

FEBRUARY 2017

TODAY IN THE WORD™



The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

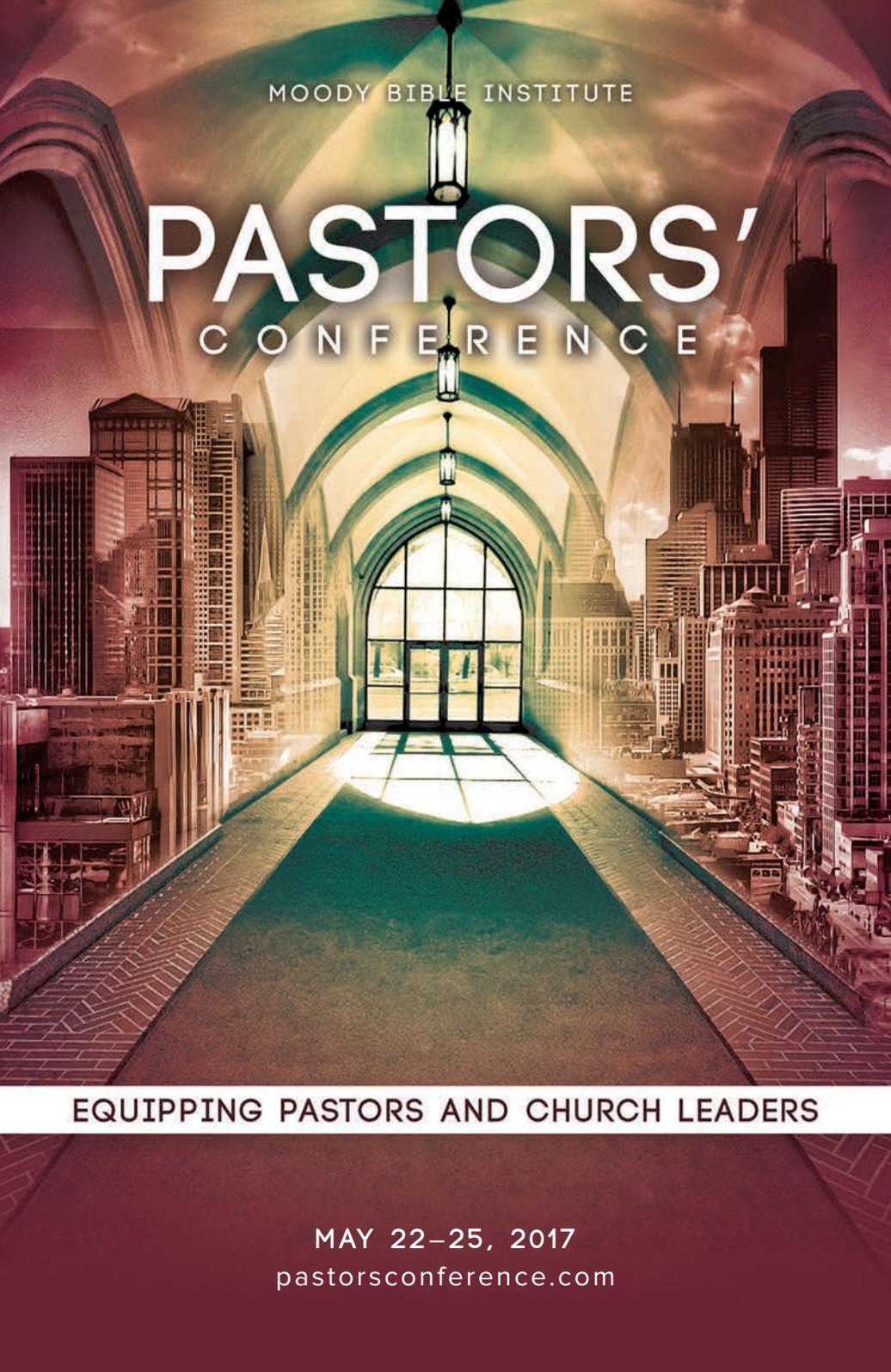
Galatians 5:22–23

GALATIANS: Freedom and Fruit of the Gospel

A devotional from



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TODAY WITH DR. PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Global Ministries

When Following God Gets Discouraging



One of Moody's early students was Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955). Mary's parents, Samuel and Patsy McLeod, were former slaves in

Mayesville, S.C. Everyone in the family worked picking cotton; Mary was the only one of their seventeen children to attend school. A missionary woman offered young Mary the opportunity to further her education at the Scotia Seminary in North Carolina and then at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago. She completed her studies at Moody in 1895, her heart set on being a missionary to Africa. Racial prejudice crushed Mary's dreams when a church board denied her application.

Mary was resolute in her desire to serve God. She went to Florida to teach in a missionary school and started her own school in Daytona Beach in 1904 with \$1.65 in her pocket. Above the doorway, she carved the name "Faith Hall." The school still exists today as Bethune-Cookman University.

Mary's efforts extended beyond education. She registered men and women to vote, standing up to threats by the Ku Klux Klan. She served by special appointment under

U.S. presidents and was a noted ambassador on behalf of African Americans. In 1953, one of Mary's lifelong dreams came true when she was sent to Africa for the presidential inauguration in Liberia.

Mary's life and accomplishments are examples of what God can do through someone willing to faithfully serve Him. But the victorious end of her story does not mean we should forget the difficult beginning and the closed doors she encountered. Sometimes you and I might feel discouraged in doing good. Like Mary, we may see our efforts to serve Him shut down. But in his letter to the Galatians, the apostle Paul writes, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (6:9–10).

Paul says that at God's appointed time, "we will reap a harvest" (v. 10). While we may never understand the whole story in our lifetime, we are still called to follow faithfully and serve humbly. May we, like Mary, resist discouragement, trust the harvest to God, and never become weary in doing good to serve others for His glory. ■

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by Dr. John Koessler

The Threefold Nature of the Law

One theme in the book of Galatians is the superiority of the gospel over the Mosaic Law. Paul summarizes his argument in Galatians 3:11: “Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because ‘the righteous will live by faith.’” Why, then, did God give the Law? To understand the answer, we need to understand its threefold nature.

First, God gave the Law to help us understand the nature of His holiness and our own unrighteousness. The Ten Commandments, originally given to Israel on Mount Sinai in Exodus 20 and then repeated in Deuteronomy 5, reveal the moral foundation for all God’s subsequent laws. Sometimes referred to as the moral law, the commandments do more than reveal God’s moral nature. When properly understood, they enable us to see our own sinfulness (cf. Matt. 5:21–30). In this way, the Law functions not only as a kind of guardian of morality but also as a signpost that points to our need for the righteousness only through Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:24).

The second dimension of the Law was ceremonial. This Law, revealed to Israel through Moses, included rites and regulations that anticipated the ministry and atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The author of the book of Hebrews

characterized it as a mere “shadow” of good things to come and explained: “For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship” (Heb. 10:1). The sacrifices and ceremonies of the Law of Moses were never intended to make the worshiper perfect. They pointed forward to the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which does take away our sins to make us truly righteous (Heb. 10:10; 1 Peter 3:18).

The Law also had a civil function. Some of the commands in the Old Testament were intended to regulate the community life of God’s people. Rules that dealt with slavery, divorce, or the kind of penalties to be meted out for various crimes were intended to order the culture of God’s people. These commands were not intended to be permanently binding on all people at all times (cf. Matt. 19:8).

The Mosaic Law was a path to salvation. Salvation is and always has been by grace and through faith. ■

FOR FURTHER STUDY

To learn more about the foundational moral law of God, read *Ten: How the Commandments Set Us Free* by Mark Mitchell (Discovery House).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Bruce Everhart

Bible Teaching, Fellowship, and Community at Moody

D. L. Moody, the evangelist and founder of Moody Bible Institute, is credited with the idea that has grown into one of our most beloved traditions. As the story goes, it was Mr. Moody's birthday and it was snowing, so he decided to cancel classes at the Bible school and take the students on a sleigh ride.

While we no longer take everyone on a sleigh ride, we do still suspend classes during the week of Moody's birthday, February 5, and we hold the Founder's Week Bible conference. Our faculty, staff, and students join other attendees to hear from some of our country's premier Bible teachers. Founder's Week is a free weeklong event that is open to the public, with sessions held in Chicago at Moody Bible Institute and nearby Moody Church. You are invited! If you are able, please plan to join us for some or all of this week of outstanding Bible teaching.

With the blessings of new technology, the conference is available even if you are unable to attend in person. Moody Radio listeners can hear evening sessions on their local station. Sessions are also available through streaming, so you can join us on your computer ([www.foundersweek.org](http://wwwFOUNDERSWEEK.ORG)). This year's Founder's Week conference, "Heirs

with Christ," will be held February 6 to 10 and will feature teaching from Gary Chapman, Janet Parshall, Tony Evans, Don Sunukjian, and former Moody president Michael Easley. We also hear from our student music ensembles, Moody faculty, and so many others.

