

COMPLETE IN CHRIST

COLOSSIANS 1:21-23

# GOSPEL MOTIVES FOR GOSPEL PERSEVERANCE



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**FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH**

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# INTRODUCTION

## Problem

Do you fear giving up the Gospel because of hostile opposition to it and to believers?

We are living in times of increasing opposition to the Gospel: verbal opposition, economic opposition, workplace opposition, legal opposition, etc.

Many have given up part of the faith, especially in the area of sexual ethics. Some have given up all of the faith and abandoned the Gospel altogether. Some of them have been well known Christian leaders.

How can I expect to stand in the face of opposition, if they can't?

## Effects

This fear of giving up the Gospel has some significant effects upon us:

- **It displaces Christ**, resulting in man-centeredness. We have our eyes on people who threaten us rather than on Christ's protection of us.
- **It demoralizes**, resulting in sin. We give up doctrinal and moral beliefs resulting in immoral behavior.
- **It destabilizes**, resulting in inconsistency. We are all over the place as we respond to attacks from all directions.

## Solution?

This fear of giving up the Gospel can be removed and replaced with a confident expectation of perseverance which has some wonderful happy consequences.

# CONTEXT

## Background

The Gnostics ("Know-it-alls") had seduced some Colossians from the Gospel. They had "moved away from the hope of the Gospel" which they had heard from Paul (1:23). He therefore writes to secure the perseverance of the remaining Colossian believers, and he does so by starting with the cross of Christ. It was not only the power of God for salvation (Rom. 1:16), but the power of God for perseverance too.

## Chapter

The Apostle had just spoken about cosmic reconciliation (1:20), the universal consequences of Christ's cross.

In verse 21, the cosmic comes down to earth; the abstract becomes concrete; the impersonal becomes personal." He turns to the Colossians, and says, "And you...he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death."



**How can we persevere when we are so weak and the opposition so strong?  
Paul gives us three truths, the first of which looks to the past.**



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# 1. CHRIST HAS MADE PEACE FOR YOU (21-22)

## You were alienated from God

**(21) *And you, who once were alienated...***

Paul had just talked about the future reconciliation of the world (20), but he then reminded the Colossians that this is a great contrast to their present world and even to their past relationship to God. Instead of being reconciled, like the vast majority of the world then, they were estranged from God. But there's another side to that too, God was estranged from them.

Many feel estranged and alienated today. They have a feeling of not belonging, of being out of place, not fitting in, of being dislocated. It's a horrible feeling, and part of the reason for so much unhappiness and despair. But Paul tells us that there is a much worse alienation, an alienation that is more serious, and which is at the root of all other alienation, that is alienation from God.

We are out of step with God, we are out of place in his presence, we don't fit in, we don't belong to him. We are strangers to him and him to us. There is a mutual discomfort with one another. Peel back all the layers of an unbeliever and you will find alienation from God at the center.

## You were hostile to God

**(21) *You were...enemies in your mind by wicked works.***

**Hostile thoughts:** Whatever else characterizes people it is hostility to God in their minds. We sometimes say, "People are apathetic when it comes to God." The Bible says, "No such thing as apathy when it comes to God." If people are alienated from God, they hate him. Their thoughts, aims, and attitude are hostile towards him. Their thoughts towards him are all bad.

**Hostile works:** Different translations produce different ideas here. The NKJV and ESV basically says that hostile thoughts are expressed in hostile works. The NIV has the idea that hostile thoughts are the result of hostile works. It suggests that the reason that people think evil thoughts about God is because they want to do evil works. In other words, their sinful thoughts about God are the result of the sins they want to and do commit. Both ideas are true. Sinful acts produce sinful thoughts and vice versa. It's a vicious cycle.

The main takeaway is that alienation is not a passive state but an active and aggressive state. This is a deep, wide, and long hostility and it explains the whole of world history.

## You were reconciled by Christ

**(21) *...yet now he has reconciled in the body of his flesh through death.***

God did not leave the Colossians in their spiritual alienation and aggression. He brought them to reconciliation. Or he brought reconciliation to them. God did it. They didn't do it. They could never do it. We are active in alienation and aggression but passive in reconciliation. Christ has taken us over to God's side and God over to our side by taking away sin.

How did he do this? What did he use? He used a real physical flesh-and-blood body like our own. Evil works produced an alienated life. Christ's body produced a reconciled life. Without naming them, he's hitting the Gnostics who denied any goodness in the human body, and therefore any possibility of God taking human flesh.

