

January 26, 2020

## “Gospel Praying” Colossians 1:3-14

FCF: The struggle with how to respond to challenges to the gospel

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The Lord calls us to meet challenges to the gospel  
(magnet) with prayer shaped by the gospel.**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

How do we respond to threats? I heard a recent news report that residential development has led to habitat destruction which has led to coyote displacement and now danger to pets. So you'd better keep an eye out because that's a threat. Let's say your child comes home from school complaining of a bully. You need to dialogue with them about self-defense because that's a threat. Perhaps you're driving down the highway and notice that tractor trailer beside you is starting to drift. So you accelerate to get some distance away from them because that's a threat.

What about a threat to the gospel? Perhaps hostility, whether overt or covert. Perhaps persecution or pressure to conform to ways of thinking or living. What do you do? And what do you do when others are facing it? That's worth thinking about. What should a disciple do then?

**SCRIPTURE READING:** Colossians 1:3-14**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

First, some background. This letter was written by Paul to the church in Colossae. The origins of the church can be traced to Paul's three-year stay in Ephesus. Epaphras, a Colossian, had travelled to Ephesus, heard and embraced Paul's message, recognized how good this news is, and carried it to his home town. That was the birth of the church, sometime in the mid-50's.

I should add that Colossae was a pluralistic city, a melting pot of many different ideas and faiths. Paul is writing the early 60's. And by this point, the church is facing a serious challenge from destructive teaching - a challenge both to its mission and survival. Given that we only have one side of the conversation, it's difficult to tell exactly what this teaching was. Some have said it was Gnosticism. Others have said it was Jewish syncretism. It's likely that it was a bit of both Jewish and pagan folk belief, leading to a tragic deemphasis on the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Now think of the challenges to the gospel in our own pluralistic context. Moralism - live right and hope the scales will balance. Materialism - live how you want because this is all there is. Middleism - everyone is right so don't worry. Those who hold such positions may not see it but each of those is a faith, a worldview, a way of seeing and living. Each presumes they are right and pressures others to conform. How should we respond? Not by pretending otherwise. The Lord calls us to meet challenges to the gospel. How? With prayer shaped by the gospel.

That is gospel prayer. And we see it both in the context and content of Paul's prayer.

**I. THE CONTEXT OF SUCH PRAYER**

Let's start with the context of such prayer, the dynamics behind it that form its setting.

*A) Who They Were*

Who were these people Paul was writing to? What was his relationship with them?

1. No obvious tie

Paul had never personally met them. He had only heard of and about them ([READ Colossians 1:4, 9](#)). So they weren't really friends. There was no obvious tie between Paul and these people.

2. But a spiritual bond

But there was an unbreakable spiritual bond ([READ Colossians 1:1-2](#)). They may not have been friends but they were family. And so, hearing of their need, Paul committed himself to pray.

*Illustration:*

Years ago we lived in a split level house. One evening, after we had put the kids to bed and were downstairs getting settled into a movie, I heard little footsteps coming down the stairs. So, with a flash of impatience, I got up to identify this intruder. As I got to the bottom of the stairs, I was met by our son (four or five at the time) who said, "Hannah needs you." Alex's room was next to hers and he could hear her crying. So he got up and came downstairs to get us.

"Daddy, your daughter, my sister, needs you." That's how we are to pray, no matter what else you could say about the relationship. If we are family, we go to our Father for one another.

*B) Where Paul Was*

Part of the context is who they were. The next part has to do with where Paul was.

1. Not ideal circumstances

It wasn't ideal circumstances. Paul was in prison in Rome. In the ancient world, prisons were dark, overcrowded, lacking basic necessities like bedding, adequate clothing, and an opportunity to bathe. Decent food and water came from friends on the outside who were often pressured not to associate with prisoners. This is the setting in which Paul sat while he wrote this letter.

2. But Paul was committed to pray

And yet he was committed to pray ([READ Colossians 1:3, 9](#)). Always, without ceasing - not a perpetual mystical experience but Paul maintained a spirit of prayer, a posture of dependence upon the Lord, and he interceded for them during his regular set times of prayer with the Lord.

This is the context of Paul's prayer - both who they were and where he was.

*Application:*

What are some takeaways from this as we think about gospel praying? Let's start with the who they were. It would seem that the things we use to designate our circles aren't nearly as big a deal as we think. Not generations, gender, race, class, upbringing, or political party. That's worth remembering as this next election cycle gets heated up. It's none of that. It's Jesus. If we are family, then we should deeply care for each other. And if we deeply care, then we will pray.

That's who they were. Now let's shift to where Paul was. It would seem that the things that often dominate our attention are no excuse not to pray. Again, think of the misery of Paul's circumstances. We can't wait until things get better. That's an ever elusive mobile mirage.

We have a tremendous responsibility here. And a tremendous privilege. Think of it. The unfolding of God's eternal plan and purposes includes our prayers as a foreordained means towards His good and glorious ends. We are included in that. We get to participate in that.

The Lord calls us to meet challenges to the gospel with prayer shaped by the gospel.

## **II. THE CONTENT OF SUCH PRAYER**

So that's the context of such prayer. Which takes us then to the content of such prayer.