Founder's Week gives you an opportunity to hear Bible teaching together with thousands of other Christians. *Today in the Word* offers you a tool for a year-round devotional reading, either alone or in a small group. Every study in *Today in the Word* is intended to help you go deeper in your understanding of Scripture and to grow more in your relationship with Jesus Christ.

D. L. Moody once said, "The Bible was not given for our information, but for our transformation." God's Word produces eternal and life-changing results. It helps us see ordinary life from God's perspective. It corrects our faulty thinking and behaviors. And it shapes and molds us in His image. Thank you for joining us again for this global Bible study we call *Today in the Word*. And we welcome you to join us for Founder's Week, "Heirs with Christ." We look forward to spending time in the Word with you!

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TODAY IN THE WORD™

Galatians: Freedom and Fruit of the Gospel

Many of us are tempted to add something to the gospel in order to be good Christians. Perhaps it's political party affiliation—in order to be a “good Christian” you must be a Republican or a Democrat. Perhaps it's economic status—some say that “good Christians” should be wealthy; others claim that “good Christians” should choose poverty.

Some Jewish Christians in Galatia, a region in Asia Minor, wanted to add the Law of Moses to faith in Christ. These so-called Judaizers taught that following the Law was essential to pleasing God. The apostle Paul knew that the church he planted was in danger. The message of the gospel itself was at stake.

Paul's direct rebuke and stern admonitions of “foolish Galatians” must have come as a shock. In Christ, they were to live in the freedom and grace of Christ by the Holy Spirit, not bound by the rules of the Law.

Today's American Christians live far from the first-century Galatians, but we still need to hear Paul's admonitions. Often we are tempted to add rules and boast in our good works. As we study Paul's passionate appeal to Galatians this month, we pray we'll enter into freedom and love of Christ. Thank you for studying the Scriptures with *Today in the Word!* ■

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WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY

1

Jesus Christ . . . gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.

Galatians 1:3–4

Grace and Peace to the Galatian Churches

Charles Spurgeon, the famous nineteenth-century British preacher, said, “The more you read the Bible, and the more you meditate on it, the more you will be astonished with it.” This month we’ll be reading and meditating on the apostle Paul’s letter to the Galatians. This letter was written to churches in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia (in modern-day Turkey). Paul intended this letter to be circulated among the churches in cities he had visited on his first missionary journey, including Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (vv. 1–2; see Acts 13–14). This epistle, which scholars date to about A.D. 48, is Paul’s earliest letter we have.

One key theme of this letter is the good news of freedom in Christ. As Paul summarizes in these opening verses, the gospel proclaims the wonderful truth of Christ’s substitutionary sacrifice to rescue us from sin and death, all by

the will of God the Father and for His glory (vv. 3–5). The phrase “the present evil age” means all human history since the Fall (see 2 Cor. 4:4).

This gospel, the good news of freedom through the work of Jesus, rejects the message of legalism, which is the idea that if we follow certain rules we’ll be in a relationship with God. We can do nothing to merit or earn salvation. In fact, legalism cheapens or demeans Christ’s work on our behalf. The gospel is instead all about God’s grace given to us in Christ.

This month we’ll focus on three themes in Galatians. First, faith—we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. Second, freedom—we have been delivered from bondage to sin to freedom in Christ. And third, fruit—followers of Christ live in and by the Holy Spirit, bearing fruit for God’s glory.

APPLY THE WORD

If you’ve never started a spiritual journal, start this month! You can include notes on Galatians, keep track of prayer requests and answers, and write things you’re learning about God to remind yourself later or to share as a testimony with others. Even a few short notes each day can help you focus on what God is teaching you through His Word.

PRAY WITH US

For the next three days, please pray for the Food Service staff on Moody’s Chicago campus. May the Lord encourage Carlos Perez, Gonzalo Garcia, Gregory Dickson, and Hoa Lam, so that they would “encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thess. 5:11).

If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

Galatians 1:9

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY

2

There Is No Other Gospel!

Recent research “estimates that more than 250,000 Americans die each year from medical errors.” That would make medical errors the third-leading cause of death in the United States, behind heart disease and cancer. The fatal errors include everything from surgery-related mistakes to mix-ups with medications.

Just as medical errors can be a matter of physical life and death, the truth of the gospel is also a matter of spiritual life and death. That’s why Paul’s tone in today’s reading is so scolding and severe. Instead of the words of praise and encouragement that typically open other letters, here he rebuked the church for “deserting” Christ and “turning to a different gospel” (v. 6). He was absolutely “astonished” or stunned at their fickleness. As commentator Douglas Moo put it: “He has neither the time nor the inclination to thank God for the Galatians when their very identity as Christians hangs in the balance.”

A specific group of people was to blame for the “confusion.” We’ll see later that “some people” referred to in verse 7 are Judaizers, who were teaching the new Christians in Galatia that they must keep the Mosaic Law in addition to trusting in Christ. They and anyone who preach a false gospel, however, are “under God’s curse” (vv. 8–9). The Greek word is *anathema*, a term means accursed, denounced, detested, or damned.

Today our culture has elevated the value of tolerance and accepting different opinions, and we may feel Paul’s rhetoric is over the top. But to abandon God’s grace and “pervert the gospel of Christ” is the very opposite of good news and of God’s will and calling for believers (v. 7). Paul’s passion in defense of the gospel is a model for us to follow. We must be willing to discern and stand for God’s truth.

APPLY THE WORD

Some today want to replace the grace of God with the gods of self-esteem, positive feelings, or fulfilling relationships. They look for political or social views, or consumerism and a prosperity gospel. But these are all counterfeits! Only the true gospel “is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16).

PRAY WITH US

As we continue to intercede for Food Service, please include in your prayers Jeffery Williams, Jonathan True, Karen Davis, Martin Rios, and Rachel Campbell. Ask the Lord to bless their service and to help them in all life’s circumstances.

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY

3

God . . . was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles.

Galatians 1:15–16

The Gospel from Christ

Headed for Damascus, the Jewish Pharisee Saul intended to persecute followers of Christ (vv. 13–14; see Acts 9:1–19). But while he was on the road, “suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied.”

Saul, also known by his Greek name Paul, received the gospel directly from Jesus Christ (vv. 10–12). This direct commission mattered, because in order to claim apostleship, he had to be an eyewitness to the risen Savior.

Apparently Paul’s enemies in Galatia had been suggesting that he was not a *real* apostle, and because of their accusation, the gospel he had preached was losing authority and credibility with the believers there. After all, they reasoned, if he lied about being

an apostle, how could they trust his message? Therefore, Paul defended his apostleship in order to defend the authority of the gospel.

As Martin Luther succinctly explained in his commentary on Galatians: “We exalt our calling, not to gain glory among men, or money, or satisfaction, or favor, but because people need to be assured that the words we speak are the words of God. This is no sinful pride. It is holy pride.”

Paul knew God had set him apart and specially called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles (vv. 15–16). Before he even met the other apostles, he had been tutored by the Lord during a three-year period in Arabia (v. 17, see Acts 9:22–23). As Jesus Himself said, “This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

APPLY THE WORD

Paul gladly admitted that the entire course of his life had been determined by God (v. 15). The same is true for each of us. As Psalm 139:16 says, “All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.” This truth can be a source of encouragement. The Lord holds your yesterday, today, and tomorrow in His hand!

PRAY WITH US

In conclusion, please uphold in prayer Food Service’s Rebecca Williamson, Steven Frausto, Thomas Thorpe, Tyler Ringer, and Vinh Hoang. As they serve nutritious meals to students, thank the Lord for this team, committed to excellence at the workplace.

The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.

Galatians 1:23

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

4

The U-Turn Effects of the Gospel

Following his conversion, Paul's life took a complete U-turn. His beliefs and values were flipped on their heads. He had been eager to persecute Christians; now he was one. He had opposed the gospel as heresy; now he preached it. He had believed fervently in the Mosaic Law and his own righteousness; now he trusted wholeheartedly in God's grace and Christ's righteousness. All he once relied upon and prized he now called "garbage," a vehement term which can also be translated "dung" or worse (Acts 9:19–31; Phil. 3:4–14).

In today's reading, Paul continued to share his testimony with the Galatians in order to validate his credentials as an apostle and to give God glory for the gospel's transforming power in his life (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3–8). His testimony implied an argument he makes explicit later—that it makes no sense whatsoever for gospel believers to go back to an old life or former ways of living.

After three years in Arabia, Paul finally did go to Jerusalem, where he met privately with Peter and James (vv. 18–20). If this is the visit recorded in Acts 9:26–30, as seems likely, then it was Barnabas who introduced them. In any case, Peter received Paul as an equal, recognizing the truth of his gospel and the fact that he had received it directly from Christ.

