

MAY 2019

TODAY IN THE WORD™



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

Colossians 1:10

LIVING IN CHRIST: The Book of Colossians

TODAY WITH MARK JOBE

President of Moody Bible Institute

The New Me



Have you ever been to a school reunion? When we meet classmates we haven't seen for a long time, we are often in for a surprise. The star

football player no longer looks like an athlete. And the quietest kid in class is now confident and outgoing.

Your friends may notice that you have changed as well. You may look or talk differently. You might not like to do the things you once did. Most of us aren't the same persons we were when we were young. And that's a good thing!

Scripture talks a great deal about who we were and who we become in Christ. When we are born again, we undergo a radical spiritual transformation. God gives us a new identity. At the moment of redemption, our sins are paid in full, covered by the blood of Jesus. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Gal. 2:20). We are transformed into a new person, made holy in the eyes of God.

Some people have a long history with religion, but they don't experience much change. By contrast, when you place your faith in Jesus, you are made new! You will not and cannot stay the same.

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: the old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Cor. 5:17). The Holy Spirit now indwells you. And that gives you a whole different way of approaching life.

In the book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul is encouraging the believers to recognize who they are in Christ and to start behaving as the sons and daughters of God. Paul likens this shift—from who we were to who we are in Christ—to the act of putting on new clothes. We are to take off our old self and our old behaviors and "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:10).

Our identity shapes our behavior, including the way we talk, walk, and interact. This new you comes with a radically different set of attitudes (Col. 3:8). What an encouragement it is to embrace the identity of one who has been chosen by God, "holy and dearly loved" (Col 3:12). While religion can help people modify their outward appearance or behavior, only a living, breathing relationship with Jesus transforms us from the inside out. In Christ we are made new. We are His holy creation, set apart and sanctified for God's purpose. ■

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

Jesus: The Head of the Church

We often use the label *Christian* to help people understand what the church is all about. The church is considered Christian because it has its origin in Jesus Christ. He is its founder (Matt. 16:18). The church promotes the teachings of Christ (Luke 6:47). And the church preaches the gospel of Christ, the message of forgiveness through Christ's death and resurrection (2 Cor. 2:12).

But Christ's relationship to the church is much deeper than that of its founder and teacher. In the book of Colossians Paul explains that Christ is the head of the church (Col. 1:18; 2:10, 19). We associate the term *head* with authority. The head is the boss or the person in charge. While this is certainly true of Christ, Paul also means more.

The apostle is emphasizing the vital connection between Christ and the church that is both ongoing and life-sustaining. Jesus is to the church what a physical head is to the body. Christ is not merely the church's organizer and primary teacher. The church derives its life from Christ and acts as His agent in the world.

While the image of the body speaks of mutual dependence among those

who are a part of the church (Rom. 12:5), the image of the head indicates the church's complete and utter dependence upon Jesus Christ. Just as the body cannot function without the head, Jesus sustains the church with His own life. He alone is the source of its growth and provides direction.

Jesus is more than an important figure in the history of the church. He is supreme over the church. The church belongs to Christ (Matt. 16:18). It answers to Him (Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The church cannot exist apart from Christ (John 15:1–4).

No human authority can overrule Christ's authority over the church. No earthly wisdom or human effort can provide what Christ supplies to the church. Commentator William Barclay observed that without Christ, ". . . the church cannot think the truth, cannot act correctly, cannot decide its direction." To call the church *Christian* is far more than a label. It speaks of a unique relationship no other organization or community can claim. If you remove Christ from the church, you no longer have the church. ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more, read *He Is Enough* by Asheritah Ciuciu (Moody Publishers).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Jamie Janosz

Meet This Month's Devotional Writer: Dr. Ryan Cook



Ryan Cook is an assistant professor of Bible at Moody Theological Seminary where he teaches courses in the Old Testament and Hebrew grammar and syntax.

Please tell us a little about yourself.

I am originally from Michigan and now live in northwestern Indiana. My wife Ashley and I have been married for 16 years and we have three children, ages 6 to 12. When I have time, I enjoy playing the piano and guitar.

What is your favorite course to teach at Moody?

Probably the Book of Psalms. It is a joy to introduce students to the rich theology of this book. The Psalms provide us with a way to relate to God in every season and experience of life. Joy, sorrow, and thanksgiving are all taken up in prayer to God.

How long have you been a Bible reader?

Bible reading has been an important part of my life since I was a child. For many years, I have had a regular Bible reading plan where I read through the Bible in a year and the book of Psalms once a month.

What did you find especially meaningful about this month's study in *Today in the Word*?

What really stood out to me in studying Colossians was the importance of prayer. Paul begins the letter by telling the church he is praying for them (1:3–4), and he ends it by encouraging the church to be in prayer (4:2). Giving a greeting from Epaphras, Paul informs the church that he is “always struggling on your behalf in his prayers” (4:12).

When I picture Paul's work in church planting, I envision him preaching, debating, and confronting false teachers. One of the main ways he worked to plant and nurture churches was through prayer. The most important thing for him was not having the right missionary strategy or the most persuasive speech, but keeping connected to the real source of empowerment for ministry.

What resources in Bible study would you recommend?

I think it is important to have an easy-to-use Bible study guide, like *Today in the Word*, that provides solid background and context information. Moody Publishers provides useful resources for a deeper Bible study, such as *The New Unger's Bible Handbook* and *The Moody Bible Commentary*. ■

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Living in Christ: The Book of Colossians

The attack on the transatlantic passenger liner *Lusitania* in May 1915 was one of the great disasters of World War I. Bound for Liverpool from New York, this luxury liner sank within 20 minutes when torpedoed by the German submarine U-20. More than a thousand passengers and crew died, among them 128 Americans. Survivors left many extraordinary accounts for us. On one of the collapsible rafts, passengers started singing a hymn, “Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow.” One survivor recalled, “We put a good deal of heart into it . . . Then we just waited . . . It was beautifully calm.”

How difficult it may be for us to completely trust Christ—until we grasp His all-sufficiency and faithfulness, especially in times of worry, trial, or loss! This month in *Today in the Word* we'll follow the apostle Paul's instruction to the church at Colossae about living “a life worthy of the Lord” (Col. 1:10). We'll praise God for the believers' union with Christ and our freedom in Him. We'll also learn about persevering in prayer, walking in wisdom during our journey on earth, and finishing this journey well.

We pray this month's study will strengthen your faith and reliance on the Savior in every season of your life. As we walk with Christ, may our lives reflect the prayer of the psalmist, “I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust’” (Ps. 91:2). ■

—Elena Mafter, Senior Editor

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WEDNESDAY
MAY

1

*How good and pleasant it is when
God's people live together in unity!*

Psalm 133:1

The Family of God

A little girl was doing her best to carry her baby brother. Watching her struggle, someone asked if she wasn't tired. The girl gave her now famous reply, "No, he's not heavy; he's my brother." Like that little girl, we are often willing to go the extra mile to care for our family.

While in prison, the apostle Paul penned the remarkable letter, we know as the book of Colossians, to a group of Christians he had never met. Colossae had been an important town along a trade route in modern Turkey. While the city had waned in prominence compared to nearby Laodicea, it still had a cosmopolitan feel with different ethnicities, including a significant Jewish population.

Paul introduced himself as an "apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God" (v. 1). Paul had the authority of one called and appointed by Jesus. As a former persecutor of the faith, Paul was aware

that he was an apostle of Christ Jesus only "by the will of God" (v. 1). God had stopped him in his tracks and set him on a new course on the road to Damascus.

Although Paul had never visited this church, he warmly greeted them as "faithful brothers and sisters" (v. 2). Referring to a non-relative as a "brother" or "sister" was highly unusual in Greco-Roman culture. Yet, it was commonplace among early Christians who viewed one another as family. They could act this way because of their unity "in Christ" (v. 2). This was more important than their biological family, or city, or ethnic origin.

Paul ends his greeting with the familiar "grace and peace" (v. 2) upon the Colossians. This phrase is not a throw-away line. The grace of God enabled Paul to be an apostle and helps believers today to treat one another as family—brothers and sisters—in Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Take time to think about the people in your church. Do you view them as family? What might it look like if we lived out this aspect of New Testament teaching? When we accept Christ as Savior, God calls us into a new family. Pray that God will give you the ability to recognize and appreciate the true unity believers have with one another.

PRAY WITH US

We'd like to start the month by praying for Moody's faculty in the Pastoral Studies department: Craig Hendrickson, John Koessler, Laurie Norris, Pamela MacRae, and Winfred Neely. We praise God for their wonderful ministry to students!

We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you.

Colossians 1:3

THURSDAY
MAY

2

Partners Through Prayer

As a junior high school student, I received a letter from an elderly woman in my home church. She wrote that she could not do much physically any longer, so she saw her primary ministry as prayer. She wrote to let me know that she would be praying for me daily for the rest of her life.

