

FEBRUARY 2012

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TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

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of Christ rule
in your hearts.

Colossians 3:15



Colossians:
Live Worthy of the Gospel

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TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

Who's in Control?



Most scholars agree that the apostle Paul was likely imprisoned in Rome when he wrote his letter to the Colossians. Though he was constantly chained to guards,

he was allowed to receive visitors, accept gifts—and fortunately for us—send letters. He wrote this letter primarily to combat heresies regarding Christ that were affecting the struggling first-century church in Colossae.

Colossians 1:15–18 is considered to be one of the greatest christological passages in all of Scripture. Though we could spend several weeks doing an exposition on all its theological implications, I want to encourage you with an overview of three important truths that are just as relevant today as when the apostle Paul first communicated them to the church in Colossae hundreds of years ago.

First, Paul tells us that Christ is the image of God: “The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation” (v. 15). Jesus Christ has made visible to us the One who is invisible. So what is God the Father like? Christ has revealed Him to us. We can have assurance that one day when we stand in the presence of God, we will know Him intimately because He has revealed His character to us through His Son.

Second, Christ is the agent of creation. “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invis-

ible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (v. 16–17). When we look at the beauty of creation—whether the Grand Canyon or the Rocky Mountains or anything else—we see a marvelous picture of the Creator. But Christ is not just Creator, He is also Sustainer, actively involved in the everyday inner workings of the universe.

And finally, Christ is the head of the body. In verse 18, Paul explains Christ’s relationship to the church: “And he is the head of the body, the church.” As members of the body, we must be careful to follow the direction of the head: Christ Himself. Christ gives definition to God (v. 15), design to the world (v. 16–17), and direction to the church (v. 18).

Paul puts to rest the false teaching of the day by declaring Christ’s sufficiency in all things. Though we may not be facing the same heresies as the Colossian believers, these reminders of Christ’s sufficiency and authority are still relevant today.

For example, in today’s economy, many of us are asking the difficult question: “Can God continue to provide for my needs?” Scripture says that Christ is Sustainer. He can provide. And in today’s world ridden with corruption, many of us are asking, who is in control? Scripture says that Christ has all authority. He is in control.

Can Christ meet our needs? Is He in control? Absolutely, yes.

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



The Mystery of the Gospel

For most of us a mystery represents a puzzle to be solved. We read a murder mystery and look for clues to identify the killer. When we speak of mysteries in the spiritual realm, we also think of puzzles, but the unsolvable kind. Consequently, when someone asks us a difficult question about God, we are tempted to shrug our shoulders and say, "It's a mystery."

We may mean only that God operates by rules we do not understand. They make sense to Him and are consistent with His nature but are mysterious to us. Or we may speak of mystery when we see an apparent paradox in Scripture, like the seeming tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation. In most cases what we really mean when we describe something as a mystery is, "I don't know."

When Paul speaks of "mystery" in the book of Colossians, he means something very different (Col. 1:26, 27; 2:2; 4:3). He is not speaking of a puzzle to be solved or of something that is impossible for us to understand. Instead, Paul describes mystery as a truth which was previously hidden but has now been made known by God. In the book of Colossians the mystery Paul has in mind refers to the indwelling of Christ, the believer's hope of glory.

Paul outlines the broad contours of biblical mystery in Colossians 1:26 when he characterizes this doctrine as something that "has been hidden for ages" but is "now disclosed to the Lord's people." Mystery in this sense is synonymous with revelation. Christ Himself is the mystery. It is the revelation of the person and work of God's Son who is also Israel's Messiah.

This mystery also includes a revelation of the extent of Christ's work. In Ephesians 3:3-4, Paul writes of the mystery made known to him by revelation, which he also refers to as "the mystery of Christ." This mystery was not made known to previous generations but was revealed by the Holy Spirit to those who first preached the gospel. It was the good news that the Gentiles could be heirs together with Israel and members of the church, which is Christ's body. The news that Gentiles could share in the promises in Christ, along with those Jews who embraced the gospel, energized the outreach of the early church and propelled the gospel to the ends of the earth. It is this same promise that empowers the church's evangelism today.

For Further Reading

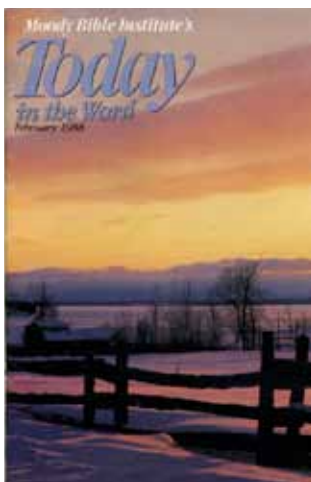
To learn more about the mystery of Christ, read *Love So Amazing: Exposition of Colossians* by D. Martyn Lloyd Jones (Baker).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Elena Mafter

A Commitment to the Word in a Changing World

As I write this column for our February 2012 *Today in the Word*, I have before me another February issue—the very first *Today in the Word* that went to print 25 years ago in 1988. It seems almost like a museum piece when I think that it appeared in a world without the blogosphere, Twitterverse, or e-publishing. In the past 25 years, *Today in the Word* has changed with the changing times: more than 200,000 people, including citizens of 68 countries, now read the print version of our devotional, and thousands receive it daily via e-mail or visit our Web site. The layout looks different, and we even have a podcast!



Then I start to read the “old” *Today in the Word*. First, I notice that 1988 was a leap year as well, so the first *Today in the Word* in February had 29 devotions, like the one you are reading now. Second, I realize that its topic, “Learning from Bible Characters,” is similar to today’s issue: an instruction to God’s people on how to live a Christian life. The design from 25 years ago might be out of date today, but the eternal God speaks to me from the beautiful Scripture verses, through the years, like He did to those first readers of our devotional.

What an honor it is for all of us at *Today in the Word* to continue this legacy! What

a privilege, in this changing world, to bring the unchanging, eternal Word to His people. In the introductory article to that inaugural issue, the (now unknown) editor wrote: “Turn the page, and welcome a new friend from Moody Bible Institute—*Today in the Word!*” We can now say that the friendship lasted for a quarter of a century, and this devotional and its readers have become old friends. We want

to thank all our friends for your commitment to *Today in the Word*, for your prayers, and financial support.

We are especially thankful for your letters, both the ones where you praise the work of God through this publication, as well as the ones where our sharp-eyed readers caught our *faux pas*. As it should be among friends! This month, we’d like to feature some of your letters we’ve received lately.

I’ve been receiving Today in the Word for well over 10 years. I could not go one day without it. It has taken me through many trials and new beginnings. I could not have done it without knowing how precious I am to my Lord and Savior, Jesus. Today in the Word has opened my eyes.

— Barb (via e-mail)

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EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Paul Currie

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Heather Moffitt

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
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CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Adam Kellogg
John Koessler
Kim Pickett

WRITER
Brad Baurain

DESIGN/LAYOUT
Larry Bohlin
Rachel Hutcheson
Nancy Rudd

1-800-DL MOODY
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Colossians: Live Worthy of the Gospel

Treat each other the way you'd like to be treated. Love others. Don't focus on physical things, but dwell instead on the spiritual. Those are decidedly Christian themes, aren't they? Not so fast. These are principles many religions share, and in today's culture, they often mask the most important claim of Christianity: the centrality and supremacy of Jesus Christ.

From his imprisonment in Rome, Paul spoke out against an alarming trend in the early church. They were unclear about the distinction between cultural values, heresies, and the truth of what they had been taught about the gospel. Paul needed to clarify the truth about Christ, himself, and the church.

We could use that same clarification, and we'll study Paul's discerning word for us in Scripture. We'll see that Paul indeed has the authority to separate false doctrine from the truth of Christ. We'll learn that Christ isn't one of many good teachers but the reigning ruler of our universe and the only One deserving of our worship and praise. And we'll see what difference that should make in how we live.

We shouldn't just blend in with the world. We should stand out as peculiar for Christ, even as the world recognizes with appreciation our love and good deeds. Thank you for studying with us this month in *Today in the Word*. May the fruit it brings in our lives mark us as different in a world that is pressuring us to conformity.

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“Jesus, name above all names / Beautiful Savior, glorious Lord / Emmanuel, God is with us / Blessed Redeemer, Living Word.” The words of this classic chorus by Naida Hearn are simply a list of names for Jesus. Simple, yet profound. Simple, yet powerful. Simple, yet it will take eternity for us to worship Christ. This month we’ll study the book of Colossians and see some of the simple, profound, and powerful truths about Jesus. We’ll examine the evidence for His sovereignty, superiority, and glory, as well as His redemption proclaimed in the gospel and through our life in Him.

To God’s
holy people
in Colossae.

Colossians 1:2

Colossae was a city located in the Lycus River Valley in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), about 100 miles east of Ephesus. Its location has been identified, but it has never been excavated. Focusing on the centrality of Christ, the epistle appears to have been written to combat a heresy. We don’t know exactly what heresy, but it seems to have been a syncretistic blend of Judaism, mysticism, legalism, and paganism. Epaphras, very likely the

planter and pastor of the Colossian church (1:7), knew the heresy threatened the purity of the gospel and the spiritual lives of believers in his congregation, probably a mix of Jews and Gentiles. He was worried enough to go on a trip to Rome to ask Paul’s advice (4:12).

In response, Paul, with Timothy’s assistance, wrote this epistle and sent it to Colossae (vv. 1–2). Since it was written during one of his imprisonments (4:3, 18), it is often grouped with other “prison epistles” such as Philemon. Scholars are not sure exactly

which imprisonment, but scholar Douglas Moo identifies Rome as the most likely location, meaning that the book was probably written around A.D. 60 (see Acts 28). Commentator N. T. Wright summarized the book’s overall purpose: “Writing to a young church discovering what it was like to believe in Jesus Christ and to follow him, Paul shares their sense of wonder as he encourages them to explore the treasures of the gospel and to order their lives accordingly.”

Apply the Word

For many in our culture today—as in the culture of the Colossians—truth is considered relative: you have your truth, and I have mine. As we study the letter to the Colossians this month, pray that the Spirit will renew your commitment to the truth of the gospel and the truth of who Jesus is. Pray that this truth will make a difference in how you live as a committed follower of Christ.

Pray with Us

Employees serving in the Customer Service Center answer phone calls made to Moody’s ministries. Will you pray that God will use Annie Quick, Jens Douglas, Janet Giesler, and Bethany Grubb to spiritually encourage the individuals with whom they speak today?