Paul then continued his evangelistic ministry in Syria and Cilicia, an area in modern-day Turkey and Lebanon that included his hometown of Tarsus (vv. 21–24). He didn't narrate the details of his missionary endeavors there because his main purpose in this passage was to vigorously defend his truthfulness and apostolic credentials. Nonetheless, his ministry was successful and people praised God for it. For Paul, the bottom line was always that God's name be glorified.

APPLY THE WORD

What have been the effects of the gospel on your life? If you did a dramatic U-turn to follow Christ, give thanks today! If you've been a believer most of your life, consider what kind of person you might be without the gospel and then give thanks! As you continue to grow more like Christ, what effects will the gospel have on your future? Again, give thanks!

PRAY WITH US

Ken Heullitt, chief financial officer, would like to thank the *Today in the Word* family for your faithful support of God's work at Moody. Moody's finances are in the Lord's hands, and we thank you for your part in His plan for Moody Global Ministries.

We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

Galatians 2:5

Recognizing the Truth of Paul's Gospel

Did followers of Christ need to conform to the Jewish ritual and sign of circumcision? In the earliest days of the church, some said yes and others said no. Acts 15 records the meeting of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to discuss this question. Considering Peter's experience with Cornelius, and Paul's ministry to the Gentiles, they were led by the Holy Spirit to conclude that no, circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law were no longer required.

Most scholars agree that the letter to the Galatians was written before the Jerusalem Council, and the definitive decision had not yet been rendered. This controversy was still hotly debated in Galatia, with the Judaizers teaching that circumcision and obedience to the Law were required in order to be right with God. Simply trusting in Christ was not enough. Paul disagreed, and he fought to preserve for the young church the truth and purity of the gospel (v. 5).

Paul's second visit to Jerusalem, which took place fourteen years after his conversion, had been for the purpose of bringing a gift from the church at Antioch (v. 1; see Acts 11:27–30). He traveled with Barnabas, who would soon accompany him on his first missionary journey, and Titus, a Gentile believer who would later be left in charge of the church in Crete (see Titus 1:5). On this second visit, the Jerusalem apostles again recognized Paul's gospel (and by implication his apostleship) as true and authentic (v. 2).

Furthermore, although the Jerusalem Council had not yet met, circumcision was not required of Titus (v. 3). That is, the other apostles had never demanded what the Judaizers in Galatia demanded—circumcision and obedience to the Law, in addition to faith in Christ, resisting the efforts of "false believers" to compromise the freedom found in Jesus (v. 4)!

APPLY THE WORD

Throughout history, people have taken God's gift of salvation and tried to alter it. Don't give in to temptations or pressures! Be like Paul, who stood courageously for Christ even when others were slandering his reputation and ministry. In the end, we, like him, must trust in God rather than people (see Ps. 56:11).

PRAY WITH US

We are grateful for the hospitality ministry of Moody's Catering team, led by Natoshia Portis. Would you lift them up to God in prayer as they help organize events on Moody's Chicago campus?

They recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised.

Galatians 2:7

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

6

Recognizing Paul's Status as Apostle to the Gentiles

Moody alumna Eleanor Chesnut went to China as a medical missionary in 1894. She did pioneering work in the city of Lien-Chou, setting up a new hospital. As recounted in *A Martyr's Grace*, on a Buddhist holiday in 1905 a mob was incited to storm the hospital in search of foreign Christians. They found and killed Eleanor and five other missionaries. These martyrs sacrificed all for the sake of serving Christ. They, like Paul, believed the spread of the gospel to be worth everything, including their lives.

In attempting to modify the gospel, the Judaizers had tried to stir up dissension or create a division between Paul and the original apostles—that is, the apostles who had been Jesus' followers before His death and resurrection—in the minds of the Galatians. They were trying to convince these new believers that they had accepted a second-rate gospel from a second-class apostle.

In refuting them, Paul walked a fine line. On the one hand, he respected the other apostles and wanted the Galatians to know that these “pillars” of the church fully recognized him and accepted his gospel (v. 9). On the other hand, his apostleship and message came directly from Christ and did not depend on or derive from them (v. 6). Their relationship was one of equality and reciprocity, not authority or rivalry. As signified in their offering the “right hand of fellowship,” they recognized that God had appointed Paul as primarily an apostle to the Gentiles, just as Peter was primarily an apostle to the Jews (vv. 7–8).

In short, Paul, Peter, John, James, and the others were all co-laborers or fellow servants together in the kingdom of God. Their common goal was to faithfully preach and live out the gospel of Christ (Col. 1:21–23).

APPLY THE WORD

A commitment to serve the poor has been one way the church lives out its faith from the beginning (v. 10). The message of the gospel includes both words and actions! Would outsiders know from our words and actions that we have a heart for the poor? That we stand with those whom society has left behind? That God loves them through us?

PRAY WITH US

Dr. Paul Nyquist, Moody's president, invites you to pray for Founder's Week, our annual conference, starting today in Chicago. Pray for the speakers' sensitivity to God's guidance and for the Holy Spirit's ministry to the hearts of all participants.

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY

7

*I saw that they were not acting in line
with the truth of the gospel.*

Galatians 2:14

Rebuking Peter: Living Consistently with the Gospel

In recent years, city workers in Chengdu, China were filmed spraying the yellow grass along the roadsides a fluorescent green. They used a dye called Top Green Turf Greening Agent, which, according to its maker, is nontoxic and especially popular with cities in northwestern China.

In today’s reading, Peter acted in a way as fake as this “green grass.” He had visited Antioch and shared a meal with Gentile believers (v. 12). In other words, he hadn’t kept kosher or followed the Law’s dietary restrictions. But when Jewish believers from the “circumcision group” arrived, he changed his practices, fearful of potential criticism, and led others astray as well (v. 13). He wrongly chose legalism or fear above his freedom in Christ.

Paul boldly and publicly confronted Peter about this hypocrisy and unfaithfulness to the gospel (v. 11).

The word *hypocrite* literally meant “play-actor.” Peter had been living “like a Gentile,” that is, as a person not under the Law. Why, then, was he now pretending or play-acting and “forc[ing] Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?” (v. 14). Peter accepted this correction and did not hold a grudge, as shown in his later support for Paul and against the Judaizers at the Jerusalem Council. As he said there: “We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we [Jews] are saved, just as they [Gentiles] are” (Acts 15:7–11).

In the epistle to the Galatians, this incident is a kind of narrative climax and proof of Paul’s status as a genuine apostle and a minister of the genuine gospel. If Paul could correct Peter, then he must be equal to him as a fellow apostle. If Peter accepted the correction as deserved, then the gospel Paul preached must be the same as the one Peter believed.

APPLY THE WORD

The gospel is for all people, not only for one race or ethnicity (see Matt. 28:19; Acts 11:26). Our faith has always been multiethnic and multicultural. If your church is comprised mostly of one ethnicity, consider how you might share worship with a church filled with people different from you, with whom you’ll be worshipping in eternity (Rev. 5:9–10).

PRAY WITH US

As Founder’s Week continues on campus, mention in your prayers Moody students who take a break from their classes to participate in the conference. May this week be a time of faith building, encouragement, and spiritual growth in our students’ lives!

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

Galatians 2:20

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY

8

Justification Is by Faith Alone

According to a 2015 survey by Barna, 57 percent of American adults said, “knowing what is right or wrong is a matter of personal experience.” Ninety-one percent agreed, “The best way to find yourself is by looking within yourself.” Seventy-nine percent agreed, “People can believe whatever they want, as long as those beliefs don’t affect society.”

What Barna called “America’s new moral code” is at odds with biblical truth. This was Paul’s problem with the Judaizers as well. They had added works to the gospel, which made it no gospel at all. The good news is that salvation comes by God’s grace plus nothing (vv. 15–16).

Paul wanted to make the doctrinal issues crystal clear to the Galatians. These are not abstract philosophical theories. This was an essential theological and practical question that

affected people’s daily lives: what from the Mosaic Law should be required of Gentiles who came to faith in Christ? The unequivocal answer: Nothing.

Justification is by faith alone in Christ alone. This doesn’t mean at all that “Christ promotes sin” (vv. 17–18; see Rom. 6:1–2). It does mean that one cannot mix salvation by faith and salvation by works (vv. 19–21). In fact, to live to one is to die to the other!

We cannot say both that Christ saved us *and* that our good works play a part in making us right with God. These are mutually exclusive options. To try to attain salvation through our good works is to “set aside” or “nullify” the grace of God (v. 21). This is a strong term, meaning to “reject” or “despise.” But God’s grace in Christ is the only basis for our righteous standing before God and the only basis for our righteous living in the present.

APPLY THE WORD

A fitting response to today’s devotion would be to sing the classic hymn, “The Solid Rock.” “My hope is built on nothing less / Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness; / No merit of my own I claim [or, I dare not trust the sweetest frame] / But wholly lean on Jesus’ name. / On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; / All other ground is sinking sand.”

PRAY WITH US

Join us in prayer for Student Enrollment Services, headed by vice president and dean Anthony Turner. We pray for good teamwork and God’s guidance as they process the applications and make decisions about enrollments.

