

“Triumph In Christ”

“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.”

2 Corinthians 2:14

Every so often, it is beneficial for us to look deeper into the text of the Bible. Although it is not necessary for one to be a student of the languages of the Bible in order to understand it, a cursory examination can instill within us a vividness and appreciation for the Holy Spirit-inspired words. In 2 Corinthians 2:14, a unique and interesting statement is made with reference to our relationship to Christ.

The word for “*triumph*” as *thriambeuonti*. It is a present participle, which means that it expresses continuous or repeated action. Paul states that both himself and other Christians are continually being lead in triumph.

Robertson and Thayer both state that *thriambeuonti* originally represented a “hymn sung in festal processions in honor of Bacchus” (Robertson, p. 218; Thayer, p. 292). This sudden outburst of gratitude was in stark contrast to the previous dejection and gloom Paul experienced at Troas.

Vine says that *thriambeuonti* means to “lead in triumph, used of a conqueror with reference to the vanquished. Theodoret paraphrases it ‘He leads us about here and there and displays us to all the world.’ This is in agreement with evidences from various sources. Those who are lead are not captives exposed to humiliation, but are displayed as the glory and devoted subjects of Him who leads” (p. 1178).

Rienecker states that it is “the picture of the triumphal entry of a military hero into the city of Rome” (p. 457). He gives an elaborate description of the triumphal entry: “The victorious Roman general marched into the city in a long procession preceded by the city magistrates. They were followed by trumpeters, then the spoils taken from the enemy followed by white oxen intended for sacrifice, then the captives headed by the king of the conquered country, then officials of the victorious army and musicians dancing and playing, and at last the general himself in whose honor the whole wonderful pageant was taking place” (pp. 457-458). Rienecker goes further and explains that the “fragrance” also pictures the Roman triumphal entry because “it was customary for the triumphal processions to be accompanied by the release of sweet odors from the burning of spices in the streets” (p. 458).

There are certain exegetical difficulties which obscure the full understanding of this passage. *Thriambeuonti* means to lead in triumph, but there is a question as to what sense the verb is being used in. Rienecker says that "Paul represents himself as one of the victorious general's soldiers sharing in the glory of his triumph" (p. 458). However, Robertson takes a slightly different view and says that the "picture here is of Paul as captive in God's triumphal procession" (p. 218). *Thriambeuonti* is ambiguous enough to allow the two differing views.

Colossians 2:15 is the only other occurrence of *thriambeuonti* in the New Testament. In this passage, the verb is being used to signify the victory of God over Satanic powers through Christ's death. In his attempts to answer the question of interpretation, Earle quotes Lidell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon when it says, "The first -- 'lead in triumph, of conquered enemies' -- applies to Colossians 2:15. The second -- 'lead in triumph, as a general does his army' -- fits here" (p. 249). He concludes that the verb could mean both.

After carefully weighing all the arguments on both sides, the International Critical Commentary comes to the following conclusion: "Nevertheless, whatever the exegetical difficulties, it is surely right to understand the verb in its usual, attested sense when followed by a direct object, 'lead (as a conquered prisoner) in a triumphal procession', and to see the image as derived from the Roman triumph ... All that Paul may be trying to say may be that his apostolic activity serves to demonstrate the power of God (cf. 4:7), just as the presence of conquered prisoners in the triumphal procession served to emphasize the might of the victorious Roman commander" (p. 195).

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