

# (Colossians) 12 in Closing-Two Main Admonitions

by Bob Utley

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*Bob Utley emphasizes the critical importance of prayer and evangelism as foundational practices for Christians in his sermon on Colossians 4.*

**Duration:** 26:55

**Scripture:** Colossians 4:2

**Topics:** "Colossians"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the last two commands and points emphasized by the apostle in the book of Colossians. The first main truth is found in verses 2 through 4, where believers are encouraged to devote themselves to prayer with an attitude of thanksgiving. The speaker emphasizes the importance of praying for others, specifically for God to open doors for the proclamation of the word and for clarity in speaking the mystery of Christ. The second main truth is not explicitly mentioned in the given transcript, but the speaker hints at the importance of intentional evangelism and sharing the gospel in all aspects of life.

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## Transcript

Well, Pat, that was really moving. Thank you for doing that for us. I don't see you out there.

I know you're out there. Wave at me. Thanks, brother.

That was very, very good. I want to work on the last paragraph of Colossians today. So if you'll turn to Colossians 4, it's not the last paragraph of the book because this is a book written to a specific church.

There's a lot of greetings and say hello. I'm always amazed when I look at all the people that Paul says thank you to or help these two women who are fighting or encourage a brother or welcome. How many people were involved in the missionary activities of the early church that we know absolutely nothing about? And isn't that true today? Maybe unknown to the world but well known by God.

Amen? I bet there's some stories here of faith and faithfulness, of trials and sacrifice that it would just be amazing if we had them recorded for us. I keep reminding myself that there is so little that is recorded of the early church, so little of the life of Jesus. I don't need more information.

I need to act on the information that I have been given. I don't need to long to understand everything. I need to realize that the Holy Spirit has chosen the truths that I need for faith and faithfulness and will help me apply those to my day.

And so though I long for more information, I think I have to be content with what I have. As a Bible teacher, I know that the book of Colossians and Ephesians are parallel books, prison epistles. Colossians written first to the Lycus River Valley for three churches not started by Paul.

But that Paul realized that the problems that these young churches faced was going to spread across all of Christendom. And sometime soon after the Colossian letter was sent, Paul wrote another letter, a cyclical letter, an expanded letter dealing with the same topics. And that expansion is nowhere more obvious than in this next paragraph in Colossians.

Just a few verses, chapter 4, verses 2 through 6. This will be expanded into the spiritual warfare of Ephesians 6, 10 through 19. As Paul began to think about the things that he had written, he realized the implication of these things and began to explain further what some rather short phrases would imply in the life of not only the first century church but in the every century church. And those are the things that I want to emphasize today.

I think there are basically two points in this paragraph. Now, what I've mentioned to you is that the best way to study the Bible is to compare English translations because, as you know, paragraph divisions are not inspired. Some English translations say that verses 2 through 6 is one paragraph which means it has one main truth.

Other translations say there are two paragraphs and I think there are two main truths. So if I were to say, here is an apostle writing toward the end of his life, middle 60s, and he is closing a letter to a group of distressed churches. What is the last two commands, points, emphasis that he will make to these churches? I mean, this seems like a pretty important summary and a summary that we should take note of and a summary that can benefit us in times of stress and problems and concerns in our day.

The first truth, I think, is found in verses 2 through 4. I'm going to read it. Follow with me if you would. Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert, in it with an attitude of thanksgiving, praying at the same time for us as well, that God will open to us a door for the word, that we may speak forth the mystery of Christ for which I have been imprisoned, that I may make it clear the way I ought to speak.

Several things grab me here. The threefold command. Now, it is true that there's some participles here, but they are used as imperatives.

The first one is an imperative, and it's an imperative that speaks of ongoing action. Devote yourselves to prayer. I wish I understood more about prayer.

I must admit to you, prayer is a mystery to me theologically. There's a lot of books on prayer, and I don't think any of them do justice to the diversity of witness on this subject in the New Testament. I keep saying to myself, if Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, needed to get up early and often to pray, the incarnate Son of God needed to get up early and often to pray, how can I live effectively without it? Do you understand what I'm saying to you? Prayerless Christianity is the plague of secular Christianity, of a facade of spirituality that does not go to the core of life.