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Dr. Michelle Segar's book, *No Sweat*, is subtitled, *How the Simple Science of Motivation can Bring you a Lifetime of Fitness*. In it, she critiques two common errors in exercising and dieting. The first error is that long-term goals, such as lose weight, improve health, etc., motivate us. No, she says, they can motivate us initially but they will not sustain us over the long haul. For exercise (or a diet) to be sustained, it has to have immediate reward. The only motivation that will keep us going is that we enjoy it as we do it. It nourishes us, and therefore it becomes a "want to do" rather than a "should do." She sums it up as "What sustains us, we sustain."

The Apostle Paul knew this principle before Dr Segar! Here he motivates Gospel perseverance not merely with hope of heaven, but with Gospel motives that immediately reward and sustain. He's saying, "Get daily enjoyment from what Christ has done for you to sustain your faith and keep you going." What sustains us, we sustain. I'll come back to the second error in a moment.

## APPLICATION

♥ As Mark Johnston said in his commentary on Colossians, this solves the "Something's Missing Syndrome." Believer, you don't need something more to persevere, you need more understanding of what you have in and through Christ. The more you see what Christ has done for you the more you will persevere in faith. You made war, but Christ made peace. And so he will hold you fast.

♥ Do you feel alienated? Out of place? A sense of not belonging? Does that perhaps suggest that you have a deeper problem? Maybe you are alienated from God. You are out of place and don't belong in his presence. You are at heart an enemy of God. That terrible state does not need to continue. You can find peace, belonging, and comfort in God's presence through the crucified body of Jesus Christ, dead in your place.

### He Will Hold Me Fast

Those He saves are His delight  
Christ will hold me fast  
Precious in His holy sight  
He will hold me fast  
He'll not let my soul be lost  
His promises shall last  
Bought by Him at such a cost  
He will hold me fast

For my life He bled and died  
Christ will hold me fast  
Justice has been satisfied  
He will hold me fast  
Raised with Him to endless life  
He will hold me fast  
Till our faith is turned to sight  
When he comes at last.

GOSPEL OPPOSITION TURNS OUR FOCUS TO PEOPLE,  
BUT GOSPEL PEACE TURNS OUR FOCUS TO CHRIST.



**That backward look is indeed encouraging to perseverance. But what lies ahead? Nothing less than perfection. He made peace for you to make you perfect.**



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## 2. CHRIST WILL MAKE YOU PERFECT (22)

(22) ...to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.

### Christ will present you

All that Christ did on Easter Friday was with a view to Judgment Day, the day when he will make the most incredible presentation.

I'm sure you remember the most memorable presentation in your life (e.g. a High School diploma, a degree, a long service award, or a bravery award). You looked forward to it so much. But here you are going to be what is presented and you will be presented to the world and to God.

### Christ will perfect you

What will you look like at this presentation? No guilt ("holy"). No sin ("blameless," NIV "without blemish"). No accusation (NIV "free of accusation"). Christ has begun this perfecting already, but on the last day, he will complete it (Phil. 1:6). This future is so certain we can rejoice in the present. It's like someone being bitten by a snake, but the antidote which always works has been administered and now it's just a case of waiting with confident joy.

I want to return to Dr. Segar and the second error she critiques, that is, that exercise has to be extraordinarily painful for it to work. Perhaps she's thinking of something like the *Insanity* program that leaves us writhing in agony and drowning in pools of sweat. You will not sustain this, she warns. Rather, research shows that ordinary exercise, especially incorporated into everyday life is much more sustainable (e.g. walking up stairs rather than taking the lift, parking your car further away from shops to make you walk more). All of these ordinary exercises count and we are much more likely to persevere in them.

Paul is saying something similar here. "Exercise your soul with simple Gospel truths every day. Christ will present you, Christ will perfect you. Think about these truths, incorporate them into everyday life and they will sustain you." You don't need to do extraordinary things, just believe these truths in everyday life. What sustains us, we sustain.

## APPLICATION

♥ No guilt, no sin, no accusation. All three absences will be cause for much joy in his presence. Which one of these is your favorite? At the moment for me it's no accusation. I fast forward to that moment often and listen. The silence is deafening. Then the silence becomes deafening praise. Rewind to reconciliation in your past, and fast forward to perfection in your future to keep you persevering.

♥ If you are not a believer in Christ, you will not be perfected or presented by Christ. Instead of being perfected you will be concreted in your sin. If you persevere in your sin, you will be unchangeably and immeasurably guilty, sinful, and accused. Will you not ask Christ to begin his work in you so that you can be sure he will finish it?

**PRESENT GOSPEL OPPOSITION CAN DEMORALIZE US,  
BUT FUTURE GOSPEL PERFECTION MOTIVATES US.**



**I've looked to the past and I've looked to the future. What do I do in the present?  
Hear Christ's call to persevere.**



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## 3. CHRIST CALLS YOU TO PERSEVERE (23)

*(23) ...if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

### Persevere in faith

**"If you continue in the faith."** The NKJV and ESV focus on continuing in "the faith" whereas the NIV speaks of "your faith." The former is the objective body of truth and the latter is the subjective response to the truth. Which is it? Well they are linked aren't they? We will not continue in faith (subjective) unless we continue in the faith (objective). If we move away from the objective truth we will weaken our subjective response of faith. If we lose *the* faith, we will lose *our* faith.