Paul similarly encouraged the Colossian church by affirming that he and Timothy, “always thank God . . . when we pray for you” (v. 3). He thanked God that the Colossians had genuinely embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ, evidenced in their faith, love, and hope. In this passage, Paul changed the order these virtues are usually mentioned in the New Testament. He affirmed that their faith in Christ and their love for all the believers was grounded in hope (v. 5). It was this hope of an eternity with Christ “stored up for you in heaven” that motivated their changed lives (v. 5).

Paul made another point in this opening prayer. He declared that the message they believed was the “true message of the gospel” (v. 5). There were false teachers in Colossae who had caused doubt in the minds of believers. Paul dispelled these doubts with two key points. First, the gospel message they received was “bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world” (v. 6). It was the same message that Christ followers believed everywhere. Second, it was taught to them by a faithful minister of Jesus Christ, Epaphras (v. 7).

The Colossians could be encouraged, Paul was praying for them and they were a part of God’s work throughout the world. Just as the gospel was “bearing fruit” and “growing” throughout the world, it was also bearing fruit and growing in them. The gospel, then and now, creates a community marked by faith, hope, and love.

APPLY THE WORD

Is there someone you could encourage today by praying for them? Let them know you are praying! This is one tangible way we can strengthen each other’s faith. Sometimes we need to be reminded of the “hope stored up” for us in heaven to keep our focus on Christ. Your words of encouragement may have a powerful impact on others.

PRAY WITH US

Sam Choy, chief marketing officer, welcomes your prayers for his leadership at Moody Bible Institute in providing effective communication with our friends and donors, with the Moody community on our two campuses, as well as with the public at large.

FRIDAY
MAY

3

I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

Philippians 3:8

Knowing God

Since 1995, Oxford University Press has been publishing a series of books called *A Very Short Introduction*. The purpose of this series is to provide readers with an overview of an entire complex subject in a very short book. The series has been quite successful with over 600 titles, ranging from introductions to animal behavior to the philosophy of Aristotle.

In a sense, today's passage contains Paul's very short introduction to the Christian life. Paul here begins with a prayer for the Colossians that runs through verse 14. In the opening of this prayer, he describes a pattern of life that he prays is true for his readers. This pattern has three elements to it. First, he asks that God would "fill you with the knowledge of his will" (v. 9). This "knowledge" is not a special knowledge for direction in one's personal life but a deep understanding of who Christ is and what He has done.

Second, this knowledge should be paired with wisdom, the skill to apply knowledge to life (v. 9). Knowledge and wisdom lead to a changed life that pleases the Lord and bears fruit (v. 10). Finally, the obedient, fruit-bearing life enables us to continue "growing in the knowledge of God" (v. 10).

This is a bit of a paradox. Paul had prayed that the church would grow in the knowledge of God, so that they could lead a changed life, so that they could grow in the knowledge of God. In the words of one commentator, "Understanding will fuel holiness; holiness will deepen understanding." Knowing God more deeply enables us to live faithfully, and living faithfully helps us to know God more deeply. This kind of life produces "endurance and patience" (v. 11). These God-given virtues enable a believer to persevere even in difficult circumstances or with difficult people.

APPLY THE WORD

We often pray for the health and general well-being of those we care about. While these concerns are important and deserve our prayers, Paul has modeled for us another kind of request. Take some time today and pray for someone in your life to grow in their knowledge God. To know God and be known by Him is God's deepest desire for us.

PRAY WITH US

Would you pray for Dr. Heather Shalley who serves as interim VP of Student Enrollment Services? Ask the Lord to guide and encourage her in her new role at Moody, as she builds her team and helps students with a vision for ministry find their place at MBI.

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

Colossians 1:13

SATURDAY
MAY

4

Free and Forgiven

Celebrated children’s television host Fred Rogers was also an ordained Presbyterian minister. When he was dying of stomach cancer, he often read Matthew 25 where Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and the goats. “Am I a sheep?” he would ask his wife, Joanne. She would reply, “Fred, if anyone is a sheep, then you are.”

Sometimes it can be difficult to believe that we are fully accepted by God. As Paul finishes his prayer to the Colossians, he celebrates this important truth. Paul affirms that it is not our efforts, but God “who has qualified you to share in the kingdom of his holy people” (v. 12). We have been qualified to share in this inheritance, not because we measured up to a particular standard or because we have fulfilled all the requirements but because of what God has done for us in Christ.

Paul echoes language from Israel’s deliverance from Egypt when he describes the salvation Christ achieved. Just as Israel was enslaved to a foreign kingdom and then redeemed through the mighty acts of God and brought to the Promised Land, we too have been redeemed from the “dominion of darkness” and “brought into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (v. 13).

Paul concludes his prayer by affirming these life-changing truths. We have been redeemed (v. 14). Imagine the joy a slave would have upon being released! That is the image here. This redemption is nothing less than the “forgiveness of sins” (v. 14). Sin, which once held us under its power, has now been broken. Nothing stands between us and God. No wonder Paul encourages the Colossians to give “joyful thanks to the Father” (v. 12).

APPLY THE WORD

The Bible teaches that Christ died for our sin and that His death was vindicated in His resurrection from the dead. If you trust in the work of Christ through repentance and faith, you are forgiven and have assurance of an eternity with God. If you have not yet put your faith in Christ, today is the day to turn to Him.

PRAY WITH US

Pray for our Admissions department staff who work diligently year-round counseling prospective students and processing hundreds of applications. Chelten Carter, Deborah Moreno, Christopher Toland, and Elizabeth Powell are in our prayers today.

SUNDAY
MAY

5

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

Colossians 1:15

Jesus the Creator

John Calvin once declared, “There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice.” One of the fundamental beliefs in the Bible is that the world is not the result of chance, but rather that God is the Creator of all things. This belief leads to a sense of purpose in our lives.

In today’s reading, the apostle Paul clarifies that God the Father was not the only member of the Trinity involved in creation. All things were created through Jesus and for Him (v. 16): blades of grass, as well as black holes, mountains and forests, seraphim and cherubim. This truth is a part of Paul’s larger point of exalting Jesus. As many passages in the Gospels affirm, Jesus was fully human. But while humans are created *in* the image of God, Paul declares that Jesus *is* the image of God. We can know what God is like through Jesus.

Paul also declares that Jesus is the “firstborn over all creation” (v. 15). Some have struggled with this phrase because it makes it sound like Jesus was created by God. This false teaching goes back to Arius in the fourth century. While the term “firstborn” can mean someone who was born first, it can also denote a position of authority. For example, God said to David, “I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth” (Ps. 89:27). Paul uses the term in a similar way here. Jesus holds the position of highest authority over all creation.

We all, whether we acknowledge it or not, owe our very existence to Christ. He is the one by whom and for whom we were created, and He is the one who continually sustains our lives (v. 17).

APPLY THE WORD

In the grind of daily life, it is easy for us to overlook the wonder of creation. Take some time today to give thanks that “all things have been created through him and for him” (v. 16). Even more, reflect on the marvelous truth that not only were you created by Christ but He also upholds your life each moment of the day.

PRAY WITH US

Today, as we continue to lift up in prayer the Admissions staff, thank God for the service of Jacob Stueckemann, Jacqueline Haywood, Lucas Manning, and Luci Frerichs Parrish. They are an integral part of Moody education.

He is the head of the body, the church . . . so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Colossians 1:18

The Head of the Church

While there have always been famous people, the modern world has taken fame to a new level. Outlets like *People* magazine and TMZ encourage us to care about every detail of celebrities' workout routines, diets, and vacations. Sociologists use terms like "celebrity culture" to describe the obsessive attention given to the lives of public figures.

Unfortunately, this culture of creating celebrities can even seep into the church. It can be easy for us to elevate famous pastors and church leaders. While God has gifted people to serve in leadership in the church, the church has only one true leader. In the concluding section of his celebration of Jesus, the apostle Paul proclaims Jesus as the "head of the body, the church" (v. 18).

It is possible that Paul was subtly confronting false teachers, who had

taken upon themselves too much authority. If so, Paul confronts their behavior by affirming the supreme authority of Jesus. This authority is based on three central truths: (1) Jesus rose from the dead. In His resurrection, Jesus serves as the assurance, or first-fruits, of the resurrection of all believers (v. 18). (2) Jesus is God. The fullness of divinity dwells in Him. We can know what God is like. He is revealed to us in Jesus (v. 19). (3) Through His sacrificial death, Jesus made possible the reconciliation between a fallen world and God (v. 20). Jesus reveals to us that God loves us and is even willing to pay a great personal cost to make a relationship with Him possible.

