). But as we look carefully at the text, and as we consider this passage in the broader context of the whole book of Colossians and the rest of the Word of God, we have to reject this explanation. It is wrong.

The words "faithful brethren" in verse two would be more accurately translated "*believing* brethren." And this is reinforced by the fact that Paul attaches the words "*in Christ*" – and also by the fact that in the very next verses, it is their *belief in Christ* for which Paul expresses thanksgiving. It is the saints who are the believing brethren, and the believing brethren who are the saints – those who have been justified by faith in Jesus Christ by believing on Him. No other person can claim to be a saint, and Scripture never makes that claim for any other person.

And it is for that reason that Paul finishes his greeting to the Colossian believers with these words: "Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ." Grace is the way in which true salvation comes about – the unmerited favor of God. And peace is the result. Paul writes in Romans 5:1, "Therefore being

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justified by faith we have peace *with* God." The warfare is over. We have been reconciled to God, declared "not guilty" before Him. And therefore, Paul says in Colossians chapter 3 verse 15, "let the peace *of* God rule in your hearts." Let it control you. Because you are saved, because you are a saint of God, let the peace of God have control of your heart.

If you are trusting by faith alone, in the Lord Jesus alone, by God's grace alone, for salvation today – then the Word of God says that you are a saint. And as a saint, you are qualified to partake in the glorious inheritance of the riches that are in Christ Jesus, both now and in the life to come. You are going to inherit the new heavens and new earth as your eternal dwelling place with Him.

But today, perhaps you are listening to this program and you have never received grace and peace from God. You have never admitted to God that you are a sinner. You have never admitted before God that you cannot save yourself from eternal damnation. You have never been reconciled to God by receiving the free and gracious gift of salvation that God has made available as the only way to heaven, through the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today you stand outside the kingdom. You are not qualified to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in the light.

If God is speaking to you through this message today, if you understand that you need to receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin, if you understand that you need to walk in newness of life in Him, if you understand that this is the only way that you can be qualified to be a partaker of the glorious inheritance that God has for

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his saints, then I encourage you to stop where you are right now, and call upon the Lord and ask Him to save you. And if you are taking that step today, we would love to hear from you, and we would be happy to provide you with free resources that will help you grow in your new-found faith.

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