### Persevere in stability

**"Grounded and steadfast."** "Grounded" refers to the firmness of the foundation and "steadfast" is the firmness of the grip on the foundation. You can have a firm foundation but be wearing slippery shoes. Vice versa, you can have great grips but be standing on a shaky rock. You need both the good ground and a good grip.

### Persevere in grit

**"Not moved away from the hope of the Gospel."** We need not only good ground and good grip, but good grit. "Not moved away" refers to a determination and resolve to hold on to the hope of the Gospel, whatever the opposition. In *Grit: The Power and Passion of Perseverance*, Professor of Psychology Angela Duckworth argues that "grit may matter more than talent," and devotes one whole chapter to the importance of hope in developing grit. How much more is Gospel hope!

Amazon's Jeff Bezos left a safe, high-salary, high-status Wall Street job and risked everything to start Amazon because online bookselling was his passion. "Whatever it is that you want to do," he said to Princeton graduates, "You'll find in life that if you're not passionate about what it is you're working on, you won't be able to stick with it."

## APPLICATION

♥ Stay on good Gospel ground, get a good Gospel grip, and flex good Gospel grit. Passion for the Gospel will help you persevere in the Gospel. Use Christ's powerful call to persevere as a means of faith, stability, and hope.

♥ If you are not a believer in Christ, you are on shaky ground, with a slippy grip, and you're short of grit. Won't you see your danger and relocate to the perfectly safe ground of the Gospel? It will give you stability and security.

### He Will Hold Me Fast

"When I fear my faith will fail  
Christ will hold me fast  
When the tempter would prevail  
He will hold me fast  
I could never keep my hold  
Through life's fearful path  
For my love is often cold  
He must hold me fast

OUR FEAR OF FALLING  
DE-STABILIZES US  
BUT CHRIST'S CALL TO  
PERSEVERE SECURES US.



**This is your present duty: Hear Christ's call to persevere.**  
**Do you see how different your future can look with these three insights?**



# CONCLUSION



## FURTHER STUDY

### Online Articles

- [He Will Hold Me Fast](#) by John Piper
- [Can a Christian Lose their Salvation?](#)  
By R. C. Sproul
- [The Lord Can and Will Keep You](#) by Marshall Segal
- [Don't Quit Before the Whistle Blows](#)  
by Michael Hyatt

### Books

- [The Roots of Endurance: Invincible Perseverance in the Lives of John Newton, Charles Simeon, and William Wilberforce](#) by John Piper
- [Pilgrim's Progress in Today's English](#)  
by John Bunyan
- [Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance](#) by Angela Duckworth  
(not a Christian book, but a fascinating read)

### Discussion Questions

- What opposition or difficulties (present or possible in the future) make you afraid that you may give up the Gospel?
- How does this fear affect you?
- What do you do or where do you look to keep you persevering in faith?
- How does Christ's past atoning work and future perfecting work help you persevere?
- What do you look forward to most: No guilt, no sin, or no accusation?
- How can you strengthen your Gospel ground, grip, or grit?
- How can you use this sermon to help another believer this week?
- How can you use this sermon to intensify or deepen your daily worship?

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WHEN I FEAR MY FAITH WILL FAIL  
CHRIST WILL HOLD ME FAST  
WHEN THE TEMPTER WOULD PREVAIL  
HE WILL HOLD ME FAST  
MATT MERKER



### Fear of falling

- Displaces Christ
- De-moralizes us
- Destabilizes us

### Biblical answer?



### Christ has

### made peace for you

- You were **alienated** from God
- You were **hostile** to God
- You were **reconciled** to God

GOSPEL OPPOSITION  
TURNS OUR FOCUS TO PEOPLE,  
BUT GOSPEL PEACE  
TURNS OUR FOCUS TO CHRIST.

That's past. What's ahead?



Persevere in faith and hope because Christ has made peace for you and will make you perfect.



### Christ calls you to persevere

- Persevere in **faith**
- Persevere in **stability**
- Persevere in **grit**

OUR FEAR OF FALLING  
DE-STABILIZES US,  
BUT CHRIST'S CALL TO PERSEVERE  
SECURES US.

Action?



### Christ will make you perfect

- Christ will **present** you
- Christ will **perfect** you

PRESENT GOSPEL OPPOSITION  
CAN DEMORALIZE US,  
BUT FUTURE GOSPEL PERFECTION  
MOTIVATES US.

That's future. Now?