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY

9

Those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Galatians 3:9

The Gospel Fulfills God’s Promise to Abraham

Imagine a prisoner standing before a judge. A prosecutor has just proved the accused committed a crime; the jury has declared him guilty. He knows it’s true and waits, shamefaced, for the just sentence to be handed down. But then the judge declares him pardoned—another person has accepted punishment on his behalf. He can walk out a free man!

This is a picture of the mercy and grace of God and of His salvation for sinners. The Galatians had received this gospel message, but something had gone wrong. Chapter 3 begins with a series of rhetorical questions to rebuke to the church for listening to the legalists and veering away from the gospel (vv. 1–5). They were “foolish” and “bewitched.” Were they trying to go back to their old ways? What could they add to Christ’s death and resurrection? Having begun in faith and the Spirit, why would they return to the flesh and human effort?

In fact, God’s divine plan of salvation has been the same all along (vv. 6–9). The Judaizers had forgotten history and lost sight of God’s redemptive plan. It’s always been about faith, not works or law. For example, this was true for Abraham. He believed God’s promise to make his descendants as numerous as the stars (Gen. 15:6), and through him to bless all nations (Gen. 12:3). This example was a “case closed” approach by Paul—in other words, if it was true for Abraham, then it’s true for everyone.

In this sense, all who believe in Christ are “children of Abraham” and “blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (cf. Rom. 4:9–12). Justification is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. We can never overcome sin and death through our own efforts. A good-works approach is our feeble attempt to get some of the credit or glory for ourselves.

APPLY THE WORD

If you’d like to do further study, two good books are *Galatians* by Philip Graham Ryken and *No Other Gospel: 31 Reasons from Galatians Why Justification by Faith Alone Is the Only Gospel* by Josh Moody. Or you could study through Moody Distance Learning; see moody.edu/distance-learning for more information.

PRAY WITH US

As we continue to pray for Moody’s Enrollment Services in Chicago, please add to your prayer list the staff of the Admissions department: Allison Keepert, Christopher Toland, Deborah Moreno, Emanuel Padilla, and Jacqueline Haywood.

He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.

Galatians 3:14

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY

10

The Gospel's Blessings Come by Faith, Not Works

In his “Notes on Galatians,” Thomas L. Constable commented: “Put some pure water in a clear glass tumbler. Then add some arsenic. The water will look just the same, but it has become deadly poisonous. Just so, adding a foreign element to the gospel message can transform it from the ‘water of life’ into the ‘water of death.’”

Paul taught that justification comes by faith alone in Christ alone. Add human good works, and the gospel is irretrievably corrupted and made poisonous. To rely on works not only does not lead to salvation, it actually leads to a curse or condemnation (v. 10; see Deut. 27:26). The Law required perfect obedience; to stumble even once was to stand guilty (James 2:10). Though the “circumcision group” positioned themselves as more righteous or more faithful than the “grace group,” Paul showed up their understandings of God and Scripture as

woefully deficient by quoting the Law itself against them.

Then, in case they hadn’t gotten the point, Paul declared that the righteous live by faith, not works (v. 11; see Hab. 2:4). The Law describes righteous living, but it cannot actually enable or empower anyone to live this way (v. 12; see Lev. 18:5). By contrast, God’s righteousness comes to us by faith in Christ. The condemnation and death that we deserved fell on Him instead, as the Law itself had anticipated (v. 13; see Deut. 21:23).

The Crucifixion occurred so that God’s plan would be accomplished and the blessing promised to Abraham would come at last to all people (v. 14). So the path of blessing is faith, not works, and the fulfillment of the promise is by the Spirit, not the Law. Those who reject this truth reject God’s salvation, God’s plan, God’s Spirit, and God’s blessings.

APPLY THE WORD

If you’re looking for verses to memorize that further explain the relationship between faith and works, we recommend Ephesians 2:8–10. Paul affirms salvation as a gift of God’s grace, received through faith in Christ. Then he sets forth good works as prepared in advance by God for us to do. They do not contribute to salvation, but they are its fruit.

PRAY WITH US

Today and tomorrow, we’ll continue to encourage in prayer the staff of the Admissions department. Today, please pray that God would give discernment to Jonathan Morgan, Joshua Walberg, Kylie Kristofek, and Nathan Richards.

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

11

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed . . . meaning one person, who is Christ.

Galatians 3:16

Christ Fulfills God’s Promise to Abraham

New Testament scholar Douglas Moo points out that Galatians employs three main forms of rhetoric recognized by ancient writers. One is *epideictic*, which “seeks to persuade people to reaffirm a particular view in the present.” Another is *deliberative*, which “seeks to persuade people to take action.” The third is *forensic*, which “seeks to persuade people about a past event.”

Today’s passage is the forensic argument Paul used to persuade the Galatian believers that the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham is Christ Himself. The gospel, the good news of redemption in Christ, is in a very real sense the actual person of Christ. Our salvation is the Savior!

God’s covenant with Abraham had not been pushed to the side or abolished, for how could God set aside what He Himself had established? Rather, it had been fulfilled (vv. 15, 17). The way to a

right relationship with God had always been by faith. What was new was the coming of Christ. God’s promise (see Gen. 13:15) had referenced not many “seeds” (offspring) but one “seed” (one descendant—even such a small thing as a singular noun matters in Scripture!) Jesus Christ, from the line of Abraham, both fulfilled and was the fulfillment of God’s promises (v. 16).

It had always been true that the promised inheritance (salvation) depended on God’s promise and not the Mosaic Law. God’s faithfulness and grace are the foundation of our hope of life with Him forever (v. 18). As one commentator explained: “Salvation in Christ does not rest on a law that we inevitably break; it rests on a promise that God *cannot* break. . . . He has promised eternal life to everyone who comes to Christ in faith. God will not—indeed, he cannot—go back on his promise.”

APPLY THE WORD

A first step in understanding the gospel is to realize that we are all sinners in need of a Savior. If we were able to earn salvation, there would be no need for Christ. Without Him, we’re doomed. With Him, our hope is certain. If you’ve never trusted in the name of Christ for salvation from sin, today can be the day!

PRAY WITH US

Please add to your list the remaining team members of the Admissions department: Phillip Siemens, Randle Bishop, Reichert Zalameda, and Ricardo Brown. We appreciate their expertise and their contribution to the learning process at Moody.

The law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith.

Galatians 3:24

SUNDAY
FEBRUARY

12

The Law Served Its Purpose in God's Plan

The word *guardian* (v. 24) is translated from the Greek term *paidagogos*, from which we derive the word *pedagogy*, meaning “the art or science of teaching.” A pedagogue was a slave put in charge of a freeborn child. He was like a chaperone or babysitter who bore responsibility to care for, train, and discipline the child. This protective custody was temporary, lasting only until the child reached legal adulthood.

Paul used this term to describe the role of the Law in God's plan of salvation. The Law didn't change the promise, and it didn't provide a means of salvation, but it did function as a kind of “guardian” until Messiah's coming, teaching about sin until Christ's mission of redemption enabled our full adoption as God's children (v. 19; Rom. 7:7–12).

Despite the role of angels (see Ex. 3:2; Acts 7:38, 53) and the mediatory

role of Moses in bringing the Law to Israel, this covenant had only one side or party—God. It depended solely on Him, not on Israel, though they did have responsibilities and suffer consequences (v. 20). That's why God's law and God's promise were not opposed to one another. Salvation did not and indeed could not come by the Law (v. 21). The pervasiveness of sin made that impossible. The Mosaic Law could take custody and reveal that we were imprisoned by sin, but it could not permanently break the power of sin (vv. 22–23). God gave the Law as a guardian until Messiah arrived, and He alone makes possible full freedom and salvation and righteousness (vv. 24–25).

In other words, keeping the Law will never save us. Our only hope was for God Himself to save us, which He did through His Son, Jesus Christ!

APPLY THE WORD

Because salvation depends on God, not us, we need not be in doubt about whether we're going to make it. If we've trusted in Christ, we're redeemed! This idea is called assurance of salvation. As Jesus Himself said: “My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand” (John 10:29).

PRAY WITH US

Greg Thornton, senior vice president of Media, welcomes your prayers for Moody's radio and publishing ministries: for the success of new radio programs and podcasts, as well as for the new book releases. May God be glorified through media at Moody!

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

13

If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Galatians 3:29

Heirs of the Gospel Promise to Abraham

CNNMoney reported, “American retirees expect to leave an average inheritance of almost \$177,000 to their heirs.” This ranks sixth in the world, but his number does not apply to all Americans, however, since only 56 percent expect to leave any inheritance at all to their children.

To receive an inheritance can be a nice financial windfall. Even better than money, of course, is our spiritual inheritance in Christ (v. 29). We are heirs of the gospel! This is an extension of Paul’s metaphor: After the “childhood” period with the Law as guardian, Christ came. As a result, believers have now been adopted as full members of God’s family, reaching, as it were, the legal age for adult rights and full inheritance (v. 26).

