

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"



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## Reasons to Thank God

*Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.... (Colossians 1:12)*

As Paul opens his letter to the Colossians, he lets them know that, despite not personally knowing them or having visited them ("Since we heard of your faith..."), he has heard of their faith, and of their faithfulness. As an apostle, he wants to encourage them and to equip them to deal wisely with a growing threat that they face. Despite men occasionally throughout the history of Christianity thinking of themselves as apostles with global authority over other preachers and over churches beyond the one church they serve as pastor, the office of apostle ended in the first century. Any man who, subsequent to that era, acts as a pseudo-apostle with such authority exceeds his Biblical authority and typically causes far more harm than good, regardless of his intentions. A New Testament pastor's authority is limited to the church where he serves as pastor. However, Paul had this authority and used it carefully and to the edification of churches, not for his own private benefit.

Paul first encourages the Colossians in the good report he has heard of them. Their faithful service caused him to thank the Lord for them, and it caused him to pray for their continued blessings and faithfulness. Once Paul makes this point, he steps back to give the Colossians and us a better understanding of God's work in His people that motivates them to live out their faith, even when it is quite unpopular in their native culture to do so. With this study, we shall examine these "God-works" that explain why and how a fallen, sinful creature strives to abandon that old sinful lifestyle and to pursue a righteous faith-walk as these Colossians did. A popular contemporary Christian movement of our day explains the new birth as God giving unchanged, sinful human beings a "new beginning," a fresh start. They teach nothing about God changing the sinner's nature. Everything related to salvation in their teaching relates to what the individual does. Sometimes I'd like to suggest that the framers of this errant belief visit a hospital delivery room. Try explaining to a newborn infant that he/she existed through past lives, but with his/her present birth, God is offering a fresh start, the opportunity for a

"new beginning." If this sounds strangely like reincarnation to you, you are correct. This error puts man in charge of his own destiny even more so than eastern reincarnation. Such a man-centric view of eternal issues finds no comfort in Scripture, as we clearly see in Paul's and the other inspired writings of the New Testament.

*Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet....* For Paul, the godly behaviors and the faith-walk of the Colossians did not originate with the Colossians taking advantage of a fresh start, but of a work that God created within them. Paul did not thank the Colossians for taking advantage of their new opportunity. He rather thanked God for changing the Colossians within. In their native or natural and sinful state, they were unfit for any kind of intimate fellowship with God. They were the moral polar opposites of God and of everything that God represents. Before they could serve God, they needed far more than a fresh start with an old sinful nature. Scripture specifically describes this change as a new creation, not as a fresh start with an old evolution.

*Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

*For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)*

In both of these verses, word translated "creature" or "created" comes from the same word that the New Testament uses when referring to God's sovereign creation of the material universe. The universe didn't create itself, nor did it take advantage of a "new beginning" or a fresh start. It didn't exist prior to God's creating it.

*Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. (Hebrews 11:3)*

If we accept these simple passages dealing with our spiritual creation in the most literal and reasonable manner possible, we must conclude that our spiritual state with God, and our eternal future with Him, had its exclusive beginning with Him. He did something for us—and in us—that we couldn't possibly do for ourselves. Isn't that what Paul writes in our study verse?

*Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be....* We don't ordinarily use the word "meet" as Paul used it in this verse. Vine defines the Greek word translated "meet" in this verse.

HIKANOŌ (ἰκανόω , (2427)), to render fit, meet, to make sufficient, is translated "hath made ... meet" in Col. 1:12<sup>1</sup>

Simply stated, Paul is telling us that God has done something in us and to us that renders us "fit" or qualifies us for God and for His kingdom. We didn't do something to ourselves to attain this status. Later in the chapter Paul will address what we, as new creatures in Christ, are capable of doing, and how we should go about realizing our potential as children of God, as citizens of God's eternal kingdom. Here he focuses on what God did to qualify us for His kingdom. We didn't become citizens of God's kingdom by "naturalization," by taking classes and by taking an oath of allegiance. We didn't become beneficiaries of God's inheritance by our own actions. Rather God wrote us into His inheritance and performed the necessary work in us to ensure our place in that inheritance.