In “A Call for Christian Risk,” pastor and theologian John Piper discussed the life of faith as a call to courage: “When the threat of death becomes a door to paradise the final barrier to temporal risk is broken. When a Christian says from the heart, ‘To live is Christ and to die is gain,’ he is free to love no matter what. Some forms of radical Islam may entice martyr-murderers with similar dreams, but Christian hope is the power to love, not kill. Christian hope produces life-givers, not life-takers. The crucified Christ calls his people to live and die for their enemies, as he did . . . Jesus unleashed a movement of radical, loving, risk-takers.”

We have heard of
your faith in Christ
Jesus and of the
love you have for
all God’s people.

Colossians 1:4

This is the Christ-centered faith Paul lived out and wrote about. He had already identified himself as an “apostle of Christ” (v. 1) writing to “faithful brothers and sisters in Christ” (v. 2). In today’s verses, he went on to recognize the Colossians’ faith in Christ as a key reason to thank God for them (vv. 3–4), and to remind them that their faith and love were rooted

in the gospel of Christ (v. 5). Faith and love “spring from” or are the active result of the hope of the gospel. Here, “love” is not an emotion, but rather the virtue of acting for others’ good. Paul elsewhere referred to faith and love as part of the armor of God that should be worn by Christians (1 Thess. 5:8).

Paul had never actually been to Colossae (2:1). Yet he kept them in his prayers and was aware of the church’s reputation. He wanted the believers there to continue growing in Christ, that is, to be “radical, loving, risk-takers” for the sake of the gospel. This was the “word of truth” they had originally heard

and believed and which was eternally guaranteed or “stored up” for them by God (v. 5).

Since these things are true for all believers, this epistle is written for us as well! We, too, have heard and believed, want to keep growing in Christ, and trust in God to guard our salvation.

Apply the Word

Paul wrote of thanking God in prayer for the Colossians (v. 3). Praying for specific individuals and groups is a good habit. For example, instead of just praying for the “unsaved,” we might name a specific friend or neighbor. If you are reading a news article about persecuted Christians in China, Egypt, or elsewhere, that would be a great time to pray for the people in the article. Another idea is to pray for a specific Facebook friend every time you use that social media website.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for the Customer Service Center, please remember Sarah Woods, Adam Reece, and Linnea Wheeler. Ask the Lord to fill them with His peace and joy as they assist friends of Moody’s ministries today.

Last year was the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. Believers and unbelievers alike acknowledge the powerful influence of the KJV throughout Western culture and history. One writer pointed out: “It’s the Bible of the speeches of Lincoln. It’s the Bible of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*. It’s the Bible of the speeches of Martin Luther King.” More than 350 idiomatic expressions used in daily life come from the KJV. Many readers find that the archaic language still conveys a sense of the beauty and majesty of Scripture. In fact, the KJV is the best-selling Bible translation of all time!

The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world.

Colossians 1:6

The story of the King James Version is just part of the ongoing story of the worldwide spread of the gospel. As Paul wrote, “The gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world” (v. 6). This was something the Colossians themselves had been experiencing from the first day they heard, understood, and accepted the message of God’s grace in all its truth. The idea of “bearing fruit and growing”

is geographical, as when the unreached hear the gospel and new churches are planted, as well as personal, meaning that the Holy Spirit is at work in the lives of believers to make us more like Christ.

The church at Colossae was apparently planted by Epaphras (vv. 7–8). Many scholars believe that Epaphras first trusted Christ during Paul’s ministry in Ephesus (see Acts 19), then went from there to preach the gospel in Colossae, and possibly Laodicea and Hierapolis as well (4:13). By mentioning the church’s pastor, Paul made a personal connection with a congregation

he hadn’t met and honored one of his co-workers in Christ. This connection also alerted the Colossians, in an apostolically authoritative manner, that they needed to heed Epaphras and reject false teachers. The heresy wouldn’t be addressed until chapter two, but Paul was already laying the groundwork. From his perspective, the gospel is a powerful reality that is past (received), present (“bearing fruit and growing”), and future (promised).

Apply the Word

One excellent book about the 400th anniversary of the KJV is *The Legacy of the King James Bible* by Leland Ryken (Crossway, 2011). He recounts the historical story of the KJV, including the translation itself and also its influence in education, government, religion, and art. As a scholar of literature from that historical period and of Bible translations in general, Ryken focuses especially on the KJV’s literary qualities and its status as an enduring literary masterpiece.

Pray with Us

Christine Gorz, Vice President of Corporate Communications, oversees several departments, including Customer Service Center, Marketing and Communications, and Web Communications. Please ask the Father to empower, guide, and refresh Christine in her service at Moody.

Images of roads and journeys and the theme of pilgrimage are central motifs in the Christian life. The idea is that we, like the Israelites in the Exodus, are on our way to somewhere better. While on our way, we have choices to make, lessons to learn, people to serve, commands to obey, injustices to suffer or make right, and praises to sing. Through it all, God is glorified—that's the meaning of the journey. No wonder we call this our "walk" with the Lord!

Paul had this theme in mind when he wrote to the Colossians about living "a life worthy of the Lord" (v. 10). Such a life was at the center of his prayers for them. "For this reason" meant that he prayed on the basis of their history with the gospel and the gospel's truth and power in their lives and throughout the world (v. 9).

His main prayer request was for "God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives." That is, now that they had received the gospel and were growing in faith and love, Paul's

ambition was for them to grow also in obedience and wisdom. To be filled with the knowledge of God is to be controlled by it. To know God's will is to follow it. Therefore, the outcome of this prayer would be a God-pleasing life—a high calling indeed!

Live a life worthy
of the Lord and
please him in
every way.

Colossians 1:10

What does a God-pleasing life look like? In verses 10 through 12, Paul lists four characteristics. First, "bearing fruit in every good work." That fits with his earlier mention of Christian love, or acting for others' good. Second, "growing in the knowledge of God." This means "learning" in the sense of both information and action. If theology is a relationship with God, then the "knowledge of God" must involve both knowing and doing. Third, "being strengthened with all power." The source of strength is divine, and the outcome of a strengthened faith is endurance and patience. Finally, "giving joyful thanks to the Father." The One for whom we are to "live worthy" is the One who empowers us to do so!

Apply the Word

One is struck in today's reading by the holistic nature of pleasing God and living lives worthy of the gospel of Christ. We can't just learn about God abstractly—learning and doing go hand-in-hand. We can't just emphasize attitude—gratitude must include action, not just feelings.. This is not something we can do on our own. We must rely on the Holy Spirit. To walk God's way requires His truth, power, and grace!

Pray with Us

Elizabeth Brown, Vice President and General Counsel, offers valuable legal expertise to Moody's ministries. Let's express appreciation in prayer for Elizabeth, as well as her team in the Legal department: Cassandra Blakely, Natalie Harper, and Hannah Roos.

The famous scientist Isaac Newton graduated from Cambridge University in 1665. At that time, people believed that white light was the purest form of light, and thus that colored light was somehow impure. To test this belief, Newton shone a beam of sunlight through a glass prism. The prism separated the light into a spectrum of colors, showing that white light is actually composed of many different colors. Newton concluded that these colors, also seen in rainbows, are the fundamental colors seen by the human eye. His test changed our view of light and color and is one of the best-known experiments in the history of science.

He has rescued us
from the dominion
of darkness and
brought us into
the kingdom of the
Son he loves.

Colossians 1:13

Today's reading focuses on a spiritual movement from darkness to light. The final item on yesterday's list of characteristics of a God-pleasing life was thankfulness. And the primary reason we have to give thanks to God is for His plan of redemption—how He saved us from death by sending His Son to die in our stead (vv. 12–13). As a result, we who were enslaved in the “dominion of darkness” are now “qualified” to be

citizens in His “kingdom of light.” This is pictured as an “inheritance,” that is, as a gift, something earned not on our own merit but by virtue of being a member of God's family.

The light-versus-dark imagery captures the complete contrast between two realities. The “dominion of darkness” is about sin and death, while the “kingdom of light” is about holiness and life. These two realities have opposite power structures, opposite beliefs to live by, and opposite outcomes. We were spiritually dead and headed for damnation—there was absolutely nothing we

could do to move ourselves from one domain to the other. Only God could rescue us, which He graciously did even though it meant the sacrifice of His beloved Son.

Christ died and rose again, winning the victory over death and making possible forgiveness of sin (v. 14). The “kingdom of light” is rightfully His kingdom, and the gospel received by the Colossians and still spreading all over the world proclaims the loving power of His kingship.

Apply the Word

The word “qualified” in verse 12 shows us clearly that our redemption is a gift from God. The term means “made sufficient” or “made fit.” The idea is that something lacking is provided, or that someone who needed something is equipped with it by someone else. Spend time today thanking God that His Son made your redemption possible, and that His Spirit lives in you. This is the greatest gift; let us live out our gratitude to the Giver!

Pray with Us

Lloyd Dodson, Vice President of Corporate Projects and Human Resources, guides Moody's efforts in the recruitment and development of faculty and staff. Will you join Lloyd in asking the Lord to bring the right people to Moody to help fulfill our mission?

Keith Getty and Stuart Townsend penned the popular modern hymn, “In Christ Alone.” In its second verse, this hymn reflects on the wonder of the Incarnation: “In Christ alone / Who took on flesh / Fullness of God in helpless babe! / This gift of love and righteousness / Scorned by the ones He came to save. / Till on that cross as Jesus died / The wrath of God was satisfied / For ev’ry sin on Him was laid / Here in the death of Christ I live.”

Paul, too, exalted the full deity and humanity of Christ. Colossians 1:15–20 is often considered the climax of this epistle because of its doctrinal and poetic qualities. Paul might be quoting an existing hymn, but it’s also possible he composed the hymn or poem himself. In any case, he asserted that Christ “is the image of the invisible God” (v. 15). This means that although God is a spirit and cannot be seen, Christ became human and made it literally possible to see God. This is also a way of saying that Christ is fully God. Hebrews 1:3 similarly affirms, “The Son

is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”

Christ is also “the firstborn over all creation.” “Firstborn” is a positional metaphor—that is, it doesn’t mean the Son of God began His life at a certain point in time (He’s eternal!), but rather indicates

His position as ruler over the created world. This interpretation is confirmed and expanded in the next verse, where we learn that “in him all things were created” (v. 16). Christ’s relation to creation is not only one of authority, but also one of authorship. He spoke it into being and continually sustains

it (cf. John 1:14). His preeminence covers the entire created realm, including supernatural beings, a truth that will be applied specifically in chapter two against the false teachings spread in Colossae (2:18–19). In summary, Paul wrote: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (v. 17). Or as one commentator put it, “Things make sense only when Christ is kept at the center.”