This new status is symbolized by baptism, in which a person publicly professes faith in Christ (v. 27). Metaphorically, believers are by

faith “clothed” or united with Christ. Whereas a works mentality had led to spiritual competition—as seen, for instance, in the Pharisees’ attitude in the Gospels—divine grace and unity in Christ means that all God’s children possess equal standing in His family (v. 28; 1 Cor. 12:13). Jew, Gentile, slave, free, male, and female were socially significant categories, but God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34–35). This didn’t mean that these differences disappeared, of course, but rather that God’s love and salvation are freely available equally to all.

These verses make it abundantly clear that it’s all about Christ! We’re God’s children “in Christ Jesus.” We’ve been baptized “into Christ.” We’re clothed “with Christ.” All believers are “one in Christ Jesus.” We “belong to Christ” and thanks to Him we’re spiritual descendants of Abraham and heirs of salvation (cf. Rom. 8:14–17).

APPLY THE WORD

Reflecting on verse 28, commentator Timothy George observed: “Each of these spheres of human creativity [race, money, sex] has become degraded and soiled through the perversity of sin.” Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any pride, greed, or lust in your life and to transform you through the power of the gospel.

PRAY WITH US

Frank Leber, vice president of Information Technology Services, will appreciate your prayers for his staff. We praise God for leading skilled computer specialists to Moody and for their dedicated service to reach people across the globe.

Since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

Galatians 4:7

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY

14

The Gospel Moves Us from Slavery to Sonship

In his book *Theology as Discipleship*, Keith L. Johnson explains that today's passage shows the Trinity at work (v. 6): "God's actions . . . originate from the will of the Father, proceed through the Son and are made effective by the power of the Spirit. . . . [T]he Father wills that the Son speak his words to us; the Son speaks these words in line with the Father's will; and the Spirit enables us to understand the Son's words and thus know the Father through the Son."

The entire Trinity is involved in moving us from slavery to sonship. In today's passage, Paul recaps the narrative or metaphor: With the Law as guardian, we were like children. At the right time in His plan, however, God sent His Son to redeem us, to adopt us into His family, and thus to release us to the full privileges of sonship.

Although an inheritance existed, an underage heir had no access to it and was an heir in name only (vv. 1–2). He was entirely powerless. In the same way, when we were under the Law, we were in slavery to the "elemental spiritual forces of the world" (v. 3), a phrase that can include false teaching or pagan religion (see v. 9) as well as sin and death (cf. Col. 2:8).

The narrative twist came by the Father's will and in His time (v. 4). He sent His own Son to be born of a woman, ensuring that Jesus was thus fully God and fully man. Jesus was also "born under the Law" and lived a life that perfectly fulfilled its requirements. He was the only One who could have done so! As a result, the Law's time is done. We've been redeemed, adopted, and given the reality of our spiritual inheritance (vv. 5–7).

APPLY THE WORD

Valentine's Day tends to be about flowers, chocolate, and singing telegrams. But in the spirit of Galatians, consider making this Valentine's Day a day to rejoice in the richness of the Father's love for us. To bring us into His family, he planned and carried out salvation that involved the sacrifice of His own Son. There is no greater love (John 15:13)!

PRAY WITH US

Keeping Moody's IT specialists in prayer, please add to your list James Anderson, Richard McNeill, Steven Takushi, Timothy Gauger, and Timothy Canfield from Client Technology Services, as they provide technical support for faculty, students, and staff.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

by Dr. Winfred O. Neely, Professor of Preaching and Pastoral Studies

Q I was told that Jesus died on the cross only for the elect, just a few chosen people. Does Scripture support this claim?

A Christians have thought, fought, and wrote about this point of doctrine for centuries. Some claim that Jesus died only for the elect. Others assert with equal confidence that Jesus died for all people. It seems to me that the Bible teaches both: Jesus died for the elect and for the entire human family (1 John 2:1–2).

In 1 Timothy 2:1–8, we are exhorted to pray for all people. The use of the word *all* stands out in the passage: prayer for *all* people in verse 1, prayer for *all* who are in authority in verse 2, God wants *all* people to be saved in verse 4, and Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for *all* people in verse 6. The context makes clear that “all” encompasses the entire human race. Of course, this passage does not teach that all will come to Christ, but it does imply that all could potentially come, due to the fact that Jesus died on the cross for all people, making salvation possible for anyone who trusts Christ as Lord and Savior (see Rom. 10:13). Based on the work of Christ on the cross, salvation is offered to all people (Titus 2:11). I conclude that, based on this emphasis on *all* in this text, it is a mistake to limit the death of Christ on the cross as being only for the

elect, or only for a few people. That is reductionist and a misrepresentation of God and the New Testament. Christ died for all.

Q Is it possible for us to ask God for too much in prayer?

A Thankfully, no! The Bible says that God “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20). Paul is not saying, however, that we can expect God to grant us whatever we ask. We are instructed to pray according to God’s will and His Word and in submission to Christ. Still, we should be encouraged. We should be bold in our prayers, confident to ask God to do the impossible (see Heb. 4:16). No request is too great for God (see Jer. 32:8). Nothing is impossible with Him! Nothing is too hard for Him. It is not a question of God’s power; it is a question of His will and wisdom (see Dan. 3:16–18).

Q The Bible says, “Godliness has value for all things” (1 Tim. 4:8). What is godliness?

A Godliness is devotion to the person of God. It is a comprehensive term for the whole of the Christian life. Godliness includes knowledge of God and not merely knowledge about God.

We should be bold in our prayers, confident to ask God to do the impossible.

Godliness also includes reverence for God and loyalty to God. It is the response of heart in all of life to who God is in His awesome holiness and unspeakable glory.

Q **What does Paul mean when he says we are to count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:11)?**

A The Greek word translated as *count* is key to unlocking the meaning and practical significance of these words. The word *count* means “to reckon, to consider, to recognize, to take into account.” It is a mental operation, rooted in our thinking. We have to think biblically about ourselves before the Lord. We are to take into account what the Lord has already done in our lives. Since we are in Christ, when He died on the cross, we died with Him. When He rose from among the dead, we rose with Him. We are identified with Him in His death and resurrection.

The verb *count* is an imperative in this text. The Lord commands us to think biblically about ourselves. The verb is also in the present tense. Thinking biblically about ourselves should be constant, ongoing, and habitual. The first practical step in overcoming our sinful selves and our intransigent

and entrenched sinful impulses is vigorous biblical thinking about who we are in Christ. This is what the Bible means when it says that we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (see Rom. 12:2).

Q **If we no longer offer literal sacrifices, why are we told to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice in Romans 12:1–2?**

A You correctly note that we no longer offer animal sacrifices today because of the finished work of Christ on the cross (see Heb. 10:15–18). But while Christ is our Great High Priest according to Hebrews 4:14–16), it is also true that every believer in Christ is a priest and has the privilege and responsibility to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ (see 1 Peter 2:5). Examples of these spiritual sacrifices are praise (Heb. 13:15), doing good and sharing with others in need (Heb. 13:16), and providing financial and practical assistance to full-time Christian workers (Phil. 4:18–19). In Romans 12:1, in response to God’s saving mercy in our lives, we offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. The word *body* in this text encompasses our hearts, minds, souls, and all that we have. Out of love and gratitude to God, we devote ourselves to Him without reservation.

WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY

15

Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

Galatians 5:1

Do Not Go Back to Your Old Ways!

As anyone knows who has ever made a New Year’s resolution or tried to follow the advice in a self-help book, it’s all too easy to go back to our former habits. Despite good intentions, old ways of life die hard. They’re what we do automatically, without thinking. To follow through on a choice to change takes radical commitment.

In today’s reading, Paul warned the Galatians: *Do not go back to your old ways!* If they accepted a corrupted gospel (1:6–7), that is what would happen. In the past, when they were enslaved by sin and pagan religion, slavery was a result of ignorance (v. 8). But now that the gospel has been preached to and believed by them, they should know better. They are now in a relationship with God and are known and loved by Him. Thus, going back to the “weak and miserable” old ways makes no sense (v. 9).

In these verses, Paul essentially equated legalism with paganism, which no doubt shocked the Judaizers. Both are unequivocally condemned as false religion. The mention of “observing special days and months and years” is a shorthand reference to rituals and legalism, that is, to the merit system of the Law (v. 10). Did the Galatians really wish to go from adulthood back to childhood or from freedom back to slavery? Would they really hand back or betray their spiritual inheritance? Had Paul wasted his efforts in ministry with them (v. 11)?

It’s as if they didn’t trust the gospel of grace. Out of human pride, they wanted salvation to be by works rather than by faith. They wanted at some level to deserve it or earn it. Paul would have none of it, and vehemently pleaded with them to stay true to the gospel.