Jesus is the head of the church not because He has published a lot of books or because He has a large social media presence but because of who He is and what He has done.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul told the Corinthian church that "what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5). These words reflect the heart of ministry pleasing to God. Thank the Lord that the church does not depend upon savvy leaders for success. All our dependence is upon the risen Savior!

PRAY WITH US

In conclusion of our prayers for the Admissions staff, please add Randle Bishop, Reichert Zalameda, Ryan Heinsch, and Tony Ferreira to your prayer list. May their interaction with future and current students be effective, joyful, and beneficial to all.

TUESDAY
MAY

7

He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

Colossians 1:22

The Hope of the Gospel

“I now pronounce you husband and wife!” In the right context and spoken by the right person, these are beautiful and powerful words. Philosopher J. L. Austin calls this type of statement a “speech-act.” That is, in the speaking of certain words, an action is taking place. With this statement, the bride and groom, who were two separate people before, now have become one—a married couple.

In today’s passage, Paul reflects on the major change of status that the Colossian believers have undergone. They used to be in a precarious position before God. They were alienated from Him and lived as His enemies. This status was reinforced by their wrong thinking and evil behavior (v. 21). Yet, all has changed because of what Christ has done.

Paul declares that we are no longer enemies of God because “he has

reconciled you” (v. 22). On our own, we would stand before God condemned. But Christ died to present us to God “holy,” “without blemish,” and, most importantly, “free from accusation” (v. 22)!

Christ’s death on the cross and His resurrection made our salvation and justification possible, but there is still an important part for us to play. Paul’s argument leads up to the *if* in verse 23: “*if you continue in your faith.*” Paul strongly encourages believers to root themselves in the faith and hope of the gospel in order to persevere to the end. Commentator Doug Moo puts it this way: “God does, indeed, by His grace and through His Spirit, work to preserve His people so that they will be vindicated in the judgment; but, at the same time, God’s people are responsible to persevere in their faith if they expect to see that vindication.”

APPLY THE WORD

Many Christians still have a dread of the final judgment and think that God will bring up every wrong they have committed. But this passage tells us that in Christ, we will be presented as “without blemish” and “free from accusation”! Thank the Lord today for the forgiveness and hope we have because of what Christ has done.

PRAY WITH US

A Moody veteran, Dr. Timothy Arens, VP and dean of Student Life, has guided, encouraged, and prayed with thousands of students throughout his career at MBI. As we pray for Dr. Arens, please express gratitude to God for his faithful ministry.

God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Colossians 1:27

WEDNESDAY
MAY

8

Joy in Suffering

In early October 1536, William Tyndale was put to death for translating the Bible into the English language. He had tried to procure permission to translate it legally, but was rejected. He knew the risks of continuing the project, but did it anyway because he understood the value of God's Word. Tradition tells us his last words were, "Lord! Open the king of England's eyes," a final plea for the king to permit the translation of the Bible into a language the people could understand.

The apostle Paul also suffered for a cause he believed in. In our passage today, Paul declares that he is even able to "*rejoice* in what I am suffering for you" (v. 24). Paul understood his suffering was part of his larger mission to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the nations.

Commentators have puzzled over what Paul meant when he said that

through his suffering, he filled up "what is lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions" (v. 24). Paul was not saying that somehow the redemption Jesus provided for us was incomplete. Rather, he was thinking about the church as the "body of Christ." Therefore, when the church suffers, Christ also suffers. Paul understood his suffering as a part of the tribulations that must occur before the kingdom of God would come in its fullness.

Paul recognized that his suffering was connected to his mission. God had called him to proclaim the "mystery" that the Gentiles too could come to faith in the Jewish Messiah. In Christ, they could have the hope of the forgiveness of sins, Christ's presence with them now, and an eternity with Him (v. 27).

APPLY THE WORD

Before Paul's conversion, he was a zealous persecutor of the church. When the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus, Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). It is a great reminder that when the church suffers, Jesus suffers as well. Today, pray for those around the world who are suffering for the sake of the gospel.

PRAY WITH US

Ken Heulitt, chief financial officer, welcomes the prayers of the Moody family for his teams who oversee Moody's finances. Join him in thanking God for His provision through friends and donors of Moody Bible Institute.

THURSDAY
MAY

9

He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Colossians 1:28

Everyone Is Invited

The Core Club of New York City promises the good life. You can eat the best meals, meet interesting people, and have access to boats, airplanes, and hard-to-get theater tickets. However, this Club experience is not open to everyone. To join this exclusive group, you need to pay a \$50,000 initiation fee and a \$15,000 annual fee.

Some of the false teachers in Colossae claimed that salvation was available only to an elite few, to those who had special knowledge. The apostle Paul takes a radically different view. He uses the word “all” or “every” four times in verse 28. He affirms that he is called to preach King Jesus to every person and strive to present everyone “fully mature in Christ” (v. 28). He does not mean that he will preach to everyone in the entire world, but that he is willing to preach to each person he comes across, regardless of background or status.

The proclamation of the gospel includes both “admonishing and teaching” (v. 28). That is, correcting wrong beliefs and practices and teaching the right ones. The goal for Paul was to present all these people “fully mature in Christ” (v. 28). These were believers whose whole lives, in an undivided way, were oriented toward Christ.

This task required work! Paul confessed that he must “strenuously contend” to achieve this goal. But he also knew that he did not rely simply on his own effort. He knew God had called him to this work. In reality, it was Christ working in and through him that powered his ministry. He could work hard because he knew his labor was not in vain. Christ would empower him to accomplish His will.

APPLY THE WORD

It is easy to let fear or discouragement stop us from sharing the gospel with others. Paul declared that he was able to work toward this goal because Christ was working in him. Are there people the Lord has put in your life who need to hear what Christ has done for them? Pray that God will empower you to reach out to them.

PRAY WITH US

One of the teams headed by Ken Heulitt, Investment Accounting, is on our prayer list today: Andrea Palmer-Reed, Daphne Hussey, Marilou Logan, and Tonya Reed. Their dedication and integrity of service bring glory to God and bless us at Moody.

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 1:18

The Mystery of God

On June 25, 1967, the European Broadcasting Union produced the first television program to be broadcast globally live via satellite. Some 400–700 million people viewed the historic program titled *Our World*, with the Beatles performing their song “All You Need is Love.” The title of the song repeated in the chorus, “All you need is love / All you need is love / All you need is love / Love is all you need.”

While the apostle Paul certainly had a high regard for love, he would have changed the words of that lyric to something like, “All you need is Christ.” In today’s reading, Paul reminds his readers that he has “contended” and labored for the church (v. 1). The goal of his labor was that they “may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ” (v. 2).

Indeed, Jesus was a mystery to those in the Roman world. That God would

most fully reveal Himself as a crucified criminal must have sounded like nonsense to many of them. Yet, Paul is clear that it is in Jesus that “*all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden (v. 2). Jesus is the key to knowing and having a relationship with God and having unity in the church (v. 2).

Then, as today, many people were preaching a different message. Paul warns the Colossian church to be careful that “no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments” (v. 4). There are many arguments that may sound more impressive, or more logical, than the message of a crucified and risen Savior, but Paul reminds us that these impressive arguments are deceptive. It is only in Christ that true wisdom and true knowledge are found.

APPLY THE WORD

We may struggle with sharing the gospel because our culture makes the message seem implausible. You are not alone! The world has always rejected Christ and the message of the gospel. Paul faced insults and unbelief everywhere he went. Yet, he persevered. Thank the Lord that the incredible message of a crucified Savior is true.

PRAY WITH US

Concluding our prayer time for financial teams at Moody, please remember before the Lord our Investments department: Barry Cole, James Chadwick, Jeffery Knapp, and Joseph Ibatuan. We pray their service at Moody will always bring glory to God.

SATURDAY
MAY

11

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

Colossians 2:6

Receive and Live

Academic dissertations often have the most incomprehensible titles. In an effort to help, one website encouraged scholars to sum up their work in one easily understood sentence. The results were quite comic. For example, one complex dissertation titled “Using Zinc Finger Nucleases to Characterize the Regulation of c-MYC Transcription” was summed up in this way: “If you delete pieces of DNA, bad things happen.”

In today’s reading, the message of Colossians is summarized in two verses. In verse 6, Paul urges the church, “Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him.” Both halves of this verse are vital. Paul presents Jesus as the Jewish Messiah and the Lord of all. This is the truth that the Colossians “received.” The word *receive* as used here means to accept and commit to the apostolic teaching about Jesus. This is

what they had received from Epaphras (1:7–8): that Jesus is fully God and fully human, that He died for our sin, rose on the third day, and is coming again.