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Colossians 1:15

Apply the Word

Today’s passage takes us back to Genesis 1 with fresh eyes. Since Christ is the creator and ruler over all creation, then He is the One to whom we as stewards of creation must give account (Gen. 1:28–30). He made it all, and He will make it all new (Rev. 21:5). It can be invigorating and convicting to realize that He is the One holding everything together, that He stands at the beginning and end of history as its Alpha and Omega, and that in Him we actually see God.

Pray with Us

Moody’s annual Founder’s Week conference begins tonight in downtown Chicago. As Dr. Paul Nyquist, Moody’s President, gives a message from God’s Word, ask the Lord to minister to those in attendance, as well as to those listening around the world on Moody Radio and online.

Paul pictured the church as one body that consists of many parts (see 1 Corinthians 12). A body made entirely of ears wouldn't be able to walk. A body made entirely of legs wouldn't be able to eat. A body made entirely of hands wouldn't be able to see. In the same way, a diversity of people and spiritual gifts is exactly what the church needs to thrive. The key, of course, is a head. Without a head to run the show, a body is just a corpse. In the case of the church, the Head is Christ. He's the One in charge!

He is the head
of the body,
the church.

Colossians 1:18

Christ's headship over the church is yet another facet of His greatness and glory (v. 18). He is also "the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead." Just as He rose from the dead with a glorified body, so also will we (see 1 Corinthians 15). Because of Him, death has lost its sting and the gift of eternal life is ours. This has been God's plan all along: "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be

the firstborn among many brothers and sisters" (Rom. 8:29). In everything Christ has the supremacy.

Christ's identity and mission are closely intertwined. His identity is fully God, that is, "God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him" (v. 19). In His humanity, Christ's mission on earth was redemption and reconciliation. Why reconciliation? Because of sin, we were God's enemies. We were in a state of war with the Almighty, and peace needed to be made. But we were enslaved in the "dominion of darkness"

and incapable of rescuing ourselves. So God reached out to us and made "peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (v. 20). The state of war ended, thanks to the sacrifice of the Victor Himself.

Paul celebrated the identity and mission of Christ in order to remind the Colossians of the Person and truth who had transformed their lives, and to call them (and us) to worship and live worthy of Him.

Apply the Word

Every believer has one or more spiritual gifts that are to be used in service to the body of Christ, the church. These gifts are given and cultivated by the Holy Spirit. A variety of gifts is necessary for the health of the church (see 1 Cor. 12:6–7). Are we using our gifts to participate in the life of the church? Just as our gift of salvation should prompt us to live in gratitude, so also our spiritual gifts should encourage us to live in service to God and others.

Pray with Us

Will you join us in praying for our undergraduate and seminary students today? Let's request that God give these men and women soft hearts as they worship the Lord and study His Word at Moody's Founder's Week conference this week.

The Ardabil Carpet is regarded by experts as “one of the two greatest Persian rugs ever woven.” Dating from the sixteenth century, it was originally made for a religious shrine in the city of Ardabil (modern Iran) and is now housed in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. It was created by “Maqsud of Kashan”—probably a court official supervising a team of weavers—and consists of 35 million knots, or an amazing 800 knots per square inch. It measures 23 feet long by 13 feet wide, and pictures a garden of paradise through intricate floral patterns and geometric shapes.

He has reconciled
you by Christ’s
physical body
through death to
present you holy
in his sight.

Colossians 1:22

Just as the Ardabil Carpet is an artistic masterpiece, so also is Christ’s work of redemption a spiritual masterpiece. Today’s verses are a classic “once you . . . but now” before-and-after picture that Paul loves to use. “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior” (v. 21). While the preceding verses position Christ with reference to people, these verses position people with reference to God. Due to sin, we were

disconnected from our Creator and in a state of rebellion against Him. Paul located this rebellion in our minds, because in this epistle his emphasis is on knowledge and truth and their consequences.

But then . . . the alienation turned to friendship and the rebelliousness to obedience (v. 22). The relationship was transformed. How did this miracle occur? “By Christ’s physical body through death” (cf. 2:15). And the fact is that this miracle is still occurring. We’re being purified and made holy through God’s ongoing work of sanctification in our lives. Salvation is

a one-time event that changes our life forever; it’s a process or pilgrimage that continues until we reach our destination. That’s what Paul meant when he said, “if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel” (v. 23). Letting God do His work in us is what faith is all about. If the Colossians and Paul have learned anything from their experience with the gospel, this is it!

Apply the Word

For those of us who live on the “but now” side of redemption, the issue is whether we are living as if Christ really does have the supremacy in everything (v. 18). Does He hold first place in our thoughts and feelings? Is He preeminent in our marriage, family, work, and play? Is He glorified above all else in our words and actions, including in our leisure, media, and music choices? Is He honored and worshiped as Head of the church and of every dimension of our lives?

Pray with Us

We have the privilege of praying for Greg Thornton, Senior Vice President of Media. Please ask the Lord to equip Greg as he leads Moody Radio and Moody Publishers in their efforts to share the gospel in creative and powerful ways using innovative technology.

From a big picture perspective, the Bible is a single book, with God as the Author and the main story as His plan of salvation. The plot unfolds something like a mystery. The original crime took place in the Garden of Eden, with Adam and Eve as the guilty perpetrators. God promised right then and there that one of their descendants would crush Satan's head (Gen. 3:15). But when and how would this promise be fulfilled? As history unfolds in the Old Testament, characters are introduced, prophecies made, and more clues given. Finally, the mystery is revealed: God's redemption came in person! His Son Jesus became a man, died for sin, and rose again so that we could be saved from the penalty of death.

Paul's life-purpose was to serve this mystery that is no longer mysterious (v. 25–26). What did it mean for him to be a servant of the church and of the gospel? Part of what it meant was that he had counted the cost. Paul suffered for

the sake of the church (v. 24). He didn't respond with complaining or even stoicism, but with rejoicing, following the example of Christ (Heb. 12:2). It's not even as though the suffering was in the past, since he was imprisoned at the time he wrote this epistle.

I have become
its servant by the
commission God
gave me to present
to you the word of
God in its fullness.

Colossians 1:25

Paul's second point was that he had been commissioned by God to preach the gospel (v. 25). This was a serious responsibility, for the gospel was the revelation of a wonderful mystery (v. 26): God's plan to send His Son, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (v. 27). Another part of this mystery was the inclu-

sion of both Jews and Gentiles in God's plan. Since the Colossian congregation likely included both, the believers there understood the racial and cultural dimensions of the gospel-empowered reconciliation found in Christ. As Paul wrote elsewhere: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Apply the Word

In verse 24, the word "lacking" doesn't mean Christ's redemptive sacrifice was lacking in any way. He did it all—we can add nothing. Yet at the same time, we've been given the mysterious privilege of sharing or participating in His sufferings. If you need encouragement through a period of suffering, write Philippians 3:10–11 on a card to review throughout the day. Our participation in suffering also assures us that we will share in the power of His resurrection!

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Moody's media ministries, will you remember Moody Publishers' Marketing team: Janis Backing, Rhonda Elfstrand, John Hinkley, Roslyn Jordan, and Adam Kellogg? May God help them to know, love, and serve their audiences more and more each day.

Information technology is at the core of contemporary society. That's one reason why Charles Kao, Willard Boyle, and George Smith recently shared the Nobel Prize in physics. Kao proved that information can be efficiently carried by light through glass fibers. Today, more than 600 million miles of fiber-optic networks circle the globe and transmit most of the world's television, telephone, and computer communications. Boyle and Smith developed an electronic eye device that is now used in most digital cameras. If your cell phone can take pictures and send them to your computer, these three men are the ones to thank!

To this end I
strenuously
contend with all
the energy Christ
so powerfully
works in me.

Colossians 1:29

in order to grow in Him. The ultimate goal was to "present you holy in his sight" (cf. 1:22).

In verse 28, Paul used "we" to include his entire ministry team, but in verse 29 he inserted a more personal statement of purpose and passion. The words "strenuously contend" indicate the kind of intensity an athlete feels in competition. Yet Paul wasn't taking credit, for he said clearly that his labors were done with Christ's energy. There is a beautiful balance here between faith that rests in God's sovereignty and faith that runs all out so as to win the prize

(Phil. 3:13–14).

Communication was also a passion of the apostle Paul. His desire was to preach the gospel of Christ with every ounce of energy he could muster and God would give him. This work of preaching didn't consist only of evangelism but extended to discipleship (1:28). Christ was proclaimed; then those who believed would need further admonishing and teaching

Like a hummingbird to a flower, Paul's every phrase in this epistle circles back to Christ and hovers there. He wanted to make sure the Colossians understood both how energetically he labored on their behalf and how none of the credit and glory should go to him, but rather to his Lord (2:1). Christ has done all the work and should receive all the glory!

Apply the Word

There's great freedom in knowing that our efforts to live for Christ are sustained by the Spirit's power. While we have the responsibility to pursue holiness to live worthy of the gospel, we are also given God's strength in this endeavor. If God has called you to take action for Him, He will also provide the endurance for you to obey. If you need to take a step of faith today, thank the Lord for His sustaining grace that makes your obedience possible.

Pray with Us

Concluding our prayers for Moody Publishers' Marketing team, please pray that Holly Kisly, John Matsuoka, Duane Sherman, Keith Wiederwax, and Zack Williamson will be able to clearly and effectively communicate Moody Publishers' current products to the marketplace.

“Fossick” is a fun English word. It’s a verb that suggests treasure hunting, but in an unsystematic or random manner. One dictionary defines it: “To search for gold or gemstones, typically by picking over abandoned workings.” The word is also used more generally to mean looking for something in a disorganized way. For example, one might “fossick about” in a drawer, searching for a missing sock. Another dictionary says it means “to rummage or search in a slightly aimless manner for an item of interest or value.”

