

Colossians 1:3–14 Sample Responses | Courtney Humphreys and Mary Hannah

Structure

From Courtney:

- I. Paul shares/models **thanksgiving** for the Colossians' faith and love and for the gospel's fruit and growth among them and globally (vv. 3–8)
 - a) Vv. 3–5a | faith in Christ and love for the saints—because of hope
 - b) Vv. 5b–8 | fruit and growth of the gospel—globally and among them, since they heard it from Epaphras
- II. Paul shares **supplication** for Colossians' continued sanctification [*that you may be ...*](vv. 9–12)
 - a) Vv. 9–10 | FILLED with knowledge of God's will; result: walk in manner pleasing to God, bearing fruit, and increasing in knowledges
 - b) Vv. 11–12 | STRENGTHENED with all power; for endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to God
- III. Paul points to radical reality of **shared identity of family of faith** through God's work of redemption. (vv. 13–14)

These verses are the passage's anchor.

From Mary:

Paul reports his prayers regarding the Colossians and those prayers' underpinning (vv. 3–14).

1. Prayers of **thanksgiving** for how the gospel has borne fruit among the Colossians and around the world (vv. 3–8)
2. Prayers of **petition** that the gospel would keep bearing fruit among the Colossians (vv. 9–14)
 - a. First petition (vv. 9–10)
 - b. Second petition (vv. 11–12)
 - c. Reason for assurance that God will grant these two petitions (vv. 13–14)

Unifying Theme

From Courtney: Paul demonstrates the centrality of prayer and the radical reality of Christian identity as he begins his letter to the Colossians with thanksgiving for their faith and love and the gospel's fruit among them (and globally) and with supplication for their filling and strengthening, and by pointing them to their collectively shared identity as redeemed "saints in light."

From Mary: As Paul reports his prayers regarding the Colossians, he stresses the singular efficacy of the fruit-bearing gospel that is at work in the past, present, and future among God's redeemed sibling-saints in Christ.

Paul's Aim/Purpose

From Courtney: Paul aims **to point** the Colossians to the power and centrality of prayer and to God as the source of the good fruit they have demonstrated and the source for their full strengthening and **to remind** Colossians of their collectively shared identity as redeemed and forgiven.

From Mary: Paul aims to **encourage** the Colossians by reporting his prayers for them and by emphasizing God's good work among them through the gospel, not least to (1) **confirm his love for them** before he corrects them and (2) **confirm the Lord Jesus's full sufficiency** by demonstrating the gospel's complete power for conversion, ongoing maturation/endurance, and glorification when sibling-saints in Christ will receive their full inheritance.

In the apostle Paul's opening words to the Colossians, he begins articulating:

general
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- the primary relational context of growing in the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 1–2),
- the essential foundation of growing in the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 3–8),
- the purpose of and assurance for growing in the Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 9–14).

specific
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In Word-Filled Women Bible Study, we are here together:

- In the **relational context of forever family** as sister-saints in Christ,
- On the **foundation of the gospel** of the Lord Jesus Christ and his Scriptures that proclaim it,
- For the **purpose of walking in a manner worthy of him**, in our various contexts and callings, all the way to the end,
- And with the **full assurance that our Redeemer will complete the good work** he has begun in us, through the gospel.

Some additional remarks relating to this passage:

- **Paul models the beauty of intercessory prayer grounded in the gospel.** What fuels Paul's prayer life, as demonstrated in vv. 3–14? Thanksgiving (rising from *truth*—an accurate assessment of who God is and what he's done for them); Love (for God, for God's people, for lost people)
- **The foundation for growing in Christ is the gospel of Christ.** The gospel is the centerpiece and the basis of Christian life and ministry. It's good to pause and define the gospel, rather than simply assuming it. When we *assume* the gospel, overtime we *lose* it. Verses 13–14 put forward one of Scripture's clearest, most succinct definitions. Paul writes, "*He [that is, God the Father] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" The gospel is the announcement that God has taken initiative to rescue us from the tyranny of sin and death and to set us free as citizens of his kingdom. And he grants us the forgiveness of sins *in Christ*—which we know has come at great personal cost to this beloved Son: his own lifeblood. The gospel tells of this substitutionary act of God for our sake. This sacrificial love of Christ is the basis of our inclusion into God's family and God's kingdom—it all happens *in Christ*. Good news indeed!
- **In vv. 3–5a, Paul thanks God for the fruit of the gospel evident among the Colossians**—the evidence of its transforming power in the lives of real men and women. And what is this fruit? It's faith and love, which are based on hope. But let's get more specific. This isn't some kind of general faith in a higher power; nor love as merely a kind disposition to give people the benefit of the doubt; nor *hope* as pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking. No, the fruit of the gospel is faith *in Christ Jesus* and love *for all the saints*, which are anchored in the hope *laid up for us in heaven*—the robust confidence that the Lord Jesus who once came to this earth in humility will come again in resplendent glory.
- **Paul's prayer in vv. 9–14 expresses the purpose of and assurance for growing in Christ.** Paul models the beauty of intercessory prayer grounded in the gospel. It is entirely possible for us to seek spiritual growth for the wrong reasons. We may be tempted to grow in our handling of the Scriptures mainly so that we can look like we have it all together. We're tempted to use *knowledge*—knowledge of the facts of the Bible—as some sort of social power. Perhaps we're tempted to care more about being *perceived* as a Word-filled woman than actually living as one. But when Paul asks God to grant the Colossians knowledge and strength, he has in mind something quite different. In Paul's prayer, we see the purpose of growing in Christ. He prays that the Colossians would be filled with knowledge *so that* they can walk worthy of the Lord and that they would be strengthened *so that* they may endure patiently, joyfully, and thankfully. Paul prays for the sort of maturation in Christ that leads to humble servanthood and perseverance—the hard and rigorous work of following in the footprints of Christ. This is the sort of knowledge and strength the gospel engenders as we root ourselves in God's truth. It's very personal, powerful, and practical. Paul's prayers for the Colossians provide models for us. We too can thank God in these ways and ask God to supply this knowledge and strength for ourselves, for each other, and for those believers to whom we're ministering, that they might faithfully endure in their faith in Christ Jesus, grounded in the word of the truth, the gospel. God delights to answer such prayers. The affirmation of the gospel in vv. 13–14 bears the weight of the whole passage. It assures the Colossians that God will hear these petitions and answer favorably. So too, God will complete the good work he has begun in us—and he will do it, not by our stellar spiritual performance, but by the gospel.