The second half of the verse is the natural response. Having received Jesus, they should continue to live in Him. Later in the book, Paul will give some practical ideas on what this life will look like. One commentator summarizes Paul’s message in this way, “Let Christ—and no other! for He is Lord—establish your values, guide your thinking, direct your conduct.”

Committing every part of your life to Christ will lead to a life that is not only well-grounded but also one that exhibits a deep thankfulness for what Christ has done (v. 7). When we fully grasp the wonder of God’s love, mercy, and grace, gratitude is the most natural response.

APPLY THE WORD

Today’s reading is such a great summary of the book of Colossians that it would be a good idea to write these verses on a card and place it where you can see it regularly. Memorize the verses and reflect on them during your prayer time. As the Psalmist declared, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Ps. 119:105).

PRAY WITH US

Today is Commencement at Moody Theological Seminary’s campus in Plymouth, Mich.! Dr. John Jelinek, vice president and dean of MTS, welcomes your prayers for the graduating students as they are stepping into new season of their ministry.

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

1 Peter 5:8

SUNDAY
MAY

12

Don't Be Taken Captive

Iker Casillas is arguably one of the greatest goalkeepers to have played the game of soccer. In the 2013–2014 playoffs in Spain, Casillas became the first goalkeeper in history not to allow a goal for the entire eight-game tournament. That level of perfection takes constant vigilance. You cannot take your eyes off the game for a moment.

In today's passage, Paul warned the Colossian church to be on guard, to keep their eyes on the game. Paul was concerned that they would be taken captive by "hollow and deceptive philosophy" (v. 8). Paul didn't mean that someone would literally imprison them. Rather, his concern was for something far more dangerous. There were false teachers who wanted to entrap the Colossians in ways of thinking and living that were opposed to the gospel they had received. That same threat is certainly true today.

The problem with false teaching is that it "depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ" (v. 8). This philosophy sounds enticing. It is based on the best human reasoning and is empowered by spiritual forces. But no matter how attractive it may appear, it cannot compare to the message we have heard from Christ.

Paul reminded the church that Jesus is God in the flesh (v. 9). The message about Christ they had received was from a far greater authority than any "human tradition." Even more, they knew the power of Christ first-hand. Once you have come to know who Jesus is and what He has done, there is no reason to look anywhere else for meaning or purpose in life. Paul exhorted the church as if saying, "Stop looking around to other beliefs and ways of life, everything you need is found in Christ."

APPLY THE WORD

Just like the Colossian church, it is tempting for us to look to human tradition to tell us how to think and what to believe. It can be easy to agree with the surrounding culture that the best life is found by pursuing comfort, ease, and safety. Paul warns us to find our values and priorities by keeping our focus on Christ, not on the world around us.

PRAY WITH US

Set aside some time for the next two days to pray for Moody Radio's WMBI in Chicago. Today, please remember Alexandra Domercant, Desiree Owen, Diana Berryman, and Hannah Pflederer, and praise God for all the skills they give to Christian radio.

MONDAY
MAY

13

*If we died with Christ, we believe
that we will also live with him.*

Romans 6:8

Alive in Christ: Part 1

“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players.” This line from William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* has staying power because of the strength of metaphor. Metaphor is one of the most potent ways to communicate an idea. As one writer explains, a “metaphor consists in bringing two sets of ideas close together, close enough for a spark to jump, but not too close so that the spark, in jumping, illuminates . . . the whole area around.”

Paul uses five different metaphors to describe what happens when a person comes to faith in Christ. His description is so detailed because he is countering false teachers who claimed that to grow as a Christian and subdue your sinful nature, you had to practice all kinds of strict rules and regulations. They emphasized not what Christ had done, but what we should do.

To refute these false teachers, Paul says, “your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ” (v. 11). The first metaphor is circumcision, a removal of flesh. Paul applies this idea to the work Christ has accomplished in us. Our old nature is removed when we come to faith in Christ.

In verse 12, Paul shifts to the second metaphor of baptism. Just as in baptism one goes under the water and comes back out, so also in Christ we die to our sinful nature and raised to a new life. In other words, the Christian life is not about following strict rules to attain salvation but about our identification with Christ. He has won the victory for us! Tomorrow we will continue our study of these powerful metaphors.

APPLY THE WORD

It can be easy to believe that spirituality consists in following a long list of rules: read the Bible, pray, volunteer in church, give generously, fast, or attend Christian events. While these are all good things, Paul reminds us that we have victory over our sinful nature because of what Christ has done for us. Our faith is in Him, not in our good works.

PRAY WITH US

WMBI’s Matthew McNeilly, Jon Hemmer, Jonathan Renke, Karl Clauson, and Norma Malave bring a wealth of experience and creativity to Moody Radio’s programming. Your prayer support will be an encouragement as well as an inspiration for them today.

*God made you alive with Christ.
He forgave us all our sins.*

Colossians 2:13

TUESDAY
MAY

14

Alive in Christ: Part 2

In November 2018, the Federal Reserve reported that student debt in the United States had reached an all-time high, surpassing 1.5 trillion dollars. This incredible level of debt represents an enormous burden upon today's college graduates. It often prevents them from home ownership or from being able to have savings to deal with life's emergencies.

Today, we continue to look at the five metaphors Paul uses to illustrate what happens to someone who comes to faith in Christ. In verse 13, Paul declares that Jesus “forgave all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness.” He pictures our sin as having run up a debt with God. Unlike a student loan, we could never hope to repay this debt. Imagine the feeling of relief students would have if all their loans were forgiven. How much more grateful should we be that Christ paid our debt by “nailing it to a cross” (v. 14)!

Another metaphor Paul uses is that of death: we were “dead in our sins” (v. 13). In a sense, this is more than a metaphor, we really were spiritually dead. But in Christ, “God made you alive” (v. 13), an act of creation that rivals God breathing life into Adam in Genesis 2.

The final metaphor in this rich passage is found in verse 15. Paul describes a Roman triumphal procession. When Rome defeated an enemy, their army would march back home in triumph. At the end of the parade, they would include prisoners of war. Leaders and defeated generals would be dragged out in front of the Roman crowds to be shamed and mocked. Paul notes that is exactly what Jesus did to hostile spiritual forces on the cross, He “made a public spectacle of them” (v. 15). Satan has been defeated!

APPLY THE WORD

In this rich passage, Paul celebrates the fact that we have been (1) circumcised by Christ; (2) buried and raised with Him in baptism; (3) made alive in Him, no longer dead in our sins; (4) freed from our spiritual debt; and (5) victorious over the Enemy. Thank God today for all that He has accomplished for you in Christ.

PRAY WITH US

As final exams begin today, join us in prayer for Moody students in the undergraduate school. Pray for stamina during this intense time, and as they will leave campus for summer break soon, we ask for God's protection and guidance.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Eric C. Redmond, Associate Professor of Bible



Is God ever ashamed of my depression?

A To speak of the Lord Jesus being “ashamed” of you is to suggest that there might be something you are *doing* that is displeasing or embarrassing to God, or that you are not living up to God’s standard by intentional choice. Clinically speaking, depression comes about not so much by our choices, but by factors such as our genetics. Depression sometimes runs in families. Biochemistry, personality, and environmental factors also may contribute to depression. These are all things we do not choose.

The Bible gives us an example of a depressed individual. The writer of Psalm 88 begins the psalm confessing, “Day and night I cry out to you” (v. 1), and he ends the psalm saying, “Darkness is my closest friend” (v. 18). Throughout the psalm, he declares that he is “overwhelmed with troubles” (v. 3), “without strength” (v. 4), his “eyes are dim with grief” (v. 9), and he has “terrors” and “despair” (v. 15). Yet we can’t say that God disapproves of the state of the psalmist. Instead, the Lord had the words composed into a song and placed into the book of Psalms by the collaborative efforts of the Sons of Korah and Heman the Ezrahite,

songwriters and leaders of music in ancient Israel (1 Chron. 25:1–6; Pss. 42, 44–49, 84–85).

When Israel sang this psalm in worship, they expressed the feelings of depression. The Lord brought these words for us as part of the inspired Word of God—as part of *His* speaking to us. These words, though difficult, are profitable for Christian living (2 Tim. 3:16–17). The presence of this psalm in the canon of Scripture reveals that (1) God’s people have struggled with depression, (2) they have taken their depressed emotions to the Lord in prayer for help, hope, and mercy, (3) the Lord received their depressed cries as an expression of loving God with their heart, soul, mind, and strength. No, God is not ashamed of your depression. He loves you fully and eternally even while you, like the psalmist, are yet in the midst of depression.

The only embarrassment for a depressed soul might be to miss obtaining help, when the Lord has made available many resources. If you are depressed, you should talk about your depression to a member of your church’s pastoral staff and seek the counsel of a licensed therapist. The pastoral staff member will walk with you through spiritual matters. The professional therapist, gifted by the Lord with knowledge of the sciences

Does Jesus forgive us every time we ask for forgiveness, even if we commit the same sin over and over?

of the brain and emotions, will discern factors contributing to your depressed feelings and guide you with the wisdom needed to manage them. Both pastoral care and mental health experts are God's grace toward those in need of help.