### *A) Grateful for God's Work*

Paul begins with gratitude to God for His work in their lives (**READ Colossians 1:3-8**).

#### **1. Deep transformation**

A deep transformation had taken place. Faith - personal trust and daily reliance on the finished work of Jesus. Love for one another - not just affection but sacrificial service. All rooted in hope - beyond wishful thinking but in something certain yet to come. Paul was thankful for this.

#### **2. Gospel evidences**

He was thankful for the deep transformation and the gospel evidences in their lives. It had taken root in them. They were disciples - hearing Jesus' call, responding by repenting, believing the gospel, and following Him. The message had taken root and was bearing fruit, just as it should - bearing fruit and increasing. There was growth in breadth and depth. So Paul was thankful.

### *B) Asking for Yet More*

Paul was grateful for God's work. And asked for yet more (**READ Colossians 1:9-14**). Paul longed to see a building on this beginning, something that could well endure the storms.

#### **1. Knowledge of God's will**

So he asked the Lord to give them a growing knowledge of His will. Not an insight into His particular plans and purposes for them. Not a grasp of deep theological truths. But a wisdom and understanding that comes only from the Spirit and reaches out into every area of life.

#### **2. Living for Jesus**

In the midst of the storm, Paul asked that they would have that sort of knowledge. And that they would live for Jesus. Not trying to earn His favor but because they already had His favor. Such a life would have four marks - bearing fruit, growth in knowledge, divine strength, and humble thanks. Some of that was already there. But Paul longed to see them established in such things.

This is the content of gospel prayer - gratitude for God's work and asking for yet more.

### *Illustration:*

It was 1792. William Carey, the "father of the modern missionary movement," had challenged his Baptist brethren to take the Gospel to unreached lands. "The Particular Baptist Society for Propagating the Gospel among the Heathen" was formed and appointed Carey and John Thomas to go to India as missionaries. The Society later came together for a farewell service. Sometime during that all-day meeting, one of the men said to Carey, "There is a gold

mine in India; but it seems as deep as the centre of the earth; who will venture to explore it?" "I will go down," responded Carey, in words never to be forgotten, "but you must hold the rope."

*Application:*

Now let's press into this. What would it mean for us to "hold the rope" in prayer where the gospel is being challenged in our own day? For a church in another land, we could pray, "God of all nations and peoples, you have turned these dear people from idols to yourself. They have seen through the emptiness of Islam or the tyranny of communism and have embraced the gospel. Hold them tight. Don't let them give up or give in to the pressure. They are yours."

For a politician, we could pray, "Gracious Lord of all, you are the One who has gifted and appointed this brother or sister for such a time as this. Help them to stay committed to justice, mercy, and faithfulness. Their principles are under assault from many fronts. Keep them close."

For a student or a soldier, we could pray, "O Shepherd of our souls, this child of yours knows the truth. You raised them in it. Their doubts are real. But so are you. Press in on them."

The Lord calls us to meet the challenges to the gospel with prayer shaped by the gospel.

**CONCLUSION:**

Our response to a need must be fitted to the need. Here's story from last January that makes the point. It's about a 911 dispatcher and how she dealt with an unusual call ([READ](#)):

A police dispatcher in Lafayette, Indiana, is being praised for her kindness toward a caller last week. Antonia Bundy received a call from a child and asked what his emergency was. His problem was not the typical emergency Bundy normally deals with, but she still helped the boy out.

"You had a bad day at school?" Bundy asked when the boy told her why he was calling.

"Yeah. I just came to tell you that," he said.

"When he told me he was having a bad day and I asked him what was troubling him, he told me that he had homework," Bundy [told CBS affiliate WLFI-TV](#). "And at that point, I was able to determine that it was more of a 'I need help with homework' than an actual emergency."

Bundy was glad she wasn't too busy and she could focus on helping the boy with his homework. "I've always been good at math. All the way through high school I enjoyed it. So it was something I was very happy I could help him with," she said. The boy read her the problem — what is  $3 \times 4 + 1 \times 4$  — and Bundy walked him through the steps to solve it. She said the brief interaction was a nice break to her otherwise busy day.

"It kind of takes the pressure off of it a little bit. Not too much, but just a little bit to be able to relax to take a step back and truly figure out what he needed and truly spend time with him and assist him in the best way I could."

Usually, the emergencies she deals with are much worse, so a math problem was a welcome change. The boy said that was the only problem he needed help with, then thanked Bundy for her assistance.

"I'm sorry for calling you, but I really needed help," he told her.

"You're fine. We're always here to help," Bundy replied.

Yes, the boy should be corrected on when to call 911. But this dispatcher should be commended - not only for her kindness but her understanding of the nature of the need. She didn't blindly send EMT's to the house. Instead, she walked this kid through his multiplication tables.

Our response to a need must be fitted to the need. The church in the States and around the world faces challenges to the gospel, challenges to its mission and survival, just as it did in Paul's day. Those needs have never been chiefly financial or political. They are spiritual and must be met with that in mind. That's what the context and content of Paul's prayer show us.

The Lord calls us to meet the challenges to the gospel with prayer shaped by the gospel.

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) The Lord calls us to meet challenges to the gospel  
(magnet) with prayer shaped by the gospel.