Occasionally people who fall into error regarding the actual effect of this inner work of God teach that the regenerate person is just as depraved, just as void of righteousness and just as prone to sin as he/she was prior to the new birth. Effectively they are saying that the new birth makes no change whatever in an individual. To give an appearance of support for this error, they rather deceitfully redefine the meaning of total depravity so as to mean something wholly different from its historical meaning. Historically "total depravity" refers to the fact that the fall affected every trait and part of man. The word originated as a way to refute the Pelagian—and later Pelagian/Molinian/Arminian—belief that man's will remains wholly unchanged by the fall, and thus fully capable of acting just as it did prior to the fall. This "partial fall" or "partial depravity" forms the basis for the various teachings that

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<sup>1</sup> W.E. Vine and F.F. Bruce, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Old Tappan NJ: Revell, 1981).

make man wholly or partially responsible for his own new birth and thus for his own eternal life. Though the error mentioned above does not itself fall into the Pelagian/Molinian/Arminian view, it does redefine the term "total depravity" in a way to make it wholly different from its historical meaning. Unless we can claim the credentials to write a theological dictionary, I suggest that it is wise to use accepted terms with their accepted and historical meaning, not create new meanings for them. If the new birth makes a permanent change in people, particularly in terms of their relationship and attitude toward God and God's moral character/code, we should not apply the term "total depravity" to them, because they are no longer depraved in all of their being.

Without question, a regenerated person possesses two natures and, with those two natures, two moral inclinations and appetites. Scripture clearly addresses the internal conflict that we experience between these two appetites. However, the error that surfaces my concern in this point relates to the idea that regeneration makes no change whatever in a person.

If in fact a person is "totally depraved,"...dead in trespasses and in sins..." as Paul writes in Ephesians 2:1, the theological consequences are quite significant regarding the question of how a person actually becomes born again. Total depravity means the individual can't do anything whatever that is acceptable to God. Sadly, even those who claim to believe in the Bible doctrines of grace at times fall into grave error when they claim that an unregenerate elect person must hear the gospel, believe the gospel, and "receive Christ" before being born again, making a totally depraved person do what he/she cannot do before regeneration. So both the Pelagian/Molinian/Arminian and the corrupted believer in pseudo-grace end up believing the same thing, that the unregenerate person must do something to gain the new birth.

The pseudo-grace believer will attempt to evade this dilemma by claiming that God requires certain conditions of the unregenerate, but since God then sovereignly, irresistibly, and effectually causes the unregenerate elect to perform those conditions, God gets the praise for salvation as if He required nothing of the unregenerate at all. Effectively this errant teaching produces two kinds of Arminian, one who says that God requires the sinner to perform the required conditions and leaves man to do or not do them, and the other who teaches that God requires those same conditions of the unregenerate, but then He steps in and performs them on the sinner's behalf. The effect is indeed two kinds of Arminian; 1) one is man-centric, and 2) the other is deterministic or fatalistic. The result is in fact two kinds of

Pelagian/Molinistic/Arminian error, not two kinds of grace belief.

*Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light....* John Gill defines this inheritance.

This is the inheritance "of the saints", and of none else; who are sanctified or set apart by God the Father in eternal election; who are sanctified by the blood of Christ, or whose sins are expiated by his atoning sacrifice; who are sanctified in Christ, or to whom he is made sanctification....<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of what we believe in this life, every child of God, every blood-bought heir of this inheritance shall know why they are in heaven when they arrive there. He or she will joyfully praise God for being there.

*And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation....*  
(Revelation 5:9)

Ah, what a day that will be!

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church  
16434 Woodruff  
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday                      10:30 A. M.  
Joseph R. Holder    Pastor

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<sup>2</sup> Copied from Gill's *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, SwordSearcher Bible Software.