Now, I personally do not believe that Jesus is giving us a time when we must pray. Through the years, you meet some very zealous religious overstaters, people who say, Jesus prayed early, you've got to get up at 4 o'clock and pray till the dawn. You've got to do this.

I do not think this is a theological teaching passage on when and how long I must pray. And there have been those who said that an hour of prayer is worth more than five minutes of prayer. I disagree with that.

That a certain time is more spiritual than another time. That a certain topic is more spiritual than another topic. That a certain position of the body is better than another position of the body.

I think all that is spiritual baloney because prayer is the natural result of a personal relationship. What kind of marriage would I have if I never spoke to my wife? And must I plan when to speak to her? I think the greatest thing theologically about prayer is... And I'll put it another way. I've used this through the years and I hope it's effective for you.

Most of my life I have heard and completely agree with the statement that you must have a personal relationship with God through Christ. The problem is how do I define that personal relationship? Because I have never seen Jesus. I have never audibly heard Jesus.

I mean, my Bible doesn't float. How can I have a personal relationship with someone that I have not seen or heard? Well, I think the tell-tale marker of a personal relationship is the desire to pray. And I think reading God's Word and listening to mature Christians is the way the feedback comes.

Now, I would never deny if someone said to me, God spoke to me audibly. I think I have met enough people that I would say, okay, I hope you are grateful for that because there are many of us that have served him for decades and never heard an audible voice. And part of me says that we walk by faith and not by sight and I should not seek a personal voice.

I used to get so nervous going to these testimony services where somebody comes in and says, I was sick and I prayed and Jesus came in the room and touched me and now I'm well and I thought, I've been sick as a dog. I haven't seen the boy. Is something wrong with me? You know, everybody's personal testimony is not scripture, amen? Just because it happened to you doesn't mean it ought to happen to everybody.

Just because you get up at 4 o'clock and are deeply committed to it doesn't mean everybody has to get up at 4 o'clock. If you get up at 4 o'clock, pray for me, but don't call. Do we really believe that prayer changes things? Now, this is where I'm caught on the horns of the dilemma between an understanding of the sovereignty of God and the free will of man.

Now, here is Paul in prison and he's going to say, pray for me. Now, is Paul in prison by the will of God or not? No, no, no, no. No, no, I'm not letting you off that easy.

Is Paul in prison by the will of God? Isn't this part of the testimony from Ananias that you're going to speak before kings and the only way he got to Rome was on a trial in a legal dispute that Caesar was going to have to somehow hear? It was the will of God that Paul's in prison. Now, does Paul pray to get out of prison? He does not. I'd be praying, get me out of here.

At least kill the roaches in the vicinity. I don't know, let the rats go to the next cell. Something, you know, very selfish.

Paul does not pray that. I do not know how, when, how often to pray. I don't.

Once I tell God in faith my desires, is that enough? Must I say it a certain way at a certain place at a certain time in a certain form? Must I say over and over again? I can't answer these questions. Because there are texts about keep on knocking. I mean, there are texts about that.

I simply think that if something bothers you as a believer, you have the right to pray about it as often as it bothers you, amen? But if there are persons like me who pray about it once and then I don't have to pray about it again, thank you, I'm not less spiritual than you. The fact that we go to him and say, Dad, I have this request, and we're willing to accept a no, maybe, wait a while, okay. The answer is not our greatest need.

Fellowship with God is our greatest need. But here's where I'm caught. Can I affect the will of God by prayer? Now, see, here's the clash of human free will and the sovereignty of God.

Certainly God knows more. You know, I'm nervous about going to a hospital room and praying for healing when healing is not always the will of God. Sometimes going home is the will of God.

I said it to you in a sermon. I think I must have misunderstood. I said it not well.

I've mentioned one time that my son was having some difficulty and Peggy was asking me to pray. I said, I'm not going to pray about this. That's not because I don't love my son.

And it's not because I don't believe God makes a difference. It's because I believe that God brought my son to a set of circumstances for the spiritual well-being of my son. And him suffering in these circumstances, not knowing what's going to happen with all the resources he trusted in gone is a better spiritual place and I don't want to pray against God.

I do not know how to pray always. But, but I do believe that intercessory prayer can affect the will of God. If intercessory prayer cannot affect the will of God, why do we pray at all for others? Now, here's the mystery.