Q We all sin, but after asking Jesus for forgiveness for our sins, what if we then turn around and commit that exact sin the next day or a week later and ask for forgiveness again? Does Jesus forgive us every time we ask for forgiveness, even if we commit the same sin over and over?

A The great news of the gospel is that Jesus died to save and redeem us, once and for all (Rom. 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18)! He died "for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28; see also Luke 1:77; Col. 1:14). The same grace that provides salvation remains in force to forgive us and sanctify us when we sin in this world as believers, for sin cannot outpace God's grace toward us: "Where sin increased, grace increased all the more . . . so also grace might reign" (Rom. 5:20–21).

Yet, the repetition of sin is much more of a reality in our lives than we think. Because we tend to look at our more visible sins, we can miss our continued lack of victory over anxiety, wrath,

pride, gossip, greed, discontent, grumbling, lack of self-control, and the like. We need to go to the Lord repeatedly to confess our failure to overcome these sins. We also need to invite mature believers to join us in our personal efforts to defeat these sins.

Q One of my Bible versions translates the Matthew 18:21–35 teaching on forgiveness to say we should forgive 77 times, the other says 490 times. Which is correct?

A The number in Matthew 18:22 is difficult to translate. It appears to be a direct reference to Genesis 4:24. In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the very same words of Matthew 18:22 are found in Genesis 4:24. In the Genesis verse, the Hebrew words translated into Greek mean 77. That's why, in contrast to the older translations, more recent translations now render the number as 77.

Regardless of the exact number, we should heed the point made by Jesus: Our forgiving of another for a personal offense must be limitless. This is the true measure of forgiveness. God the King reminds us that we who are in debt beyond our ability to pay must be ready and willing to forgive others.

WEDNESDAY
MAY

15

*They have lost connection with the head,
from whom the whole body . . . grows
as God causes it to grow.*

Colossians 2:19

Focus on Christ

In his masterpiece *The Screwtape Letters*, C. S. Lewis writes fictional letters from a senior demon to a junior one with advice on how best to lead a young Christian astray. Shortly after the young Christian’s conversion, the senior demon gives this advice, “All extremes, except extreme devotion to the Enemy are to be encouraged.” That is, the junior demon should encourage the man to spend time in extreme devotional practices, or in self-denial, anything as long as it takes the focus off Christ.

In today’s passage, the apostle Paul deals with this very issue. We do not know exactly what the false teaching in Colossae was, but it seems to have been some blend of Jewish and Greco-Roman religious practices. These false teachers were claiming that if the Colossian believers really wanted to be spiritual, they needed to follow dietary

laws, celebrate on appropriate days, and engage in the worship of angelic beings. They claimed to have insider knowledge received from visions on how to be spiritual (v. 18).

Paul exhorts the Colossian believers not to let these false teachers sway them. Claiming to have some kind of special knowledge on how to be connected with God, they were prideful, and their ideas came from an “unspiritual mind” (v. 18). The core issue was that with all of their rules and visions, they had “lost connection with the head” (v. 19). Paul knew that the only way to really grow as a Christian was through being connected to our Savior. These teachers took the focus off Christ and put it on following their own visions and rules. Paul advises the Colossians to consider the source of their teaching. This teaching was rooted in false spirituality.

APPLY THE WORD

It’s tempting to reduce spiritual life to a set of rules to follow. Many of us like rules because they give us a sense of control. While rules are often good, they can easily become a substitute for a genuine relationship with Christ and our dependence on Him. Evaluate your heart on this important issue. Is the gospel of Christ at the center of your life?

PRAY WITH US

Vice president of Moody Publishers, Paul Santhouse, will appreciate your prayer support for the teams he leads, praising God for the devotion and efforts of his staff to provide quality Christian materials with biblical insights.

*You are all children of God through faith,
for all of you who were baptized into Christ
have clothed yourselves with Christ.*

Galatians 3:26–27

THURSDAY
MAY

16

Freedom Through Christ

In March 2018, a Missouri man who had spent nearly four decades in prison was finally released. But after a couple of months of freedom, he walked into a restaurant, put his hand in his pocket, and demanded money asking the clerk to call the police. When asked why he staged the armed robbery, he explained, “I want to go back to jail.” After such a long time in prison, it was hard for him to imagine a different kind of life.

The Bible teaches that before we came to faith in Christ, we were slaves to sin and our fleshly desires. Once we embrace faith in Christ, we can be tempted to live as if we were still enslaved to our old masters. In chapter 2, Paul talks about false teachers who had infiltrated the church in Colossae. They were teaching that if the believers really wanted to be spiritual, they should follow strict rules concerning diet, purity laws, and worship.

This was a tempting message. Paul understood that such teaching could hold “an appearance of wisdom” (v. 23). Yet, he said it was foolish to go down that path because Christ died to free us from the “elemental spiritual forces” (v. 20), the demonic powers which Christ defeated and triumphed over on the cross (v. 15).

Not only does this works-based false teaching encouraged believers to live as if they were still enslaved to the world, it also did not produce desired results. This teaching lacked “any value in restraining sensual indulgence” (v. 23). In the words of Jesus, these false teachers, “worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules” (Mark. 7:7). Paul points again and again right to the gospel—we died and were raised with Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Where do you go for advice? We need to be careful regarding who we ask for spiritual counsel. The Colossians listened to false teachers. Today, it is easy for us to get advice from sources like self-help books or talk shows. We need to evaluate all teaching against the standard of God’s Word. Ask God to help you listen to Him and His Word.

PRAY WITH US

Still keeping Moody Publishers in our prayers, thank the Lord for Duane Koenig, Gregory Miller, and Michael Davis who oversee business operations, managing the website, contracts, and subscription rights. May their work continue to glorify the Lord!

FRIDAY
MAY

17

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

Colossians 3:1

Set on Things Above

Critics have often argued that Christianity itself is just a form of escapism. “Christians are so heavenly minded, they are of no earthly good,” they quip. C. S. Lewis argued the opposite. He pointed out that the Christians in history who have done the most good have been heavenly minded. “Aim at Heaven and you will get earth ‘thrown in’: aim at earth and you will get neither,” he declared.

In today’s reading, Paul makes the same point. The false teachers of that time had been promoting the idea that to be spiritual one had to participate in ascetic practices that focused on self-denial. Paul gives an alternative vision. He says that life in Christ is more than what they could see with their eyes or touch with their hands.

Instead, Paul urges the church to “set your hearts on things above” (v. 1). This

command is so important that he repeats it in verse 2. Paul wants the Colossian church to focus on the reality that Jesus is “seated at the right hand of God” (v. 1). He is risen! That reality should be our guidepost for thinking and living. As one commentator puts it, we accomplish this “by deliberately and daily committing ourselves to the values of the heavenly kingdom and living out those values.”

In addition to these precious truths, Paul reminds us that because we have died and been raised with Christ spiritually, our real life is now “hidden with Christ in God” (v. 3). Even though we may look just like everyone else around us, our status as co-heirs with Christ is veiled. Our hope is that one day, when Christ returns, what is hidden now will be revealed. These truths will sustain us for the long haul in life and ministry, not the petty rules and regulations offered by the false teachers.

APPLY THE WORD

What are you focusing on today? In the midst of work, family commitments, and the noise of advertising and politics, it can be hard to keep your mind on “things above” (v. 2). Reflect today on the vision of the risen Savior in Revelation 1:12–18. Give thanks that Jesus is “alive for ever and ever!” (Rev. 1:18).

PRAY WITH US

Today we invite you to pray for Moody’s board of trustees. Let’s ask the Lord to bless their time together, as they meet, with fruitful discussion, wise discernment, and sound judgment in leading Moody Bible Institute.

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

SATURDAY
MAY

18

Dying to Self

In January, Netflix released a special featuring Marie Kondo, who urged home owners to “tidy” by getting rid of excess clothing, books, and household items. Her best-selling book and the televised special received so much attention that many people began emptying closets and drawers, trying to live a new life less cluttered by possessions.

After describing our new life in Christ, Paul points out the implications that truth should have in our life. Here he explains that there are certain aspects of our old life that we must let go. The language Paul uses is quite drastic, “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature” (v. 5). There can be no half-measures. We cannot continue to entertain sinful behavior.

In these verses Paul specifically mentions two kinds of sinful behavior:

sexual sins and greed. For the believer, these sins are forms of “idolatry,” putting our earthly desires above God (v. 5). Jesus made it clear, “You cannot serve both God and money” (Matt. 6:24). It is because of these kinds of sins that “the wrath of God is coming” (Col. 3:6).