APPLY THE WORD

We rejoice in knowing God, but we have even more joy and comfort in the truth that God knows us completely and perfectly (v. 9). Even when Satan attacks us with doubts, and even when our own hearts condemn us, we can “set our hearts at rest” in God’s presence because He “is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything” (1 John 3:19–20).

PRAY WITH US

Again, please include in your prayers the staff of the IT department on Moody’s Chicago campus—its Enterprise Infrastructure Services team: Deryn O’Brien, James Hickman, and Joseph Kessinger.

*Have I now become your enemy by
telling you the truth?*

Galatians 4:16

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY

16

Paul and the Galatians: Friends Tell the Truth

The book of Proverbs offers timeless wisdom about friendship: “A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity” (17:17). “Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses” (27:6). “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another” (27:17).

From this perspective, Paul was a true friend to the Galatian believers. He cared enough to tell them the truth! His strong and emotional language in this epistle was a result of their close, Christ-centered relationship. Apparently his original stop in the region had been health-related (v. 13). Despite the circumstances, which he admitted were a “trial” to them, they had responded generously to both Paul and his message. Far from treating him badly, they had welcomed him as if he were an angel or even Christ Himself. They would have ripped out their eyes for him, a hyperbole that

some think might indicate the nature of Paul’s illness. They should have enough history of mutual care and support to know that when he rebuked them, his motivation was the love at the root of their friendship.

By comparison, the Judaizers were jealous of Paul’s ministry and relationship with the Galatians (v. 17). They wanted to drive a wedge between them and to redirect the zeal of these new believers to their own way of living. Zeal was not the problem, as eagerness for righteousness is a good thing (v. 18). But the legalists had zeal for the Law apart from Christ.

Paul felt like a father disciplining his children. Even more, he felt like a mother “in the pains of childbirth,” so passionate was he for their growth in Christ (vv. 19–20). He knew it was hard for them to hear his scolding, and he wished he could be there in person.

APPLY THE WORD

Paul provided an excellent example of “speaking the truth in love” (see Eph. 4:14–16). This is a difficult skill to cultivate, but an important one. It helps us stand firm against deceit and to grow toward Christian maturity. It’s something we must do within the body of Christ. Are we willing to both speak and listen in this spirit?

PRAY WITH US

Today, please pray for the remaining Enterprise Infrastructure Services staff—Kyle Sparrow, Michael Paniak, and Paul Walker—as they provide system and network support to Moody’s ministries in Chicago.

*The Jerusalem that is above is free,
and she is our mother.*

Galatians 4:26

Hagar and Sarah as a Parable of the Gospel

Hagar's son, Ishmael, was the result of a human attempt to fulfill God's promise (see Genesis 16). When Sarah became pregnant and bore a son, Isaac, she decided that Hagar and Ishmael became a liability (Gen. 21:1–21). When Ishmael mocked Isaac, Sarah ordered them to leave. With sadness, Abraham sent them out into the desert, trusting God to care for them. He knew that it was Isaac and not Ishmael who was the son of promise.

In Galatians, Paul read this story as a parable of the gospel, an analogy of the doctrinal narrative he had presented. It reflected the truths about promise, law, and Christ that he been describing. Furthermore, this method of interpreting the Torah was a common rabbinic strategy in his day. By using it, Paul was beating the Judaizers at their own game.

This parable or analogy depended upon the contrast between the two lines of

Abraham (vv. 21–23). On the one hand, Hagar was a slave. Her son Ishmael was born by normal human means. On the other hand, Sarah was free. Her son Isaac was born miraculously as a result of God's promise. Clearly, Sarah and Isaac were the superior line.

Paul interpreted this figuratively as a contrast between the true gospel and legalism (vv. 24–27). Hagar and Ishmael represent the covenant given at Mount Sinai, that is, the Mosaic Law or the earthly Jerusalem. Its children are slaves. Sarah and Isaac represent the promise given to Abraham and its fulfillment in Christ and the gospel, or the heavenly Jerusalem. Its children are free. One side shows that human capabilities were insufficient. The other rests on a foundation of our faith and God's faithfulness. This is a reason for great joy, as when a barren woman becomes able to bear children.

APPLY THE WORD

Verse 27 quotes Isaiah 54:1. In its original context, this verse is about the return of Jewish exiles to Jerusalem. In Paul's analogy, it's also a picture of the nations coming to Christ through the gospel. Revelation 21 includes this powerful description of the new Jerusalem: "God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them."

PRAY WITH US

The ministry of our Education and Media branches depends in many respects on the smooth functioning of all the Operations departments. Please remember in prayer the Operations teams headed by executive vice president, Steven Mogck.

*We are not children of the slave woman,
but of the free woman.*

Galatians 4:31

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

18

Hagar and Sarah and Our Status as Children of God

Swimmer Maya DiRado, a gold medalist at the 2016 Olympic Games, said her athletic pursuits are rooted in her faith: “Knowing that I’m a child of God and that his love for me is determined by nothing I can achieve or do on my own has given me a quiet confidence. . . . Jesus’ love for me and all humanity is something that always helps me better love people around me when things get difficult.”

Being a child of God is an incomparable privilege! In today’s reading, Paul took the parable or analogy from yesterday and applied it to the Galatians’ situation. Their identity as believers in Christ aligned them with Sarah and Isaac and the promise God made to Abraham (v. 28). They should not “switch sides,” as it were. To go back to the Law and try to live by merit would actually work against the gospel in their lives. The legalists were tempting the Galatians to choose the wrong mother, along with slavery and immaturity. No doubt

the Judaizers were stunned to find themselves assigned to the line of Ishmael.

Historically, Ishmael had persecuted Isaac, and now history was repeating itself (v. 29). Salvation by works is the enemy of salvation by faith, and confidence in the flesh is utterly opposed to confidence in the Spirit. The solution is the same now as it was then, to “get rid of the slave woman” (v. 30; Gen. 21:9–14). There can be no compromise. Legalism must be rejected!

Followers of Christ are children of the free woman (v. 31). God’s promise to Abraham has been fulfilled in Christ, and as a result we’ve come by grace into our spiritual inheritance of salvation. Only one path leads to freedom and redemption: justification by faith alone in Christ alone.

APPLY THE WORD

Our status as God’s children should be a daily cause for amazement and rejoicing! Memorizing Scripture helps us remember and reflect on this truth. John 1:12–13, 1 John 3:1–2, or 1 John 5:1–2 are all excellent choices to memorize so we can marinate in these blessings. God’s words have the power to transform us to be more like Christ!

PRAY WITH US

Today, your prayer support will encourage the Engineering Operations team in Facilities Maintenance: Al Campa, Gerald Malozienc, Jamie Ixcaragua, John Fraats, and mark Padgett. May the Lord bless their service on Moody’s Chicago campus!

SUNDAY
FEBRUARY

19

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.

Galatians 5:1

Freedom in Christ

The lyrics of a popular worship song are rooted in Galatians 5:1: “It was for freedom that Christ has set us free, / No longer to be subject to a yoke of slavery. / So we’re rejoicing in God’s victory, / Our hearts responding to his love. / Jesus, we celebrate your victory. Jesus, we revel in your love. Jesus, we rejoice you’ve set us free. Jesus, your death has brought us life.”

“It is for freedom that Christ has set us free.” This means that freedom is at the heart of the gospel. This is not “freedom” in the contemporary North American sense of self-fulfillment or self-determination, but rather freedom *from* sin and freedom *to* obey God. This kind of freedom is the gospel’s purpose! The worst response people can make, then, is to allow themselves to “be burdened again by a yoke of slavery,” be it slavery to sin, legalism, works, false religion, or anything else.

Such teaching is irrational. Why would anyone choose to return to a state of bondage or powerlessness? The idea spits in the face of the gospel.

This verse is the summary and climax to this section of Paul’s argument in Galatians. The the gospel must be maintained and defended. To add works or anything else is heretical, because that would mean we’re putting our faith in something other than the person and work of Christ. To do so is to regress from freedom to bondage, from truth to falsehood, from adulthood to childhood, from grace to works, and from salvation to sin.

We have every reason and all power in the Spirit to “stand firm”! This is a key biblical phrase, used throughout Scripture to indicate active faith (see, for example, Ex. 14:13; Isa. 7:9; Matt. 10:22; and 1 Cor. 15:58).

APPLY THE WORD

Paul saw true freedom as being slaves to Christ (Rom. 6:22; 1 Cor. 7:22). An interesting book on this topic is *A Better Freedom: Finding Life as Slaves of Christ*, by musician and writer Michael Card. He explores biblical passages on this topic and reflects on them in light of the history of slavery in America and contemporary race relations.

PRAY WITH US

Keeping in prayer the staff of Engineering Operations, ask God that Paul Siebold, Scott Schaeffer, Roger Vinlasaca, Thomas Drost, and Tiffany Dickerson work well as a team, as they maintain cooling, heating, and electric systems on campus.

The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.

Galatians 5:6

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

20

Do Not Devalue What Christ Did!