The treasure of the gospel is worth a real treasure hunt! Paul had spent his life in pursuit of this treasure, in possessing it, and in giving it away—all at the same time! In today’s passage, he continued to explain the purpose of his ministry to the Colossians, so that they would better understand this apostle they had never met. Paul wanted the believers to be “encouraged in heart and united in love,” not divided by arguments and false teachings. Only in the unity of the Spirit would they enjoy the “full riches of complete understanding” of God’s plan (v. 2).

The mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

Colossians 2:2–3

And only then would they truly grasp the mystery of the gospel.

The mystery is Christ Himself (v. 3). Christ has always been the bottom line. “All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Him and nowhere else. Anyone who says otherwise is a false teacher offering a false hope (v. 4). They may claim to have solved the mystery, but they’re still in the dark! Though he was playing with the metaphors of mystery and hidden treasure, Paul didn’t mean the truth was still hidden. As he said, the mystery of God’s plan now stands revealed.

But the complete meaning of our relationship with Christ and what it means to live out the gospel still need to be fully explored by us.

Even though Paul wasn’t physically present in Colossae, his apostolic care and authority were engaged in their spiritual growth (v. 5). He delighted in what he heard from Epaphras, but he was concerned that their commitment to the truth and person of Christ was being corrupted.

Apply the Word

When you tell children Christmas is coming, their eyes light up in anticipation of gifts, decorations, and special foods. In the same way, “it’s time for church” or “it’s time for devotions” should cause us to anticipate discovering more “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” in Christ. As you look forward to worshiping the Lord with other believers tomorrow, remember that these treasures have incomparable value and are worth everything we have to give and more (Matt. 13:44–46).

Pray with Us

Dr. Larry Davidhizar, Vice President and Dean of the Undergraduate School, manages a team of faculty that serves over 1,600 students. Ask the Father to give them unity in the Spirit as they work together to help train students to share God’s Word with the world.

Evangelist Billy Graham had this to say about the Lordship of Christ: “No man can be said to be truly converted to Christ who has not bent his will to Christ. He may give intellectual assent to the claims of Christ and may have had emotional religious experiences; however, he is not truly converted until he has surrendered his will to Christ as Lord, Savior and Master.”

For Paul, conversion was only the beginning of a Christ-centered, Christ-fueled transformation. He desired to proclaim the gospel, so that his hearers would understand and receive it, so that their understanding and faith would grow, so that their righteousness would increase, so that the truth would continue to spread and bear fruit all over the world, so that one day the entire body of Christ would be presented holy and blameless before our Lord.

“So then,” Paul wrote, or in other words, “given all this,” keep growing (v. 6)! The Colossians had received Jesus as Savior, and their rescue into the kingdom of light was indeed a marvelous miracle. Since

they had also received Him as Lord, they needed to “continue to live [their] lives in him” on a daily basis. The title “Lord” means that Christ has all authority and we owe Him our obedience. He has all authority because He’s fully God and fully man, the Creator and sustainer of all things, the Head of the church, the One who rescued us and reconciled us to God and to one another, and the central mystery and treasure in God’s epic plan of redemption.

Paul used three phrases to describe following Christ in this way. The first was an agricultural picture, “rooted and built up in him” (v. 7). Plants without roots wither and die. In the same way, Christ must be our source of life. The second was being “strengthened in the faith” and avoiding “hollow and deceptive philosophy” by means of sound teaching (v. 8). False teaching is human-centered rather than Christ-centered, and results in captivity rather than freedom. The final phrase was “overflowing with thankfulness,” a mirror of Paul’s opening prayer (1:11–12).

Just as you
received Christ
Jesus as Lord,
continue to live
your lives in him.

Colossians 2:6

Apply the Word

Scripture uses tree and plant imagery to describe us as followers and worshipers of God. The righteous are “like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither” (Ps. 1:3). Or they are branches, abiding in the vine, Jesus Christ: “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit” (John 15:5). When we are rooted in Christ, we will see His fruit in our lives as a testimony to His sustaining work to transform us to be more like Him.

Pray with Us

It is our privilege to remember faculty serving in the Bible Department at Moody’s undergraduate school in Chicago. Pray that God will use the expertise of Trevor Burke, John Goodrich, Ernest Gray, and John Hart to prepare students to serve Christ’s Church.

In the mid-1520s, Martin Luther preached on Christ's death and resurrection: "[W]hen I come to understand the fact that all the works God does in Christ are done for me, nay, they are bestowed upon and given to me, the effect of his resurrection being that I also will arise and live with him; that will cause me to rejoice. . . .

[I]t has been done easily, namely, by Christ, who has crushed the serpent once, who alone is given as a blessing and benediction, and who has caused this Gospel to be published throughout the world, so that he who believes, accepts it and clings to it, is also in possession of it, and is assured that it is

as he believes. For in the heart of such a man the Word becomes so powerful that he will conquer death, the devil, sin and all adversity, like Christ himself did."

Baptism is a public confession of and identification with the death and resurrection of Christ. In today's verses, Paul again affirmed both the divinity and the humanity of Christ, in whom "all the

fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (v. 9). He also affirmed the supremacy of Christ, as He "is the head over every power and authority" (v. 10). The contrast here between Christ's gospel and the "hollow and deceptive philosophy" (v. 8) tempting the Colossians couldn't be stronger!

You were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God.

Colossians 2:12

Because of who Christ is and what He did, we ourselves have been given His fullness (v. 10). What does this mean? Paul explained it using two of the most powerful symbols in Scripture. The first was circumcision (v. 11). Physical circumcision had for the Jews been a sign of

being set apart as God's chosen people (cf. Deut. 30:6). Now that Christ has come, spiritual circumcision, that is, the "your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off," is available to all who believe in Him. The second symbol was baptism (v. 12). Previously a sign of repentance or dedication, it has now also become a public testimony to one's faith in the death and resurrection of the Son of God.

Apply the Word

Christ made baptism part of the Great Commission: "Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). In Romans, Paul again connected baptism with Christ's death and resurrection: "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (6:4).

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Bible Department faculty—William Marty, Gerald Peterman, Ronald Sauer, and Andrew Schmutzer—will you ask the Lord to give these men perseverance and steadfastness as they pour into the next generation of pastors, youth leaders, and missionaries?

Meditating on the Cross and the atonement of Christ during a recent Easter week, writer Philip Yancey shared several insights. First, “The Cross made possible a new intimacy with God.” We can now “approach the throne of grace with confidence” and find “mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb. 4:16). Second, “The Cross reveals the limits of human achievement.” Though some look to politics or science to solve humanity’s problems, Christ exposed these as false hopes at the Cross. Third and finally, “The Cross brings to light an unexpected quality of the Godhead: humility.” The Son of God “made himself nothing . . . he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:7–8).

Having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

Colossians 2:15

12) to applying Christ’s gospel to Christ’s people (2:13–15). He was laying the groundwork for a definitive refutation of the false teaching tempting the Colossians (see tomorrow’s devotion).

We also see here Paul’s preferred before-and-after approach to describing saving faith (v. 13). “Before” we were sinful, spiritually dead and uncircumcised; “after” we have been forgiven and made righteous, spiritually alive and circumcised. All the credit for this goes to God. He is the one who gave us life and forgave us. He is the one who “canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness,” and nailed it to the Cross (v. 14). He is the one who conquered all at the very moment it appeared all was lost (v. 15).

This is the triumph of the Cross trumpeted by Paul in today’s reading! In a sense, the flow of the book repeats itself here. Paul had moved from describing Christ (1:15–20) to applying Christ’s gospel to Christ’s people (1:21–23). Now again, Paul went from describing Christ (2:9–

God could do all this because of the Cross. Jesus’ death paid the debt for sin. It was the final, once-for-all sacrifice. A cross was an instrument for criminal execution, but this Cross became an ironic, decisive symbol of God’s victory over the forces of evil.

Apply the Word

In light of our devotion, perhaps Valentine’s Day needs to be observed differently today. The greatest act of love in human history is beyond the romance of chocolates and candlelight. The Cross represents “how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ.” His ultimate love “surpasses knowledge” (Eph. 3:18–19). What can we do today that would honor Valentine’s Day in a way that spotlights and glorifies the greatest Love of all?

Pray with Us

Concluding our prayers for faculty in the Bible Department, please lift up Timothy Sigler, Michael Vanlaningham, and Michael Wechsler. Praise the Lord for their commitment to teaching tomorrow’s Christian leaders how to correctly handle the Word of truth.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Michael Kellogg, Moody Radio Host



One of our college students just came back for a break and said that one of his Bible professors taught that the disciples of Jesus were probably teenagers. I never heard that before. Could that be accurate?



The Bible isn't clear on the exact age of those Jesus chose as His disciples, but this professor is engaging with speculation rather than fact. I believe Jesus chose His disciples regardless of their age. Rabbis generally established schools to which students could come and learn from a chosen teacher. Jesus, however, selected His disciples personally.

Some have suggested that Peter was older, because when Jesus was criticized for not paying the temple tax in Matthew 17, he told Peter to go fishing and then take the coin found in the fish to pay the tax for both Jesus and himself. These people infer that Peter and Jesus were the only ones in the group over the age of twenty and therefore the only ones required to pay taxes according to the Roman law. Others infer the disciples were younger because Jesus called them little children in John 13:33. If they were adults, that term would have been insulting to them. It seems more consistent with Scripture to say that He called them children because they had so much to learn. And the truth is we all have a lot to learn, no matter how old we are.



Why is there such an emphasis in the Scripture for making a joyful noise unto the Lord?



I had a pastor who recognized his deficiency in musical talent and yet never tired of "singing with great gusto"—which some would call "great noise." I loved his enthusiasm. In his monotone voice he triumphantly made his way through many a great hymn and praise song. I believe God was greatly honored by his singing.

I think so much of Christianity is about our hearts and our emotions, not just what we know in our head. Music has a way of connecting truth with the deepest places in our hearts. It's one of the reasons D. L. Moody believed that music should be part of his evangelistic campaigns, and he employed Ira Sankey as his esteemed song leader and choir director. Psalm 33:3 cheers us on to sing new songs to God and shout for joy. The natural response of a sensitive heart is praise.



When I read about Jacob in the Old Testament, I feel that there is very little in his character that I find admirable.

I think we forget that the Bible is a written record and tells both the good and the bad in its historical narrative. When a biblical character does something devious, deceptive, or

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

downright dishonest, God is not putting His affirmation on it. He's simply recording it for us.