We are able to put our earthly desires to death because, in Christ, we have already died to that way of life (Col. 2:20). When Jesus died on the cross, He defeated sin and its ability to enslave us. Because we live in a fallen world, we remain surrounded by sin, and we may be sorely tempted by various sins. That is why Paul gives this warning. Paul’s overall message to us is this: “Live in the victory that Jesus has achieved for you!” We used to walk in self-destructive ways, but now, in Christ, freedom is possible.

APPLY THE WORD

Dying to old habits can be painful. Paul’s strong message is as relevant to us today as it was in his day. We can become so comfortable with the sins in our life that we don’t view them seriously. Take an inventory of your life. Are there sins you have to “put to death”? Ask God to help you recognize areas where He wants to work in you.

PRAY WITH US

It’s Commencement on our Chicago campus today! And a first one for Dr. Mark Jobe as president of Moody Bible Institute. Please say a prayer for Dr. Jobe as he hands out diplomas to graduating students. May it be a glorious occasion for everybody present.

SUNDAY
MAY

19

*The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life,
but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence.*

Proverbs 10:11

Off with the Old

Driving on a congested highway can be a severe test of patience. Road rage is an all too common occurrence! When confronted with a slow driver, tailgating, or someone aggressively cutting across traffic, our emotions may quickly escalate. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, deaths caused by road rage increased 500 percent between 2006 and 2015. Anger and rage are a part of our sinful nature.

In Colossians 2:11, Paul reminded the church, “In him [Christ], you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by hands.” In today’s reading, Paul picks up on this metaphor. Paul declares that an old self needs to be removed from the life of a believer. This includes removing from our life sins of the tongue: “anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language” (3:8).

The Bible regularly reminds us how powerful and dangerous our tongues can be. With our tongue we are able to tear people apart. A church can even be destroyed through lies and deception (v. 9). The apostle James tells us that apart from the influence of the Spirit, “The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (James 3:6). But that old part of us has died with Christ and we do not need to live under its power any longer.

Paul encourages us to “put on the new self” of a transformed life (v. 9). As we live out our new life in Christ, the old dividing lines of Jew and Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, or even slave and free do not matter (v. 11).

APPLY THE WORD

We often do not take our words seriously. On social media now, we can be quick to speak, pronounce judgments, or pass along gossip. Take a moment today to reflect on your speech. Pray that the Lord will help you put to death destructive habits of the tongue that hinder your spiritual life and can damage those around you.

PRAY WITH US

Mark Wagner, chief operating officer, invites you to thank God in prayer for His generous provision for Moody Bible Institute through our community of friends throughout the years. May we honor God with good stewardship of all the resources!

We love because he first loved us.

1 John 4:19

MONDAY
MAY

20

Chosen, Holy, and Loved

Jesus told the parable of a servant who owed a king the equivalent of millions of dollars. In a lavish act of mercy, the king forgave the servant's debt. Soon afterward, the forgiven servant encountered a fellow servant who owed *him* the equivalent of a few thousand dollars. When asked for more time to repay the loan, the forgiven servant refused and threw the man in prison. Upon hearing this, the king rebuked the forgiven servant and had *him* condemned (Matt. 18:21-35).

The apostle Paul reminds the Colossians that they were “God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved” (v. 12). They did not earn this distinction. God chose them, made them holy, and loved them deeply. And God has extended this same love to us! Understanding this reality should transform our understanding of who we are in Christ and how we relate to other people.

Paul articulates what this change should look like. We should be marked by “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (v. 12). The need for “gentleness and patience” serves as a reminder to us that there will be people in our church community who are very different from us and who need our understanding and patience. It is one thing to say there is no Gentile or Jew, barbarian or Scythian in Christ (v. 11), it is another thing to try to live in community with others who are so different.

Because God calls people of different temperaments, ethnicities, and social standing to be a part of His Church, we all have to “bear with each other” (v. 13). We should be able to do this because of the transformative power of love and forgiveness. “Forgive as the Lord forgave you,” Paul reminds us. We are able to love others, because Christ loved us.

APPLY THE WORD

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, “The person who loves their dream of community will destroy the community, but the person who loves those around them will create community.” Are you at times frustrated by your church community? Today, thank the Lord for your church and ask Him for more love to those He has brought into your life.

PRAY WITH US

Would you include in your prayers the Engineering Operations team: Al Campa, Cory Smith, Daniel Yoo, and Eric Rathbun? As this team maintains the physical structures of MBI’s campus—electrical, HVAC, plumbing—we pray they are strengthened spiritually.

TUESDAY
MAY

21

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Colossians 3:15

Unity Through Song

Game 3 of the 2018 World Series set a record of the longest game in series history at 18 innings. The only people who were on the field working for the entire game were the umpires. The home plate umpire squatted and made a judgment call on 561 pitches over seven and a half hours!

The apostle Paul urged the church at Colossae to allow the peace of Christ to “rule” in their hearts (v. 15). In any church, it can be easy for strife, tension, and division to rule. At times, it may seem that we need an official umpire to settle disagreements! Paul points us to a different way. He calls us to live in the peace that Christ achieved. Just as Jesus’ death and resurrection allowed us to have peace with God, we should also allow that kind of peace to rule among us.

The peace of Christ is a result of the “message of Christ” (v. 16). Paul paints

a beautiful picture of what it looks like when the message of Christ, that is the gospel, takes up residence in us. The church should be a place where the gospel is right at home. One of the ways this happens is through music. Paul directs the church to “teach and admonish one another . . . through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit” (v. 16).

Reformation leader Martin Luther said, “After theology I give to music the highest place and the greatest honor.” As the author of many hymns, he understood the power of music to teach truth about God. This is why Paul encouraged a church striving for unity, peace, and right doctrine to carefully attend to what they were singing. What we sing often becomes what we believe. Paul instructs us that whatever we do, we should “do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (v. 17).

APPLY THE WORD

How have songs or hymns influenced the way you think about or relate to God? In today’s passage, Paul shows us how powerful music can be to teach us truth about God. Musician Michael Card has recorded more than 37 albums, all with one goal, to teach the Bible. Take time to listen to God-inspired music today and be refreshed.

PRAY WITH US

Again, we lift up in prayer Engineering Operations staff—electricians, engineers, mechanics. Today, we thank the Father for the faithful service of Gerald Malozienc, Israel Ledee, Jamie Ixcaragua, and John Fraats.

*Submit to one another
out of reverence for Christ.*

Ephesians 5:21

WEDNESDAY
MAY

22

The Family Under Christ: Part 1

Most fairytales end with the prince marrying the princess and living “happily ever after.” What happens after the wedding is of no real interest to the story. We know that the real challenges, joys, sorrows, and adventures of a couple’s life together only begin on the wedding day.

Previously in chapter 3, Paul has reflected on the transformation that the gospel brings to human relationships. He teaches that in Christ, “there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised” (3:11). In today and tomorrow’s readings, he applies this new perspective to the most intimate relationships of any household. He instructs wives, husbands, children, parents, slaves and masters: “whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (3:17).

Paul called wives and husbands to live in ways that are both in line with

and counter to their culture. Wives were to submit to their husbands—in line with contemporary Greek and Roman thinking of that time. However, Paul’s admonition specifies voluntary submission in the context of our relationship with the Lord Jesus (v. 18). Husbands were called to “love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (v. 19). While there were many household codes in Greco-Roman culture, there was no parallel for the command for husbands to love their wives. This command goes beyond the culture norm. Husbands are to model the kind of self-sacrificial love Christ has for the church (see Eph. 5:25-33).

Paul also includes a charge for children and parents. He considers children to be full, responsible members of the church and commands them to obey their parents with an eye to pleasing the Lord (v. 19). Parents are not to domineer their children, but encourage them (v. 21).

APPLY THE WORD

Our home is an important place for us to live in Christ. One commentator reminds us, “The family is where, under the lordship of Christ . . . we first learn to work out the values of compassion, humility, gentleness and patience.” Reflect on some ways you can live out the love and gentleness of Christ to those nearest to you.

PRAY WITH US

Please commit to prayer the rest of the Engineering Operations team: Scott Schaeffer, Roger Vinlasaca, Thomas Drost, and Lauren Schmidt. This team’s behind-the-scenes work enables all the ministries of Moody and blesses all of us!

THURSDAY
MAY

23

The Son of Man . . . will reward each person according to what they have done.

Matthew 16:27

The Family Under Christ: Part 2

During the last couple of decades, many companies have switched from offices filled with cubicles to an open office concept. The idea behind the open office is that employees can collaborate more effectively and not feel isolated. Employers appreciate the accountability an open office brings. The design of the office is supposed to influence what happens in the workspace.