A recent survey by Ligonier Ministries and Lifeway Research identified pluralism as the real religion of many Americans. For example, 45 percent agreed, “There are many ways to get to heaven,” and nearly as many agreed, “There will be people in heaven who have never heard of Jesus Christ.” Most do not understand the gospel; 71 percent said, “An individual must contribute his/her own effort for personal salvation.”

Surprisingly, 54 percent of evangelical Protestants agreed with that last statement. With such theological ignorance, the message of Galatians is needed now more than ever! If you do not stand firm but instead step back into slavery, the consequences will be enormous. First, Christ and His work of salvation “will be of no value to you at all” (v. 2). Second, you’ll be obligated to obey the entire Law (v. 3), which is impossible. Third, you’ll be “alienated from Christ” and fall away from grace

(v. 4). In truth, these three consequences are all the same and amount to damnation. No one can be justified by good works. Putting faith in works is *not* saving faith.

Circumcision was the physical sign of Jewish identity and faith. The Judaizers were telling the Galatians they needed to be circumcised in order to join God’s family. In itself, as Paul knew, circumcision didn’t matter (v. 6), but presented as a condition for salvation it was a return to slavery under the Law.

By contrast, the true gospel involves faith (not works), Christ’s righteousness (not ours), and the power of the Holy Spirit (not the flesh) (v. 5). We stand justified already, are being sanctified or made progressively holy, and are awaiting salvation’s future, complete fulfillment. This is “the righteousness for which we hope,” a hope “guaranteed by God” (1 Thess. 5:8; Heb. 6:19).

APPLY THE WORD

Faith expresses itself through love (v. 6; 1 Cor. 7:19). As you consider your plans and schedule for today, how might your faith express itself through love for God and others? Make this a prayer and see what opportunities the Lord brings your way! Thank Him for the opportunity to express your faith in tangible ways that show love.

PRAY WITH US

Would you uphold in prayer today the ministry of Christine Gorz, vice president of Marketing and Communications? We pray for God’s grace and joy to bless Christine through her important leadership responsibilities at Moody.

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY

21

You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?

Galatians 5:7

The Cross of Christ Is the True Gospel

Perhaps because Scripture presents Christ as the second Adam (see Rom. 5:19; 1 Cor. 15:22), a church tradition developed that the actual skull of the historical Adam was buried at the foot of the Cross on the Mount of Golgotha. This is the reason why classical art sometimes depicts the Crucifixion with a skull at the bottom of the painting.

Though no evidence supports this tradition, it does capture an important doctrinal truth: Through His death and resurrection, Christ overcame sin and death, the results of the Fall. As Paul explores the gospel—what it is and what it isn’t—he keeps coming back to the Cross: We’ve been crucified with Christ (2:20). We should boast only in the Cross (6:14). And in today’s reading, the Cross is an offense or stumbling block to those who prefer works to grace (5:11).

Two pictures describe these false teachers. First, they are like runners who cut off other runners in a race (vv. 7–8; cf. 1 Cor. 9:24). They prevent others from following and obeying God. Second, they are like yeast permeating bread dough. It takes only a little to have a large negative impact (v. 9). They had thrown the Galatians into confusion and would one day pay the penalty and face God’s justice (v. 10).

The Cross offended the “circumcision group”—at whose expense Paul was sarcastic—not only because it was a shameful instrument of criminal execution but also because it means we can do nothing to save ourselves (vv. 11–12). Christ did it all! Merit is not a factor, which hurts our pride. To say it another way, obedience to the Law can never accomplish salvation. Justification, as we’ve seen, is by faith alone in Christ alone.

APPLY THE WORD

The Cross has become a powerful and beautiful symbol of Christianity. Artists have celebrated it in words, images, and music throughout church history. You can see some of these artistic works online, if you aren’t close enough to visit an art museum, you can search specifically for paintings that show a skull at the foot of the Cross.

PRAY WITH US

Please support in prayer Dr. Junias Venugopal, provost and dean of Education. His godly service at Moody has been a testimony and an example of wise leadership to our students. Pray for continued blessing on his ministry.

*Do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh;
rather, serve one another humbly in love.*

Galatians 5:13

Gospel Living Is Walking by the Spirit

Most of us understand Venn diagrams. Where one circle overlaps another, then the overlapping area is what the two domains have in common. If one circle is entirely inside another, then one domain is entirely subsumed within the other. If two circles do not overlap at all, then the two domains share nothing in common.

Paul taught that the domains of “flesh” and “Spirit” are like non-overlapping circles in a Venn diagram. They have absolutely nothing in common (vv. 16–18). They are exact opposites and are in fact hostile to one another. The domain of the flesh is the domain of sin, slavery, works, and legalism. The domain of the Holy Spirit is the domain of righteousness, freedom, faith, and grace. His domain is where and how we live out the gospel, which is not just a message but a way of life. After all,

freedom is not an excuse to indulge the flesh or sin as we please (Rom. 6:1–2). Doing whatever we want isn’t freedom but just another kind of slavery.

To live in freedom and express our faith through love can only be done in God’s strength (v. 6). From this perspective, love is a significant Christian virtue. “Love your neighbor” is a key command in the Law, with the opposite being contentiousness and competitiveness (vv. 13–15). The Law spoke truly, but it couldn’t enable us to obey it, so it couldn’t save us. The Law’s precepts thus remain true, and now in Christ and by the Spirit we have the power to actually obey them. How tragic if we don’t, because that would mean we’re living in the wrong domain and denying the gospel. We’re called to be “led by the Spirit” down other paths to other goals, for God’s glory!

APPLY THE WORD

“Walk by the Spirit” (v. 16) is a present continuous verb and could also be translated “go on walking” or “keep on walking by the Spirit.” Walking by the Spirit is a daily, habitual, ongoing choice. The daily practices of studying God’s Word and prayer help us to keep on walking by the Spirit. Thank Him for His presence with you today!

PRAY WITH US

We invite you to pray for Moody’s Undergraduate faculty in the Theology department. May the Holy Spirit lead professors John Clark, David Finkbiner, Marcus Johnson, Bryan Litfin, and David Rim in grounding our students in biblical truth.

THURSDAY
FEBRUARY

23

Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Galatians 5:21

Acts of the Flesh

In a Renaissance drama by Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus sells his soul to the devil in exchange for 24 years of power and pleasure. During these years, he sometimes thinks about repenting. In one of these episodes, Lucifer appears to distract him with a parade of the seven deadly sins—pride, covetousness, wrath, envy, gluttony, sloth, and lechery (lustfulness). Faustus’s heart is so far gone into sin that he delights in the parade and forgets about repenting. At the end of the play, he dies and is dragged off to hell.

The seven deadly sins is one well-known list of qualities antithetical to the Christian life. Paul’s list of “acts of the flesh” in today’s reading is another. It contrasts directly with the list of “fruit of the Spirit” that we’ll study tomorrow. It doesn’t exhaustively list all possible sins, but it does give representative examples of the attitudes and behaviors to avoid.

This list includes at least four types of sin. First are sexual sins; the term *impurity* includes thoughts, words, and actions. Second are worship sins. Idolatry bows before false gods, while witchcraft reflects a desire to control the supernatural realm. Third, we see relational sins, such as hatred, jealousy, and selfish ambition, which damage respectful or loving human relationships. And fourth are sins of excess, in which good things are abused and thus turned into bad things. Wine and sex could be received as blessings, but drunkenness and orgies are clearly sinful.

“Those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21). This doesn’t mean there’s no possibility of confession and forgiveness, for we know from other Scriptures that God grants repentance to all who confess. But these habitual practices do not reflect a life in relationship with God as His children.

APPLY THE WORD

Confession of sin is an important spiritual discipline. We need it on a daily basis! It keeps the slate clean with God, removing barriers to fellowship and obedience. It also reminds us of the need for humility and dependence upon the Lord. God has promised to “forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

PRAY WITH US

As we continue to pray for Theology professors, please include Michael McDuffee, Sanjay Merchant, Gregg Quiggle, Richard Weber, and Kevin Zuber in your time with God today. We praise God for their knowledge and love of the Word of God.

*Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep
in step with the Spirit.*

Galatians 5:25

FRIDAY
FEBRUARY

24

Fruit of the Spirit

The heaviest pumpkin ever cultivated in North America was grown in 2015 in Illinois by farmer Gene McMullen. Weighing in at 2,145 pounds, the pumpkin took 93 days of patient care to grow, according to McMullen. The current world record is held by a 2,323-pound specimen from Switzerland, weighed in 2014.

Like these giant vegetables, the fruit of the Spirit takes patient care and godly commitment to grow. Like yesterday's list of "acts of the flesh," today's list of "fruit of the Spirit" is not exhaustive but rather presents examples of godly virtues (vv. 22–23). These qualities should characterize the lives of followers of Christ (vv. 24–26). The implication from verse 21 is that those who live like this *will* inherit the kingdom of God.