You got a lost person, family member, spouse, child, and you're asking God, you're asking God, have mercy on this one, deal with this one. Now, I know and you know that God is not going to overcome the free will of that person. He won't do it and he won't let us do it, but somehow us praying intensifies the spiritual atmosphere of that conflict, releases spiritual powers that would not be released if we did not pray.

Now, do I understand that? No. Do I keep praying? Yes. Maybe when I get there, I'll understand.

Paul is praying. He's asking them to pray for him. I hope you know that this is just like Ephesians 6, 19 where Paul says, pray for me, pray for me.

And I guess what really gets me, and I just love Paul so much for this, he doesn't pray to get me out of here, get me more food. He prays, God, help me to open a door. Man, what a powerful metaphor.

Open the door for the word that I may speak clearly the gospel. Man. Now, as somebody who does evangelism, I certainly know that the presentation of the one who shares the gospel is not the key.

It's the wooing of the Holy Spirit. But Paul wants God to open a door. I wonder if he was remembering the revival at Ephesus where he said, God opened a door that no man could close.

We need to pray for God to open a door in our lives for opportunity to share who he is. We need to have an evangelistic intentionality about life. This has nothing to do with personality type.

This has nothing to do with your spiritual gift. This has nothing to do with you being on staff, off staff, ordained, unordained. God's people need to have a prayerful intentionality for the spread of the word with effect.

We need to pray. Pray for our concerns. Pray for our needs.

Pray for our families. Pray for our situations. Yes, God is concerned.

We can pray as often as we want about anything that concerns us. But somewhere amidst the concerns of life, we've got to be overtaken by the priority of the kingdom. That there is more to prayer than what's in it for me.

That there is something greater out there that can only be impacted by the prayers of the people of God. I've heard some of the Campus Crusade seminars in the past talk about that revival usually comes when God's people begin to pray in extraordinary ways. And the truth is God's people are not praying.

And the statistics on how long pastors and church leaders pray is shocking. But again, I think it's not a matter of time, but it may be a matter of subject. Do we pray for the salvation? Did you pray that someone would be saved today in this service? Do you pray when you talk to your neighbor that some spiritual content may get into the conversation? Do you look when you give gifts, when you send cards? Do you look for a spiritual aspect to share something of who you are with them? In our gift-giving, do we give things that might point someone toward God or just more colorful potholders? There needs to be an intentionality about all of life that recognizes the priority of evangelism.

I think those Roman soldiers that were chained to Paul in three shifts, 24 hours a day, heard the gospel, don't you? And maybe Paul was praying for more soldiers. Make it a four-shift, Lord. Bring more of those young men in here.

We run from our responsibilities in evangelism and we neglect our responsibilities in prayer and then gripe about the spiritual condition of our churches and nation. Thank you, Paul. Thank you for reminding us of the door of the Word.

And thank you reminding us about in speaking forth the mystery of Christ, which I think is the Ephesians 2, 11 through 3, 13, that Jew and Gentile are now one in Jesus Christ, the unity of all humanity, the focus of Genesis 3, 15 now brought together in Christ. The other paragraph is verse 5 and 6. And this again, I think, has an evangelistic intent. Here is Paul in prison saying to these churches, terribly disrupted by false teachers, terrible disruption in the fellowship, conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.

Now, if you know the Ephesians parallel well, this looks like Paul is going back to... that he expands this in Ephesians 5, 15. And this becomes part of the ever be filled with the spirit. Now, I mentioned to you that in Colossians 3, 16, the exact structural parallel to ever be filled with the spirit in Ephesians is let the Word of Christ richly dwell in you, in Colossians.

And now, what is the result? Are we praying for the spirit-filled life or are we praying for the indwelling Word to have effect? Is that mean American health, wealth, and prosperity Christianity? Are we praying for more and more for me? I assure you the worst thing God could do to most Americans is answer their prayers. Because we're praying for all the wrong stuff. We're praying for me stuff.

Can Christians pray for me stuff? Yes. But the more they become spirit-filled, the more they're going to pray for His stuff. And the more the chances of answered prayer come with His stuff in His name for His kingdom.