The way Jacob treated Esau was wrong. Some of David's choices were not exemplary either. There were consequences for their actions, although they weren't always immediate. Jacob the trickster received a major trick from his manipulative father-in-law Laban. Later, Jacob's sons tricked him into believing Joseph, whom they hated, was dead. Ultimately, all these lessons molded Jacob into the man God designed him to be, but the process, I'm sure, was painful, as it is for all of us who fail to obey God.

Q **Countless missionaries and their ministries report incidences of very godly people and their children who go to bed at night hungry. David said, "I was young and now am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (Ps. 37:25). How does this fit with the reality that some born-again people are hungry today?**

A As a young Christian, I found this a hard reality to deal with as well. David's words seem to indicate that people who love God are protected from hunger. But David is simply telling what was true of himself. He had never seen righteous people hunger. It doesn't mean it hadn't happened; he was

simply giving his experience. Certainly, godly people lived in the Old Testament time who experienced hunger, just as good people are hungry today.

The problem is not a deficiency of God's blessing. His creation supplies enough to feed every man, woman, boy, or girl. We have plenty of wealth on the earth to provide for every need, including food, shelter, and clothing.



Did God use evil spirits as judgment on King Saul?



People in Saul's time had no category for mental illness, and they couldn't differentiate that from demon possession. So it was not unusual for them to attribute many illnesses involving both the body and the mind to the influence of evil spirits. Most of us can accept the idea that some physical diseases are the direct result of living a life in direct disobedience to the will of God, like perhaps drug abuse or even immoral living. We can understand the direct correlation between divine judgment on any of these. But these causes don't explain all illness.

In the case of Saul, it appears that his poor spiritual choices began to affect his mental health resulting in depression, paranoia, and bouts of terror. For more on this question, see the following passages: Mark 5, John 9, and James 1:13.

The audience gasped in horror. After enjoying a concert by renowned violinist David Garrett, they watched him trip, fall down a flight of steps, and land on top of his violin case. When he opened it, he found the instrument in pieces. The violin was a nearly 300-year-old Stradivarius, worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. At the time, experts said it would take at least eight months to fix and might never sound the same again.

Just as Garrett's unfortunate accident damaged a priceless violin, so also legalism does irreparable harm to the gospel. The false teaching faced by the Colossians seems to have been a mix of legalism, paganism, Judaism, and mysticism. Christ-followers are supposed to have died to these inadequate philosophies! "Therefore," said Paul—in light of who Christ is and His triumph on the Cross—"do not let anyone judge you" with regard to trivial concerns such as food and holidays (v. 16). The Law had specified clean and unclean foods, but those days were gone. "New Moon

celebrations" were probably linked with pagan customs, and those too were inapplicable to believers in Jesus. The best we can say about some of these things is that they were a "shadow" or foreshadowing of God's plan (v. 17). Now that the reality, Christ, has fulfilled these symbols, there is no point in judging others about whether they observed these things.

The reality,
however, is found
in Christ.

Colossians 2:17

People who continue to pursue such things or who pass judgment based on them are arrogant (v. 18). They parade their false piety before others and delight in spiritual sensationalism. They like to hear themselves talk. They've lost connection with Christ the Head; they're separated from His life and truth (v. 19). What a shame it would be to let such people "disqualify you" or pull us off the track of true discipleship! The spirit of legalism is the tendency to turn faith into a set of rules to follow or a set of experiences to avoid or crave. Since the rich treasure of Christ and the gospel are ours, why would we settle for such empty counterfeits?

Apply the Word

Issues related to food and holidays aren't just historical (v. 16)—they're still issues today. Choices about what people will and won't eat, and why, are contentious matters. As Christian holidays like Christmas and Easter have become identified with and defined by our consumerist culture, believers face challenges in maintaining the spiritual significance of these days. We should all be reminded of the godly qualities of charity and humility in these matters.

Pray with Us

We invite you to pray for Ken Heulitt, Chief Financial Officer. May God give Ken and his team wisdom as they seek to be good stewards of the resources that Moody's financial partners have entrusted to us.

Recent research has found that “nuggets of misinformation embedded in a fictional television program can seep into our brains and lodge there as perceived facts.” Even if we’re skeptical at first, the study showed that just two weeks after viewing such a program, we’re more likely to accept misinformation as true or possibly true. One reason for this is that as our memory fades, we no longer remember the source—the misinformation gains credibility as we forget where we heard it. This is called the “delayed message effect” or the “sleeper effect.” The researchers commented: “People are bombarded by mass media every day all over the world, and a sizeable (and growing) body of mass communication research has demonstrated that much of this content is distorted in a multitude of ways.”

Our beliefs are only as good as their source. That’s why Paul was so concerned that the Colossians’ faith be grounded in the pure gospel. The syncretistic false teachings that were causing an uproar in

the church and leading some away from true faith were like weeds in a garden. They needed eradicating! So in today’s passage Paul essentially repeated the same points as yesterday. He reminded them of the genuine gospel in our key verse for today. Christ’s death was not just an unpleasant prelude to the miracle of resurrection. It was a spiritually necessary act that paid the penalty for human sin. In the same way, to say that we “died with Christ” isn’t just a figure of speech. It’s a spiritually necessary crucifying of the old sin nature and of our attachments to the world.

You died with
Christ to the
elemental spiritual
forces of
this world.

Colossians 2:20

What are “the elemental spiritual forces of this world” (v. 21–23)? They’re legalistic rules, carrying an “appearance of wisdom” but in fact lacking “any value in restraining sensual indulgence.” They may look like the pursuit of holiness, but the truth is they’re wasted effort. Again, the best we can say is that these practices might be useful for a time, but as merely “human commands and teachings” they are not the road to Christlikeness.

Apply the Word

Once again, the errors Paul condemned are not only historical but current concerns. It’s not hard to think of things about which some Christians say, “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” (v. 21). We all need to embrace wisdom and the need to make choices according to kingdom values, but strategies of avoidance or asceticism cannot be made into general rules for everyone. To do so dishonors the discipline of freedom in Christ (Gal. 5:1).

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Moody’s finances, let’s lift up the Investments team: William Barnhart, James Chadwick, Jeffery Knapp, Charles Moeri, Cherise Wilson, and Dawn Cox. Praise God for these employees who are using their skills to serve the Lord at Moody.

In the middle of Hebrews 11, popularly dubbed “Faith’s Hall of Fame,” the writer paused to summarize the lives of such heroes as Enoch, Noah, and Abraham. What set their faith apart? “Admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth, people who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Heb. 11:13–16).

Set your hearts
on things above,
where Christ is
seated at the right
hand of God.

Colossians 3:1

Now he turned his full attention to the flip side. If the heresy had gotten it all wrong, then what is an authentic godly lifestyle?

The rest of the book answers this question. An authentic godly lifestyle—that is to say, how people who have “died with Christ” should live—starts with us setting our hearts and minds on Him. This means our whole person, including thoughts, feelings, choices (our will), and creativity (our imagination). The weak alternative is to be preoccupied with and live for things that are only temporal, earthly, and human (v. 2).

To live as “foreigners and strangers on earth” and to be “longing for a better country” is exactly what it means to set our hearts on Christ (v. 1). Up to this point in Colossians, Paul had laid a powerful doctrinal foundation, explaining clearly and beautifully the person of Christ and the message of the gospel. He had also used that doctrine to expose and condemn the syncretism and false teaching that was infiltrating the Colossian church.

To set our sights on “things above” is to live every moment in light of the beauty of Christ (v. 4). Faith that strives for this orientation is the surest path to spiritual growth. Thankfully, we don’t have to (and can’t!) do this in our own strength. Christ, whose redemptive mission is complete (that’s why He’s pictured as seated at God’s right hand), will empower us because our life is now actually hidden in Him (v. 3).

Apply the Word

Living as “foreigners and strangers” can wear us down. We would rather be home (v. 4). The road can seem long, even when we’re walking with the Lord. A good book, some good music, or time with Christian friends might be the spiritual pick-me-up we need. Some recommended books in this regard are *Hunger for Reality*, by George Verwer; *Don’t Waste Your Life*, by John Piper; and *Eternity: Reclaiming a Passion for What Endures*, by Joseph Stowell.

Pray with Us

Frank Leber, Vice President of Information Systems, requests your prayer support. Please pray that Information Systems’ equipment and programs will run smoothly, so that Moody’s ministries can continue uninterrupted.

The statistics about pornography are shocking. Every second, more than \$3,000 is spent on it and nearly 30,000 Internet users view it. Every 39 minutes, a new pornographic video is created. The pornography industry pulls in about \$100 billion in annual revenue worldwide. At least 4.2 million websites, or 12 percent of the total, are pornographic. Every day, Internet users make 68 million pornographic search engine requests, or about one-quarter of the total. While men are the main consumers of pornography, one of every three visitors to an adult website is a woman.

Put to death,
therefore, whatever
belongs to your
earthly nature.

Colossians 3:5

Sexual immorality is a disease with only one cure: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature” (v. 5). Dying with Christ isn’t just a compelling metaphor (v. 3). It means that “whatever belongs to your earthly nature” must be killed off. To continue living in sin is to dishonor Christ’s gift of righteousness. These were the ways in which the Colossians had walked before receiving the gospel (v. 7), but they have no place in the life of faith.

Paul’s list of sins wasn’t exhaustive. Most of the examples he chose revolve around sexual sin. “Sexual immorality” is the Greek word *porneia*, from which we get our word pornography. “Impurity” could be any kind of corruption, but often connotes sexual transgression. “Lust” is adultery of the heart (Matt. 5:28). In context, “evil desires” seems to suggest improper sexual cravings. “Greed,” or the idolatry of materialism, is the final item on the list. It might seem out of place, but in fact greed and sexual immorality are often linked because they both look to something other than God for satisfaction.

“Because of these,” Paul warned, “the wrath of God is coming” (v. 6). God hates sin and will one day judge it. All who sin are under a death penalty, waiting for that day. We who have trusted Christ, by contrast, have been rescued from death. Our penalty has already been paid. Why, then, would we continue to act as God’s enemy and do things He hates? We are children of God and should seek to live worthy of our salvation!

Apply the Word

You’re probably familiar with the FBI’s “Ten Most Wanted” list. These are top criminals that the government would like to see captured. Now that we’ve “died with Christ,” we should take seriously our own “most wanted” list—desires and actions that we want to see out of our lives because they don’t bring honor to the Lord. If you are struggling to eradicate the control of these sins, commit to prayer and also seek the counsel of a wise Christian pastor or counselor to help you.