In today’s reading, Paul continues to describe how knowing Christ should transform the relationships in the household. Here he focuses specifically on the relationship between slaves and masters. Ancient households included more than just the nuclear family. They often included grandparents, unmarried aunts, and slaves. Although slaves were technically considered the property of their owners in Roman society, Paul chooses to address them directly (v. 22), treating them as responsible and valued members of the church.

Paul encourages slaves to “obey your earthly masters in everything” (v. 22). Two points stand out with this verse. Paul calls their owners “earthly masters,” with the implication that they have another master in heaven. Secondly, Paul urges their sincere obedience because they are really working for the Lord Jesus who sees them and will reward them (vv. 23–24). Jesus cares about the work they are doing and is honored by quality work done for Him.

Paul also addresses slave owners. He encourages them to treat slaves not as property but as fellow persons deserving just and fair treatment. Paul gives a stern warning, “Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs” (v. 25). Paul’s words in this passage apply to all workers who answer to an earthly authority. He reminds us to see ourselves as “working for the Lord” (v. 23). Each of us will give an account to the real “Master” in heaven (4:1).

APPLY THE WORD

John Calvin urged his congregation to live their lives *coram deo*, in the presence of God. As Christians, we should not need an open office to keep us accountable. Paul’s exhortations to Colossians are relevant in today’s workspace. Whether you are an employer or an employee, everything you do is done in the sight of God.

PRAY WITH US

From Moody student to Senior VP of Media, Greg Thornton’s life and ministry have been connected to and invested in Moody Bible Institute. Please express appreciation in prayer for Greg’s service and ask for God’s continued guidance for his life.

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:6

FRIDAY
MAY

24

Persevere in Prayer

Michael Phelps is the most decorated Olympian in history with twenty-eight medals, twenty-three of them gold. This success did not happen by accident. At the peak of his training regimen, he spent in the pool five to six hours a day, six days a week. In addition, he lifted weights three days a week. Such dedication to one's training is the hallmark of great Olympians.

The apostle Paul knew that success in the Christian life required dedication. In particular, Paul calls the church to “devote yourselves to prayer” (v. 2). Perseverance in prayer was essential for the church to succeed in living the transformed life that Paul described in his letter. Paul further elaborated on this theme by specifying how to pray: “being watchful and thankful” (v. 2).

The word *watchful* is often used in the New Testament to refer to the imminent return of Christ (Mt. 24:42;

Mk. 13:37; 1 Thess. 5:6). The hope of Christ's return motivates us to pray and gives our prayer a focus. Our prayer should flow from a sense of gratitude for all Christ has done for us.

In verses 3–4, Paul switched focus to ask the church to intercede for him. While “in chains” for the sake of the gospel, he asked for prayer that “God may open a door for our message” (v. 3). In whatever situation he found himself in, Paul prayed and looked for opportunities to share the gospel. The wording here is interesting, Paul prayed not for an open door for himself, but “for our message” (v. 3). He knew it was the message of the gospel that was most important, not the messenger. In fact, he asked for prayer to “proclaim it clearly, as I should” (v. 4). His desire was to proclaim the gospel clearly and accurately, not to share his own message.

APPLY THE WORD

Pray for God to open a door for you to share the gospel with your neighbor, coworker, or a relative. Ask for His help to clearly articulate the hope you have in Christ. For more information, see *A Field Guide for Everyday Mission: 30 Days and 101 Ways to Demonstrate the Gospel* (Moody Publishers), online or at a Christian bookstore.

PRAY WITH US

Would you focus your prayers today on Moody's Counseling Services staff: Gayla Gates, Holly Porter, and Stephen Brasel? Your prayer support will be an encouragement to them as they bring healing and encouragement to students who are hurting.

SATURDAY
MAY

25

*Teach us to number our days,
that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*

Psalms 90:12

Walk in Wisdom

Look before you leap. A stitch in time saves nine. A penny saved is a penny earned. These well-known proverbs help to pass down accumulated knowledge in ways that are easy for us to remember. Sayings like these are one way people communicate wisdom from one generation to the next, helping younger people navigate life well.

Paul knew that the young Colossian church needed God’s wisdom. He opened the letter with a prayer that God would “fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way” (1:9–10).

As Paul ends the letter, he returns to this important theme. The focus in our passage is on how the church relates to those outside the faith. Believers should avoid two pitfalls in their relationship

with the world: insulating themselves entirely from the world or assimilating with it so closely that there is no discernible difference. This relationship would involve making difficult choices as the church is facing each new situation.

Wisdom would help them make the best use of their time and their words. Paul encourages the church to “make the most of every opportunity” (v. 5). A new age had dawned with the resurrection of Jesus, and He could return at any moment. The church should live with this sense of urgency and mission. As Moses reminded Israel, “Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom” (Ps. 90:12). For Paul, making the most of every opportunity meant faithfully sharing the gospel. He exhorts the church to have winsome and engaging speech with those outside the faith. The goal is to live and act in such a way that people will have questions. When they do, be ready (v. 6)!

APPLY THE WORD

What about you? Have you ever felt like you missed an opportunity to share Christ? Did you look back and wished you had said or done something different? Pray that the Lord will help you “make the most of every opportunity” today. Ask Him to help you be sensitive to the opportunities and to act wisely when they come.

PRAY WITH US

Please pray for Janet Stiven, VP and general counsel, and for her team in the Legal department as they provide all the necessary expertise, research, and advice for the leadership team of Moody Bible Institute.

Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called “Today,” so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.

Hebrews 3:13

SUNDAY
MAY

26

Friendship in Ministry

At a time when traveling evangelists were looked upon with suspicion, Billy Graham determined to have integrity in his ministry. As a part of this decision, he crafted four rules that governed his conduct: (1) operate with financial transparency; (2) avoid even the appearance of sexual immorality; (3) avoid criticizing other pastors and churches; (4) be painstakingly honest in all publicity. He held himself accountable to a board of directors who publicly set his salary.

Paul also relied on other believers in his ministry. He had a large and diverse group of ministry partners who provided both encouragement and accountability for him in ministry. Many of them risked their lives by their close association with him.

In today’s reading, Paul mentions two of those associates, Tychicus and Onesimus. Tychicus was Paul’s letter-

bearer. In a world without a postal system, letters were carried by friends or couriers. But Tychicus was certainly more than just a courier. Paul says he will “tell you all the news about me” as a “dear brother, a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord” (v. 7). He would likely explain the details of Paul’s imprisonment and current ministry to the church. Tychicus was a close companion of Paul who traveled with him to Jerusalem, then was sent by Paul to Crete and Ephesus (Acts 20:4; Titus 3:12; 2 Tim. 4:12).

Onesimus was a runaway slave who had come to faith under Paul’s ministry. His former owner happened to be a part of the Colossian church. Paul let the church know that this former slave was also a dear brother, and now “one of you” (v. 9). Paul sent Onesimus back to his former owner along with another letter, which we now know as the Book of Philemon.

APPLY THE WORD

The apostle Paul’s life is a testimony of the importance of sharing one’s ministry. Paul had Barnabas, Tychicus, Timothy, Titus, and a host of associates to encourage him along the way. Do you have friends you consider partners in faith? Thank God for those with whom you can share ministry and who help you stay faithful to Jesus.

PRAY WITH US

Will you uphold in prayer Erubey Bautista, James Anderson, Rich McNeill, Steve Takushi, and Tim Canfield in the IT department? They ensure MBI ministries have all the programming, desktop, and software support for successful internet usage.

MONDAY
MAY

27

*Praise be to the God and Father of our
Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion
and the God of all comfort.*

2 Corinthians 1:3

Comfort in Ministry

In 1966, the *Palm Beach Post* ran a story on people's eating habits when they were stressed. In the story, the author coined the now familiar term "comfort food," which he defined as "food associated with the security of childhood, like mother's poached egg or famous chicken soup." There is security that comes from the familiar.

While Paul is known as the apostle to the Gentiles, he always had a heart for his own people (see Rom. 9:3). In today's reading, Paul sends greetings from three men who "are the only Jews among my co-workers for the kingdom of God" (v. 11). It may have been discouraging for Paul not to have a larger Jewish following. Yet, he declares that these three "have proved a great comfort to me" (v. 11).

Aristarchus had the unique privilege of being in chains with Paul (v. 11). He likely offered to join Paul in prison to

be of help to him. Aristarchus would continue with Paul in his later ministry (Acts 19:29) and may have journeyed with him all the way to Rome (Acts 27:2). Acts 15:37–39 records Paul and Barnabas's famous parting of ways. Mark had abandoned them on their first missionary journey. As they set out on their second trip, Paul did not want to bring Mark along, while Barnabas did. We do not know how, but by the time Paul wrote this letter, they reconciled. Mark would remain a trusted co-worker for the rest of Paul's life (2 Tim. 4:11). The Colossian church may have heard only about Mark's abandonment, so Paul gave an extra encouragement for them to "welcome him" (v. 10).