Now, you mean I'm supposed to live in such a way that outsiders are impacted by the personal daily choices that I make because I'm a Christian? Yes. The world is watching and there needs to be a different... Making the most of the opportunity. It's that exact same concept of Ephesians 5, 15 through 16.

Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned as it were with salt, so that you will know how to respond to each person. I am not an evangelist. I'm not.

I have a heart for that, but I am an introvert. Very... I just find it difficult to start conversations with anybody about anything. And yet, I'm a Christian.

And I believe that the answer to the world's problems is a personal relationship with Christ. I don't want people to agree with me in this or that theology or completely agree with my understanding of the Bible. But what I want them to meet is the one who died in their place.

And it's got to become frontal lobe, daily, prayerful intentionality. Now, how that works out for you, I don't know. Maybe you want to start carrying a track with you.

Maybe when you leave a good tip, you leave a track. Maybe you invite people to church services. Maybe you bake cookies to give away at church visitation.

Maybe you stay home during visitation and pray on your knees that God will have effect to those who go visiting. Maybe you take an evangelistic training course. Maybe you choose to go overseas on one of these witnessing opportunities.

I don't know. But I know it's got to be a frontal, daily, purposeful, intentional, regular, priority commitment. The two things in the Christian life that, when neglected, float away quickest is prayer and evangelism.

And they're replaced by socially acceptable religious stuff. Now, if Colossians focuses on the priority of intense prayer and intense evangelism, we would do well to analyze our lives and priorities in light of these two concerns. Are we praying? Good.

What are you praying for? What are you praying for? Do we ever, when we meet people, socially, business, community, neighborhood, is there ever a flicker of, I wish they knew Christ? God, can you use me to help them know you? God, what could I do? Can I begin to pray for this person? Can I begin to pray with this person? Can I begin to set times to take this person with me? What can I do? There's got to be... Now, some of you are going to, because of who you are, your personality, your gift, you're going to start praying, hopefully, for world evangelization. You're going to start praying for the ministry in Thailand. You're going to start praying for missionaries around the world.

God bless you. Thank you. We're losing that in Baptist life.

Some of you, because of who you are, are going to think about Aunt Sadie and the neighbor at 1314 and the guy at the supermarket who's so nice and takes your groceries out for you. Some of you are going to start thinking locally and some of you are going to start thinking globally, and that's purposeful. I do not know what you're called to do, but I know my Bible well enough to know this.

If you're saved, you're called to prayer and you're called to gospel sharing. Amen? Then, if whatever else we're doing may be good, may be comforting, may be socially acceptable, whatever we're doing that takes the place of those two things is out of the will of God for your life. Lord, forgive us for being spiritual, but not being New Testament intently focused.

Forgive us for having things like we don't spit, dance, and chew, but never share with anybody what you've done for our lives. Forgive us for spending huge amount of monies on luxuries we don't need and nothing on great commission activities. Forgive us for praying for all the personal needs and nicks and cuts and scratches we get and never praying that the gospel triumph over Islam and sin and evil.

God, forgive us. We have lost our focus. We have the form of godliness, but deny the power.

We have a facade of spirituality, but we do not have the New Testament priorities in place. I pray you'd give us wisdom, O Lord. I pray you'd give us the Holy Spirit, for without Him we cannot, that He would give us the desire, that He would give us the energy, that He would give us the wisdom, that He would give us the means to accomplish our will while we're here.

For we know we are just pilgrims. We are just passing through. This is not our home.

Use us, we pray, O Lord. Use us for your agenda, not our agenda. Empower us in the ministry of prayer and the ministry of evangelism and discipleship and protect us, protect us from the good that robs us from the best.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen. I don't know quite what kind of invitation this will be. If you don't sense there's an invitation needed, you haven't heard what I said.

It matters very little to me or to God whether you move from where you are. But I assure you it matters to God that you open yourself up to Him and let His Spirit speak to your heart and mind right now because I was not talking to your neighbor nor the young people because every one of us, every one of us are part of the mandate for prayer and intentional gospel sharing. So I pray whatever the Lord may have said to your heart and mind that as we stand together you will deal with Him.

You will deal with Him in commitment and desire for wisdom of how you, your life, your opportunities may fit in. May we stand together in His name.

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