Pray with Us

Today our prayers go to God for Landscaping Services: Andrew Hirsch and Ryan Yoder. Please pray that the beauty of creation on Moody’s Chicago campus would depict God’s glory in the heart of the city.

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, He gave them a single command—not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But Satan tempted them and they chose to disobey. We call this event the “Fall” because they fell from their original state of innocence into an experiential knowledge of sin, dooming all humanity to death (see Genesis 3). Though Adam and Eve had been created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), their disobedience defaced that image, as if mud had been smeared onto a beautiful painting.

Christ is all,
and is in all.

Colossians 3:11

Christ’s redemption cleanses us of sin, washing the painting of mud, as it were, and restoring the image of God in us (v. 10). In daily life, living out the gospel means to rid ourselves of all that is unChristlike. Once again, Paul made this point with a before-and-after contrast. In the life they had once lived, the Colossians had walked according to their “earthly nature” (v. 7). “But now,” he wrote, “you must also rid yourselves of all such things” (v. 8).

This second list of sins deals mostly with relational or interpersonal wrongdoing, with a strong link to sins of speech and the lack of self-control (vv. 8–9). “Anger” is destructive and unloving, as is “rage,” which suggests abusiveness or being out-of-control. “Malice” is animosity or an intent to injure someone. “Slander” includes gossip designed to drag down another’s reputation. “Filthy language” is profanity or obscenity. Finally, lying violates the commandment not to bear false witness against one’s neighbor (Ex. 20:16).

Paul then restated his overall point as a kind of clothing metaphor (vv. 9–10). An old garment needs to be taken off, while a new one should be put on. From “old self” to “new self,” our rebirth in Christ is a transformation in our identity. We are not who we were, and we’re not to live as we did formerly. The “new self” is still in process and is “being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” In this sense, we’re all co-pilgrims together on the journey to Christ (v. 11).

Apply the Word

The themes of process and pilgrimage have emerged several times in our study of Colossians. Salvation includes the past (gospel received in faith), present (putting our earthly natures to death, setting our hearts on things above), and future (when we’re presented blameless before our Lord). One of the great classics of Christian literature that memorably captures this narrative and these dimensions of the Christian life is *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, by John Bunyan.

Pray with Us

Please express appreciation in prayer for Collin Lambert, Vice President of Moody Radio. Through his leadership, Moody Radio is proclaiming the life-changing truth of God’s Word to more than one million listeners around the world every week.

Do you ever wish you had more self-control? Well, there's an app for that! SelfControl, an open-source program for Macintosh, runs a blacklist to which you can add websites, including email servers, that are distracting you from work or causing you to procrastinate. You tell the program not to give you access to these sites for, say, the next two hours, leaving you free to concentrate on work. "Once started," says the program's description, "it cannot be undone . . . you must wait for the timer to run out."

If only godliness were that easy! Having presented two lists of vices to "put to death," Paul now turned to an extended list of spiritual virtues (vv. 12–17). He also continued the take off/put on clothing metaphor from verses 9 and 10. Overall, today's verses continue to develop the implications of what it means to live "as God's chosen people" (v. 12). With this phrase, Paul spotlighted the new revelation of God's plan that took place in Christ. In the past, Israel would have had the "chosen people" label (see Deut. 7:6). This doesn't

mean they were the only ones God loved, for His plan has always included the entire world. But now, it is the church that is "holy and dearly loved."

As such, what clothing should believers put on? Notice that this action is a continuous imperative, not a one-time event.

"Compassion" indicates a merciful or tender heart. "Kindness" and "patience" are also on Paul's list of fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23). "Humility" is a willingness to serve or take a lower position (see Matt. 20:25–28). Similarly, "gentleness" or meekness characterizes someone not given to self-importance.

We should also bear with and forgive one another freely and generously, just as Christ did for us (v. 13). Above all, we should "put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity" (v. 14; cf. 1 Corinthians 13). The verb "binds" means "links," "joins," and "gives shape and purpose." Like wearing a sports jersey to show our allegiance, clothing ourselves with these virtues shows we've set our hearts on Christ.

Over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

Colossians 3:14

Apply the Word

Clothing ourselves with spiritual virtue is a metaphor also seen elsewhere in the New Testament (Rom. 13:14; 1 Peter 5:5). At least twice, armor is used to emphasize the reality of spiritual warfare (Rom. 13:12). For example, Paul wrote to the Ephesians that they should "put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes" (Eph. 6:10–18). These clothing items make a fashion statement that never goes out of style!

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Moody Radio, please remember Moody Radio Southeast: Leighton LeBoeuf, Paul Martin, Dave Morais, Andy Napier, and Juanell Rice. Praise God for the biblical teaching and Christian music God is using to change lives in Southeast Tennessee.

Herbert Clarence Boyer started as a gospel musician and became one of the first scholars of African-American sacred music. In the late 1950s, he and his brother, James, achieved fame as the Boyer Brothers, recording such classics as “Step by Step.” When Horace later applied to the Eastman School of Music and told them he wanted to study gospel music, they told him the library didn’t have enough resources. When he responded that he would collect and record what he needed for his scholarly work, they were persuaded and admitted him. His research was published in 1995 in *How Sweet the Sound: The Golden Age of Gospel*. Horace Boyer knew all about singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (v. 16)!

Today’s passage builds on yesterday’s to teach us more ways to live out our redemption in Christ. Two closely linked ways are presented. First, “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts” (v. 15). “Peace” reminds us that our redemption included reconciliation, both a cessa-

tion of hostilities with God and a source of unity among believers (1:22). “Rule” is a strong verb indicating governance and control. The “peace of Christ” is analogous to an umpire in baseball—the decision-maker, an authoritative guide to spiritual life and practice. So one way to paraphrase this verse is, “Submit to Christ’s salvation at work in your life.”

Let the peace
of Christ rule in
your hearts.

Colossians 3:15

Second, “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly” or fruitfully (v. 16). How? By teaching and admonishing one another, helping one another stand firm in the truth and live lives worthy of the gospel. These are the exact activities that Paul and his companions were so committed to in their own ministry (1:28). How else? By singing a variety of styles of music in order to express worship and thankfulness to God.

Verse 17 summarizes Paul’s main point here. How can we live in ways that honor Christ? By doing everything in His name and for His glory. Even daily activities like eating should inspire thankfulness to God.

Apply the Word

Church music wars are a violation of Colossians 3:16. Judging a fellow believer’s spirituality by his or her musical preferences is not godly. We’re expressly commanded to “sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” that is, a variety of styles of sacred music. Any of these can be worshipful. Any of these can be used to give thanks to the Lord. Choose some music today to either sing or listen to as a way to focus your heart on gratitude to the Lord.

Pray with Us

Mention in your prayers Moody Radio Indiana, which broadcasts from studios in Indianapolis. Ask the Lord to bring salvation to the lost through the faithful service of Amber Cummings, Kelli Thompson, Ray Hashley, Tom Winn, Joel Wright, and Linda Yeager.

When nonbelievers read our Bible passages for today, they tend to make accusations of patriarchy and sexism. But sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox of the University of Virginia has done research challenging these stereotypes. As he told an interviewer, the critics “need to cast aside their prejudices about religious conservatives and evangelicals in particular. Compared to the average American family man, evangelical Protestant men who are married with children and attend church regularly spend more time with their children and their spouses. They also are more affectionate with their children and their spouses. They also have the lowest rates of domestic violence of any group in the United States.”

How do Paul’s instructions regarding the family fit in with the flow of this epistle? They indicate that Christ is the source of fullness in the home as in every dimension of life (cf. Eph. 5:21–33). They’re a specific example of how to live out our redemption in Christ. They’re an illustration of what happens when we let the

peace of Christ rule in us and the word of Christ dwell in us. But how does authority work when we’re all one in Christ? To say we’re equal at the foot of the Cross (3:11) doesn’t eliminate family and social order and responsibilities. These still exist, although they, like every area of life, have been transformed.

Each one of you
must also love his
wife as he loves
himself, and the
wife must respect
her husband.

Ephesians 5:33

Wives are to submit to their husbands “as is fitting in the Lord,” because it’s the right thing to do (v. 18). What’s new is that this is presented as their choice. Husbands are to love their wives and not be harsh with them (v. 19). What’s new is that men have no right to abuse their author-

ity. Children are to obey their parents in all things (v. 20). What’s new is that such obedience is respected or seen as valuable in God’s eyes. Parents, especially fathers, are not to embitter or discourage their children (v. 21). What’s new is again that parents have no right to abuse their authority. The ideas of submission and obedience reflect the relationships within the Trinity itself, and should be a source of peace in our relationships that brings glory to God.

Apply the Word

One recent Christian movie that presents a vision of how redeemed family life and manhood might look is *Courageous*, produced by Sherwood Baptist Church in Albany, Georgia. Casting Crowns recorded the movie’s theme song. In the movie, a police officer and his friends experience a series of events that cause them to reflect on their roles as fathers and husbands. There’s drama, action, comedy, and preaching: <http://courageousthemovie.com>.

Pray with Us

Dr. Junias Venugopal, Provost and Dean of Education, serves as Moody’s chief academic officer. Please join us in asking the Father to give him discernment as he oversees Moody’s undergraduate school, seminary, and distance learning which are serving over 3,500 students.

In order to interpret accurately today's reading, it's important to understand that slavery in New Testament times was not like slavery in American history. The latter, sometimes called "chattel slavery," was premised on virulent racism that asserted that one race was so inferior as to be subhuman, and therefore slaves could be bought and sold like animals. In Paul's day, slavery was often a temporary state to pay off a debt, or based on a class system. Nowhere does Paul endorse the ungodly idea of one human being "owning" another. In fact, his approach to the master-slave relationship contradicts abuse of power.

Whatever you do,
do it with all your
heart, as working
for the Lord, not
for human masters.

Colossians 3:23

As with family relationships, Paul saw the need for social order and responsibilities, but he didn't simply sign off on the prevailing cultural notions of his day. Slaves were instructed to obey their masters, but this wasn't to be a matter of mere power. Instead, doing so would demonstrate their spiritual integrity (3:22–24). To do their work well even when unsupervised would show that they honored a Master who was above their "earthly master." Since

they were part of God's family and set to receive an "inheritance" of salvation, they had excellent reasons to do their best for Him! The reality of the matter was this: "It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

Furthermore, Paul didn't see slaves as "property" without rights—quite the opposite. Like husbands and parents, masters were warned not to abuse their authority. The phrase "earthly master" was a reminder to them as well of the reality of a heavenly Master. Since God is just and shows no favoritism (3:25), masters were explicitly ordered to "provide your slaves with what is

right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven" (4:1).