Jesus (who was also called Justus) was a common name in first century Judaism. Not much is known about the person Paul mentions here. He reminds us of the many anonymous Christians who helped to spread the gospel.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul confesses that he received a special comfort from key friends and ministry partners: Aristarchus, Mark, and Jesus. It can be easy to get discouraged and run down in ministry. Is there someone in your church who could use some encouragement or comfort this week? We all need community around us to persevere in faithful ministry.

PRAY WITH US

Jim Elliott, vice president of Stewardship, oversees planned giving, trusts, and the ministry of stewardship representatives across the country. He will appreciate your prayers for his department today.

*I want the men everywhere to pray,
lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.*

1 Timothy 2:8

TUESDAY
MAY

28

Prayer in Ministry

The United States Olympic committee ranked wrestling as the fifth most difficult sport out of sixty. Wrestling requires a unique combination of speed, strength, endurance, technique, confidence, and drive. Dan Gable, an Olympic gold medalist in the sport, was quoted as saying, “Once you’ve wrestled, everything else in life is easy.”

In today’s reading Paul continues to send greetings to the church at Colossae. Beginning in verse 12, he focuses on greetings from his Gentile coworkers. Epaphras founded the church in Colossae and served in a pastoral role there. Paul calls him a “servant of Christ Jesus,” a term he reserves elsewhere for himself and Timothy. Even though Epaphras was absent from Colossae, he was still hard at work for the church there. Paul lets the church know that he is “always wrestling in prayer for you” (v. 12).

Prayer also requires a great deal of effort, strength, and endurance. Epaphras was making every effort on behalf of his church through perseverance in prayer. Specifically, he prayed that the church would maintain its belief in the gospel and grow to maturity (v. 12). One can easily imagine the anguish Epaphras had over his church as it struggled with false teaching. His continued prayer was for the church to “stand firm” in that difficult season (v. 12).

Paul mentions greetings from Luke and Demas too. Luke is known to us as the author of the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts and was a regular traveling companion of Paul. In all his writings, Luke emphasized the importance of prayer (see Luke 11:2–8; 18:1–18; Acts 8:15–17). Perhaps, when writing about prayer, Luke had an example of Epaphras in mind.

APPLY THE WORD

Do you find it hard to stay focused while praying? Paul compares prayer to wrestling. It is a struggle and a battle, both with ourselves and the evil one. Be encouraged today that God hears your prayer and that your labor is not in vain. Like the persistent widow of Luke 18, we should “always pray and not give up” (v. 1).

PRAY WITH US

Moody Distance Learning brings the classroom to students in their homes, and today we pray for its Independent Studies team—Christian Martinsen and Lanna-Marie Enns—who are dedicated to excellence in education.

WEDNESDAY
MAY

29

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 3:14

Finishing Well

John Stephen Akhwari was a world-class marathon runner from Tanzania. In the 1968 Olympic Games, he had the chance to compete for his country. Nineteen kilometers into the race, John was caught in a group of runners jostling for position. He fell, dislocating his knee and injuring his shoulder. Despite these serious injuries, Akhwari continued the race, shuffling and limping toward the finish. At 3:25.27, he was the last athlete to cross the finish line over an hour after the winner. After the race a reporter asked why he had continued, he said, “My country did not send me 9,000 miles to start the race; they sent me 9,000 miles to finish the race.”

As Paul draws this letter to a close, he has a couple of requests for the Colossian church. First, he asks that his letter be sent to the church in Laodicea. Laodicea was about a three-hour walk from Colossae. Paul recognized that this

letter, which dealt with issues specific to the Colossian church, could also be useful to other churches. (This may be the beginning of the church creating a collection of Pauline letters.) Paul also asks that the Colossian church read the letter he had written to Laodicea. We do not know for certain which letter this was, but it is possible that he was referring to the letter we know as the Book of Ephesians.

Paul’s second request was to a man named Archippus: “See to it that you complete the ministry you have received from the Lord” (v. 17). While the specific ministry Paul refers to is unknown, clearly Paul knew the Lord had given Archippus a job to do and he needed to finish it well. The fact that this line of the letter would have been read to the whole church at Colossae would certainly serve as an extra incentive for Archippus to continue and complete this ministry.

APPLY THE WORD

Starting a new ministry can be really exciting. But all of us encounter setbacks or discouragements at some point. Paul reminds us that it’s important to finish well. In another letter he wrote to the church at Philippi, he says, “I press on toward to goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14).

PRAY WITH US

Keeping Moody Distance Learning in our prayers, we invite you to pray for its Product Development team—Kevin Mahaffy, Mary Oprea, Philip Brown, Richard Lin, and Sandra West—who design and provide technical support for online courses.

*I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge
and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.”*

Psalm 91:2

THURSDAY
MAY

30

Final Greeting

Hungarian painter Elmyr de Hory has become famous for painting high-quality forgeries. Over the course of his career, he forged works of Picasso, Matisse, Degas, and Modigliani. Around 1,000 of his forged paintings were sold to large art galleries all over the world. Once he was found out, his forgeries became appreciated as works of art in their own right. They now sell for over \$20,000 apiece. Ironically, there are now con artists producing fake de Hory forgeries!

As was the common custom in those days, Paul used a scribe to write his letter to the Colossian church. A professional scribe would have neater handwriting and would conserve the costly papyrus the letter was written on. To show that the letter was authentic, Paul added a final greeting in his own hand, as he did for his other letters (see 1 Cor. 16:21; Gal. 6:11; 2 Thess. 3:17).

Paul’s final command to the church is poignant: “remember my chains” (v. 18). This abrupt sentence functions in two ways. As one commentator put it, Paul’s wanted to “hold up his manacled wrists to impress the readers with his authority as a suffering apostle.” This graphic image of Paul’s willingness to suffer imprisonment for the sake of the gospel was a measure of his commitment. More important though was his desire for the church to pray for him. Just as he had labored in prayer for the church, he was asking the same of them in return. In this way, they would support one another.

Paul’s final note is one of blessing, “Grace be with you.” In one sense, the entire letter has been about grace, the grace that God has shown to us through the work of Christ.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul’s experience of being in chains for the gospel is not unique in the history of the church. Thousands of brothers and sisters in Christ around the world suffer the same fate today. Remember these dear believers in prayer. You can pray for the persecuted church with information from such ministries as *Voice of the Martyrs*.

PRAY WITH US

Today, please add to your prayer list the remaining Distance Learning team, Courseware Development: Alin Vrancila and Emanuel Padilla. Pray for inspiration and creativity from the Lord as they develop and teach new distance learning courses.

FRIDAY
MAY

31

In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.

Colossians 2:9–10

Living in Christ

The apostle Paul faced many setbacks in ministry. In 2 Corinthians, he describes some of the difficulties he endured: flogging, imprisonment, stoning, beatings, and shipwrecks, just to name a few (2 Cor. 11:23–28). At the climax of this list, he says he is daily concerned for all the churches (v. 28). When he heard about the false teaching at the church in Colossae, he was deeply alarmed by it. In some ways, we should be thankful for this false teaching because it prompted Paul to write this letter.

False teachers had infiltrated Colossae. They claimed that to be saved you needed more than simply Jesus. They propagated their own “special knowledge,” which included things like dietary laws, special rites, and the veneration of angels (Col. 2:16–20). To counter this, Paul set forth bold and profound teaching about the nature of Jesus.

Paul reminded the Colossians that Jesus is our Creator and Redeemer (1:15–23). There is no need to worship angels, because they too were created by Him (1:16). There is no reason to look to special rites, knowledge, or dietary laws to achieve redemption because it has been achieved by Him (1:21–23). In Jesus, “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (2:9). When you have seen Jesus, you have seen God. He is the only one who could make peace between us and God (2:13–15).

This truth about Jesus changes everything for us. Because He defeated the power of sin and death, we are called to “put to death” our sinful nature (3:5–11). Because of what Christ accomplished, Jews and Gentiles, slave and free, all people can be a part of the body of Christ. We now have the freedom to forgive and reconcile with one another (3:12–15). It’s a powerful witness to unbelievers (4:5–6).

APPLY THE WORD

Although written almost 2,000 years ago, Colossians is just as relevant and profound today. The gospel has the power to transform our lives and our communities. Let’s take Paul’s admonition to heart that “just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him” (2:6).

PRAY WITH US

As we come to the end of our prayer time this month, let’s thank the Lord for the powerful lessons from the book of Colossians. May we live in Christ with wisdom, prayer, and faith! Thank you for studying the Bible with us.



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