Paul always saw the social and spiritual as intertwined: "Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called by the Lord is the Lord's freed person; similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave" (1 Cor. 7:21–22).

Apply the Word

In light of today's devotional, the best contemporary analogy or application for this passage concerns the workplace. We, too, should do our work completely, with integrity, and with the right spiritual motives. We, too, should work as for the Lord and not for people. Though we may chuckle over Dilbert cartoons and call ourselves "cubicle slaves" or "cogs in the machine," our work is yet another way in which we can live out the truth of the gospel of Christ.

Pray with Us

Donor Resource Management—Edgardo Camacho, Sharon Cluff, Norma DeJesus, Patricia Fletcher, and Kyella Gilliam—serves Moody by processing donations and receipts. Ask the Lord to equip this team with all they need to serve Moody's ministry partners with excellence.

Francis McDougall grew up overseas with a military father. After earning a medical degree in 1839, he worked at an ironworks, then was ordained in 1845. In 1847, he sailed from England for Borneo as a pioneering medical missionary. Francis and his wife, Harriette, ministered among three groups of people—the Muslim Malays who ruled Borneo, Chinese traders who had settled there, and the indigenous Dyak people. Though they faced difficulties such as severe illnesses and the deaths of their own children, they persevered in serving and were able to bring many people to the Lord.

Exploring the history of Christian missions is a great way to prepare ourselves to join the Colossians in praying for the spread of the gospel, as Paul requested in today's reading. The epistle is winding down and we've now come, as is often the case with Paul, to a hatful of concluding exhortations. The first is, "Devote yourselves to prayer" (v. 2). The spirit of prayer is both "watchful and thankful," that is, vigilant for the truth and grateful to God for His gifts of truth and grace.

Devote yourselves
to prayer, being
watchful and
thankful.

Colossians 4:2

Paul followed up his exhortation with specific prayer requests—that God would open doors for the gospel to spread, and that He would enable Paul and his team to proclaim it clearly when the opportunities came (vv. 3–4). Paul's missionary ambitions were pursued in submission to God's sovereignty. He understood that the worldwide spread of the gospel (1:6) was because of God's power and plan, not human activities. That's one reason why he wasn't worried about being in chains in Rome.

Not only was God in control, but the "mystery of Christ" for which he had been imprisoned was more than worth it.

In these circumstances, we might request prayer for physical freedom, but Paul didn't even mention it. The phrase "as I should" reflects his high sense of responsibility with regard to the sacred significance of his message. The matter uppermost on his mind was the truth of the gospel, both in his ministry and in the lives of the Colossian believers.

Apply the Word

Consider your personal prayer life. The verb "devote" (v. 2) indicates a habit or an ongoing orientation, not a one-time event but an attitude in which we persevere. Somewhere in our hearts and minds, as part of our growing spiritual maturity, prayer should always be happening (see 1 Thess. 5:17). If we're not sure what or how to pray, the prayers of Scripture make excellent models. For example, we might imitate Paul's prayer in Colossians 1:9–12.

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Donor Resource Management, join us in lifting up Brian Ixcaragua, David Kocourek, Dona Lorange, and Amelia Mendez. May this team experience God's mercy and grace as they serve at Moody today.

Announced one news source: “The 36th week of 2009 will forever be known as ‘Trout Week’ in North America.” What happened? Two world-record trout were caught in the same week! First, Sean Konrad caught a rainbow trout weighing 48 pounds from Lake Diefenbaker in Saskatchewan, Canada. He broke a record that had been held by his own twin brother. Four days later, Tom Healy caught a German brown trout weighing 41 pounds, 7 ounces from the Manistee River in Michigan, breaking a record that had stood for seventeen years.

Let your
conversation be
always full
of grace.

Colossians 4:6

said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:35). Paul was cautioning the believers not to do anything such as follow false teachers or get sidetracked on sensationalistic controversies that would compromise their witness.

“Make the most of every opportunity” encourages the Colossians to be watchful and eager for the open doors Paul had mentioned two verses ago. Nothing should stop them from proclaiming Christ—and coming from a man in prison, that exhortation meant a lot!

hortation meant a lot!

“Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people” (Matt. 4:19). This is what Paul had in mind in today’s reading. Just as he himself was committed to sharing the gospel, he wanted the Colossians to catch the same vision. The three imperative verbs in verses 5 and 6 boil down to an exhortation to witness. “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders” reminds us that the church is the body of Christ, His testimony to a watching world. As Jesus Himself

“Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt” is a good idea in general, but an excellent idea when it comes to witnessing and apologetics. When we’re questioned about our faith, we need to know “how to answer everyone” in ways that stand firm for the truth but are at the same time gracious and polite (cf. 1 Peter 3:15–16). “Seasoned with salt” means that we share the gospel with winsomeness, not a contentious spirit.

Apply the Word

Once we truly grasp the mystery of God’s revelation in Christ, we can’t wait to share this good news with others! We who’ve been rescued from the “dominion of darkness” into Christ’s “kingdom of light” have been given the joyful responsibility of telling others how it happened. Pray for an opportunity to share the gospel with a colleague, neighbor, or loved one soon. Pray that God will prepare your heart and your speech to be full of grace as you testify about His saving work.

Pray with Us

Caring for the various buildings on Moody’s Chicago campus is the responsibility of our Custodial Services. Please ask God to give strength, health, and safety to David Applington, William Bielawski, David Boskovic, Ernest Brown, and Dean Gentry.

In early 2011, the United States Postal Service (USPS) was near financial collapse. In the first quarter alone, the USPS reported losses of \$2.2 billion, and it was expected to lose \$7 billion by the end of the year. It did even worse in 2010, losing \$8.5 billion, and has lost about \$20 billion since 2007. The future looks no brighter, as additional losses of \$42 billion over the next four years are predicted. The USPS cut jobs, closed offices, and called for a federal bailout, pointing out that it carries an estimated 171 billion pieces of mail annually, or about 40 percent of the world's total mail.

A friend loves at
all times, and a
brother is born for
a time of adversity.

Proverbs 17:17

Unless things improve, one of these days we, like Paul, might need to ask friends to deliver our mail! As Colossians continues to wind down, Paul next conveyed personal news and greetings (v. 8). Two friends and ministry partners, Tychicus and Onesimus, were delivering this letter to Colossae. Tychicus is described in both personal and professional terms as “a dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord” (v. 7). Not much else is known about him, except

that he was Asian and accompanied Paul on his missionary journey through Macedonia and Greece (see Acts 20:4). His name also turns up in the epistles of Ephesians, 2 Timothy, and Titus.

Somewhat more is known about Onesimus (v. 9). A runaway slave who had stolen from his master, Philemon, he had headed to Rome in order to disappear into the urban crowds. Instead, he was converted through Paul's ministry and became one of Paul's companions.

To treat Onesimus as a friend was a revolutionary step, since runaway slaves could expect no mercy in that society. Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, who was a fellow believer and apparently part of the Colossian church. In his brief epistle to Philemon, Paul pleaded for his friend's freedom, but he wanted Philemon to do the right thing on his own, not by apostolic command. No doubt this situation was on Paul's mind when he wrote the commands studied on February 23.

Apply the Word

Before trusting Christ Paul was a zealous and legalistic Pharisee (Phil. 3:5–6). When he met the Lord on the road to Damascus, his life was transformed. Instead of persecuting believers, he began planting churches. Instead of observing ethnic and cultural boundaries, he burst through them. His former friends must have been shaking their heads—a rabbi befriendng a runaway Gentile slave? In Christ, Paul had discovered the power of genuine friendship (Prov. 17:17).

Pray with Us

Continuing our prayers for Custodial Services—Paul Henle, Danny Hutcherson, Chau Lai, Jessica Manning, Tailor Nguyen, and John Pettett—join us in thanking God for this team's commitment to maintaining Moody's facilities for students, employees, and guests.

Joseph Stowell, president of Cornerstone University, wrote of his friend, Duane Litfin, retired president of Wheaton College: “Dr. Duane Litfin is without a doubt my best friend. I will be forever grateful that, in the providence of God, our journeys merged early on. For years Duane’s friendship has been a treasured source of timely encouragement, shared wisdom, mind-probing and provocative interactions, and lots of fun. Many years ago, while browsing through an antique store with our wives in Marshall, Michigan, Duane and I spotted two bronze statues, the kind of small statues that you might see in a library. We decided to buy them, naming one of them David and the other Jonathan. We exchange them each Christmas as an expression of the delightful bond that our friendship provides.”

Godly friendships, especially in ministry, are a gift from God, as Paul also knew. In today’s verses, he passed on greetings from several friends (vv. 10–14) and sent additional greetings to the nearby church in Laodicea (v. 15).

Paul listed three Jewish friends (Aristarchus, Mark, and Justus) and three Gentile friends (Epaphras, Luke, and Demas). Aristarchus was a “fellow prisoner” and part of Paul’s ministry over a period of many years, including the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19), the missionary journey to Europe (Acts 20), and the shipwreck en route to Rome (Acts 27). Mark was the cousin of Barnabas and a successful “reclamation project” following a poor showing on his first missionary journey (Acts 15:36–41). We don’t know the full story, but he had clearly regained Paul’s trust by this time.

Luke we know as a doctor and as the historian-author of Luke and Acts. Demas, unfortunately, later betrayed the gospel (2 Tim. 4:10). Epaphras, as we’ve mentioned, was the founder and pastor of the church at Colossae and perhaps also the churches at Laodicea and Hierapolis (cf. 1:7). Since he was the one who had likely brought Paul the information concerning the false teachers, he merited a longer description as “wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured” (v. 12).

The pleasantness
of a friend
springs from their
heartfelt advice.

Proverbs 27:9

Apply the Word

Paul saw great value and experienced great joy in these friends and ministry partners who were able to be with him during his Roman imprisonment. The bonds of brotherhood in Christ transcended racial and religious barriers. Throughout Scripture, the power of godly friendships and mentoring relationships is an ongoing theme, including Moses and Joshua, David and Jonathan, Jesus and His disciples, and Paul and his team. May we follow their example!

Pray with Us

Encourage Custodial Services—Thomas Pizano, Oakley Smith, Francis Stuart, Cathy Sywulka, Do Tran, and John Williams—with your prayers today. Request that God give them fulfillment as they carry out their responsibilities, helping Moody fulfill its global mission.

Reading Scripture aloud seems to be a slowly vanishing art. Many churches don't do it, instead opting to project the biblical text onscreen. In others, the Scripture reading is merely a brief interlude between the offering and the sermon. If this seems regrettable, you might be interested in *The Word of Promise Audio Bible*.

Famous actors such as Richard Dreyfuss and Marisa Tomei employed their voice talents to bring Bible stories and characters to life. The script is the New King James Version of the Bible, with professional voices, original music, and sound effects used to create a theater-quality sound production 90 hours long.

See to it that you complete the ministry you have received in the Lord.

Colossians 4:17

Paul's epistle to the Colossians was originally communicated to the church via public readings. They didn't have photocopiers, of course, nor could the Apostle just post it on his blog. Instead, once his friends Tychicus and Onesimus had delivered the letter, it would have been read aloud to the congregation. After that, Paul instructed, they should trade letters with the church at Laodicea (v. 16). Colossae was perhaps ten miles up the

Lycus River from Laodicea, with Hierapolis another dozen or so miles away on the other side. For Epaphras to pastor in all three cities would not have required too much travel.

The Laodicean letter has not survived, leaving behind a tantalizing mystery about what Paul wrote. This is also a lesson for us concerning the inspiration of Scripture and the process of canonization (figuring out which books were part of the Bible). Here we see epistles written at the same time by the same apostle to neighboring churches, delivered at the same time by the same people, and yet

only one of them is God's inspired Word. Had the other letter been as well, the Holy Spirit would have preserved it for us.

Paul's message to Archippus to "complete the ministry you have received in the Lord" is direct but not specific, so we don't know the exact nature of the work he was called to do (v. 17). We do know, however, that he was urged to continue being faithful to the ministry he was given by God.

Apply the Word

"Complete the ministry" is good advice for all believers! And we have the complementary assurance from Philippians 1:6: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion." God is working in us just as He calls us to work for Him—all to the glory of His purposes. Thank Him for His ongoing work in your life, and commit to faithfully pursuing the work He was given you.

Pray with Us

The members of Moody's Board of Trustees provide valuable guidance to Moody's ministries. Join us in asking the Lord to give them wisdom and unity as they gather for meetings at Moody's Chicago campus today.

Last March, 13,266 teachers and students at the University of Santo Tomas in the Philippines set a Guinness World Record for making the largest human cross ever assembled. They stood inside marked-out areas, wearing black or white clothing depending on which area of the design they stood in, in order to create a huge, living picture of a cross. They did so for Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the Easter season, as well as to symbolize their stand against abortion. Prayers and worship songs were part of the world-record attempt. Seen from above, their black-and-white cross was a beautiful and breathtaking spectacle!

The beauty of Christ and the triumph of the Cross are at the heart of the book of Colossians. To close it, Paul may have taken the pen from a scribe and written the final verse in his own hand as a means of authentication (v. 18). In any case, it amounts to "Sincerely, Paul." He mentioned his imprisonment not to gripe, but so that the Colossians would be impressed one more time with the power

of the gospel. Though he sat in chains as the prisoner of a world superpower, the gospel of Christ continued to have the power to sustain him and was more than worth the sacrifice. The gospel has a power that transcends any form of earthly power, even that of the Roman Empire. Paul longed for the Colossians to live out their redemption in Christ with purity, passion, gratitude, and steadfastness.

Remember my
chains. Grace be
with you.

Colossians 4:18

This epistle has taught us that Christ is fully God and fully man. He's the Creator and Head of the church. He accomplished our salvation and brought us from darkness into light. He has reconciled us to God and to one another, and He continues to sanctify us until the day we're presented perfect (1:28). The truth of the gospel is a foundation for the Christian life. Because of it, we can walk by faith in love, rooted in Christ, as His death and resurrection transform every dimension of our lives in ways that attract others and glorify God. One day we shall behold the beauty of Christ face to face (1 Cor. 13:12)!

Apply the Word

Every letter and email we write is an opportunity to do what Paul did—wish someone the grace of God. Many people are in the habit of putting quotes as part of the automatic "signature" in their emails. This is the last impression the reader gets of that person. In Paul's case, our last impression is of the apostle in chains, uncomplainingly sharing a benediction of grace with his readers. How can we as recipients of God's grace do any less?

Pray with Us

Thank you for joining us for our study of Colossians. As we reflect on this month's devotionals, let us joyfully give thanks to our Heavenly Father who "has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves" (Col. 1:13).

FROM THE EDITORS

Continued from page 4

Any time I read Today in the Word, I become refreshed in the Spirit.

— Pastor Adedokun, Lagos, Nigeria

Today in the Word has blessed me and also has drawn me closer to God even in my way of living. I am a completely different person now.

— Catherine, Miami Gardens, FL

I've been reading Today in the Word for years, first the magazine, then the Web site, and now the e-mail version. Thank you for making the Word so available. I'm not a pastor, but Today in the Word inspired me to write several Bible study programs and sermons.

— Wendell, Sioux Falls, SD

Today in the Word is an encouragement to me, and I like to read the devotional every day.

— Cynthia, Crownpoint, NM

My wife and I are devoted readers of your wonderful Bible study. In such a busy world in which we all live, it is a pleasure to start our days in the Word. May God bless you all. You have a godly touch on this world.

— Noel, Indianapolis, IN

Today in the Word is the only devotional guide I have used consistently over the past several years. Every day is a new story that highlights the Scripture reading and application. May God continue to give the staff just the right insights. Putting this devotional guide together month after month must keep your team sharp and unified.

— Susan, Ogdensburg, NY

I have been studying the Word of God with the help of your devotional for almost ten years already. Today in the Word is a real help to keep me focused on a certain theme or book of the Bible that we study every month. Let me tell you that the recent study about Moses' leadership was a great blessing to me. It opened my eyes to new truths that have enriched my walk with my dear Savior Jesus. Thank you for a Bible devotional guide that goes deeper in God's teachings and allows us readers to have a rich spiritual meal to our souls.

— Jackeline, Hudson, FL

I just wanted to let you know how much of a change you and God have made in my life through your publication. I got away from church in college and made many mistakes in my life. God got my attention and I started realizing that I'm not in control of my life, that God is. I started going back to church and started listening to Moody Radio. I'm a truck driver, so I get to listen several hours a day. I was looking for a daily devotional at the time. Now, before I go to work my wife and I read the devotional together. What a great way to start the day! Please keep up the good work. It is making a difference in so many everyday lives.

— Richard (via e-mail)

Today in the Word draws my focus away from the details of life back to God—God's plan, His promise fulfilled, His mercy and faithfulness. I was asking the Lord what could I do, now that I'm retired and not as involved in activities as before. The thought that came to me was, "I can pray." And then I read

Continued on page 38

FROM THE EDITORS

Continued from page 37

the last TITW, November 30, about asking God to make us a person of prayer. Perfect! Thanks for an excellent devotional study on James.

— Lindy, Sopelana, Spain

I have been subscribing to your devotional for years. Excellent! This month's issue, November, 2011, is one of the very BEST issues I've ever been privileged to study. All of the lessons have been to the point, simple, dynamic, but written with a "no-nonsense" fervor that is drenched in compassion. We have recommended Today in the Word to scores of our family and friends simply because it is one of the very best, Bible-based devotional journals on the market. My heart has been moved by the penetrating questions concerning James's counsel concerning the tongue and faith. What a blessing this little devotional has been, is, and will be to my own personal spiritual growth. A great, big, THANK YOU to all on your staff who contribute to making Today in the Word one of America's best devotional guides.

— Ted Ray (via e-mail)

I base my Sunday school lessons on your Today in the Word devotions. They help me keep my class VERY interested in the Word of God! Thank you!

— Stephen, Hagerstown, MD

I just want to say how much I liked the study of the Book of Galatians. I have always enjoyed Galatians, but this month, it came alive in such a way that I will never be the same again when I think about this book or read it.

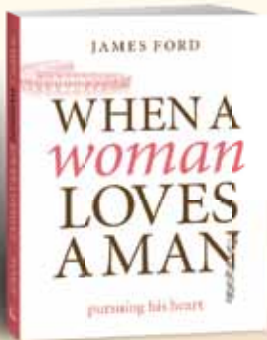
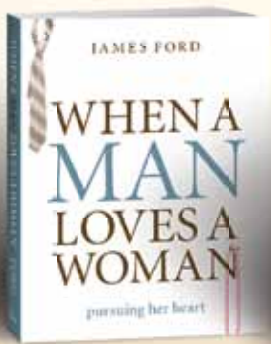
— Stephanie (via e-mail)

I have been reading Today in the Word for more than 20 years. My most memorable moment was in college when my aunt came to visit. At about 1 a.m. she awoke to find me sitting on the floor in the hallway with my Bible in my lap and your devotional booklet in my hand. I still read and learn daily now, 18 years later, as a seminary student. Thank you for what you do for God's Kingdom daily. Today in the Word is changing your readers' lives, as well the people they encounter and touch for Jesus.

— L. K., Heathrow, FL

Dear readers, speaking of the *faux pas* I mentioned in the beginning, many of you noticed an error in the December 2011 issue. The tablets that were placed in the ark were the second set made by Moses after the first had been shattered (Deut. 10:1–5). *Today in the Word* incorrectly stated that Moses placed the original (first) set of the tablets in the ark. We regret the error, and we are thankful for your feedback, which also encouraged us! Because, as John Koessler, our theological editor, pointed out, "I would like to think that our readers' powers of astute observation and biblical knowledge are partly due to the fact that they read *Today in the Word*."

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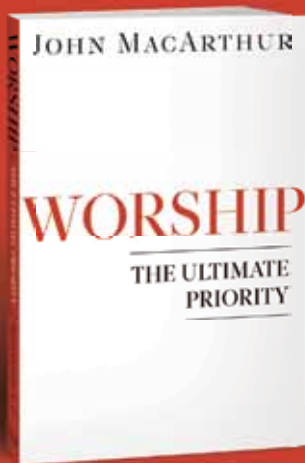
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