"Love" is *agape* love, selfless or sacrificial care that looks to serve

others' interests. "Joy" is not a result of circumstances, but an inner gladness and contentment that rejoices in the right things. "Peace" is an inner quietness and harmony in one's relationships, a result of being reconciled to God. "Forbearance" is patience, putting up with others in difficult situations. "Kindness" indicates a readiness to help others, to empathize with their needs and to act to meet them. "Goodness" is generosity, or in general working to benefit others. "Faithfulness" indicates trustworthiness or reliability, a person of integrity who keeps their promises. "Gentleness" is meekness, not attempting to dominate (6:1). Finally, "self-control" is self-discipline or restraint, the way to victory over sinful desires.

Since we belong to Jesus, the "acts of the flesh" have been left behind at the Cross. In our new way of life in the power of His resurrection, we need to "keep in step with the Spirit"!

APPLY THE WORD

"Fruit" is an interesting metaphor. We cannot make seeds grow, but we must till the soil if we want anything to grow. Cultivating the fruit of the Spirit in our lives takes work, but it is the Spirit who actually produces these qualities in our lives. We can't do it by our own effort. We must walk daily with the Spirit to see His fruit in our lives.

PRAY WITH US

The ministry of Moody Radio, led by vice president Collin Lambert, is in our prayers today. Please join us in thanking God for His faithfulness in providing support from Moody Radio's friends and listeners for this unique ministry year after year.

SATURDAY
FEBRUARY

25

If someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.

Galatians 6:1

Restoring One Another to Gospel Living

In *No Other Gospel*, pastor Josh Moody wrote about Galatians 6: “I used to think that these final verses of the teaching in Galatians were just helpful, practical instruction, but actually they are what the gospel looks like in community. And they are by contrast what legalism looks like. Paul is saying that a grace-filled community is a restorative community, whereas a legalistic community is a judgmental community.”

After giving two lists, “acts of the flesh” and “fruit of the Spirit,” and especially after his exhortation not to be conceited or contentious (5:26), Paul addressed what to do about sin in both ourselves and others. In relation to others, he instructed the church to restore sinning brothers and sisters gently (v. 1). The assumption was that they had already recognized and repented of their sin. Since God forgives them, so should we. We should not erect barriers but instead

restore them to fellowship and heal the relationship. Paul also exhorted us to “carry each other’s burdens” (v. 2; Rom. 15:1–3). That is, we should help each other out in areas of moral or spiritual weakness, or when our problems become excessive.

In relation to ourselves, Paul warned that we must be on guard against temptation (v. 1). Getting close to sin might pull us in, or at least tempt us to pride. This can quickly lead us into being self-deceived or giving us a false sense of self-importance (v. 3). We should instead be self-aware and responsible, testing our actions against God’s standards instead of comparing them with or judging others (v. 4; Matt. 7:1–5). In this sense, we should carry our own loads (v. 5). While we live in community as the body of Christ, we also stand accountable before God as individuals.

APPLY THE WORD

In light of Galatians 5 and 6, today might be a good day to focus on allowing the Holy Spirit to examine our hearts. Do we struggle with any of the “acts of the flesh”? Which “fruit of the Spirit” is God seeking to cultivate in our lives these days? As the Holy Spirit guides you, confess, repent, take action, and praise Him for the joy of His presence.

PRAY WITH US

Bruce Everhart, vice president of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, will appreciate your prayers today. He oversees such important areas as Moody’s outreach to our partners in ministry, direct mail, and fundraising campaigns.

*Whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit
will reap eternal life.*

Galatians 6:8

SUNDAY
FEBRUARY

26

Sowing a Life that Pleases God

“A man reaps what he sows” is a biblical truth reflected in this often-heard poem, which shows clearly how little things add up to big things: *Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny.*

This simple yet profound principle is the key to understanding today’s passage. It also undergirds the behavioral exhortations of verses 1 through 6, and highlights the importance of building godly character, a theme that runs throughout chapters 5 and 6. People who act as if this principle were not true mock or sneer at God (v. 7). They think they’ve gotten away with something, that God doesn’t see, that there will be no consequences to their actions, or that they’ve somehow outwitted Him.

The principle of sowing and reaping is true in both its negative and positive

forms (v. 8). Hosea 10:12–13 says: “Sow righteousness for yourselves, reap the fruit of unfailing love. . . . But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception.” Those who sow “to please their flesh” or according to the sinful nature, reap “destruction” or damnation. Those who sow “to please the Spirit” or according to their freedom in Christ, reap eternal life and individual rewards.

Therefore, “Let us not become weary in doing good” (v. 9). In fact, let’s do all the good we can to all the people we can, especially fellow believers (v. 10). Why might we “become weary” or lose heart or become discouraged? Because the way is often full of difficulties and temptations, and sometimes the reward of eternal life can seem very far away. But if we’re consistent and persistent in doing good, “we will reap a harvest”!

APPLY THE WORD

What might happen if we went through the next 24 hours with the attitude of verse 10? Let us intend to do as much good as possible to as many people as possible, especially fellow believers. We should accompany this intention by prayer. According to Scripture, we should think of doing good to others as a sacrifice of praise to the Lord (Heb. 13:15–16).

PRAY WITH US

Vice president of Human Resources, Debbie Zelinski, requests your prayers for the Human Resources staff. Ask God to direct their efforts as they hire new staff, oversee employee benefits, and coordinate training seminars and other events.

MONDAY
FEBRUARY

27

*May I never boast except in the
cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Galatians 6:14

Boasting Only in the Cross of Christ

In their hit song, “Hallelujah for the Cross,” the Newsboys sang: “Up to the hill of Calvary / my Savior went courageously / and there He bled and died for me / Hallelujah for the Cross / And on that day the world was changed / A final, perfect lamb was slain / Let earth and heaven now proclaim / Hallelujah for the Cross / Hallelujah for the war He fought / Love has won, death has lost / Hallelujah for the souls He bought / Hallelujah for the Cross.”

These lyrics capture the spirit of what Paul meant when he said: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14). Verse 11 probably indicates he had been dictating this letter to a scribe, and now he picked up the pen himself to write a few lines as a kind of authentication or signature.

Since this was his last opportunity to make his case to the Galatians, he

summed up and restated his main points. The Judaizers, those who wanted to impose circumcision and the Mosaic Law on these new Gentile believers, had wrong motives (v. 12). They sought to impress people, live by the flesh, earn salvation by good works, and avoid persecution (by fitting in better with other Jews). Furthermore, they were hypocrites, since no one can keep the Law (v. 13).

Followers of Christ, by contrast, should boast only in the Cross of Christ (v. 14). The Cross is the clear dividing line between Christians and the world. We’ve been freed from sin and the Law. The old order is ended; we’re no longer under its power. Nothing can or should be added to the saving work of Christ. By his blood, we are new creations (v. 15; 2 Cor. 5:17)!

APPLY THE WORD

The hymn “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross” is fitting: “When I survey the wondrous cross / On which the Prince of glory died, / My richest gain I count but loss, / And pour contempt on all my pride. / Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, / Save in the death of Christ my God! / All the vain things that charm me most, / I sacrifice them to His blood.”

PRAY WITH US

Equipping every interested learner with a Moody education to impact the world for Christ is the vision and the mission of Moody Distance Learning. Please support with your prayers Dr. Bryan O’Neal, vice president and dean, as he leads this ministry.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.

Galatians 6:18

TUESDAY
FEBRUARY

28

Conclusion of the Epistle

Martin Luther wrote these words about the doctrine of justification by faith: “If faith yields on this point, the death of the Son of God will be in vain. Then it is only a fable that Christ is the Savior of the world. Then God is a liar, for he has not lived up to his promises. Therefore our stubbornness on this issue is pious and holy; for by it we are striving to preserve the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to keep the truth of the gospel.”

As we close our month’s study of Galatians, Paul emphasizes once again that Christ and His work are at the center of the gospel. Any other teaching is a corrupt message and heresy.

That’s why verse 17 is a strong warning to the Judaizers: No more troublemaking! When Paul said, “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus,” he might have been referring to the

sufferings he had endured for Christ’s sake. His body literally bore scars earned in the cause of the gospel. He might also have been referring to his complete allegiance to Christ; figuratively speaking, he bore on his body a slave’s mark or brand indicating he belonged to Jesus. To make trouble for Paul was therefore to invite the righteous anger of his master, Christ Himself. The legalist claimed the mark of circumcision, but that was trumped by the mark of Jesus.

As is common in Paul’s epistles, the closing verse is a benediction (v. 18). “Grace” is particularly appropriate in this letter, given its emphasis on salvation by grace not works. We are justified by faith alone in Christ alone, so that we can walk in the Spirit and express our faith through love. In the gospel of Jesus we find faith, freedom, and fruit!

APPLY THE WORD

D. L. Moody once said, “The Bible is not given to increase our knowledge. The Bible is given to change our lives.” That’s the purpose behind *Today in the Word* as well! How has studying Galatians this month changed your life? What has God done—and what is He still doing—in your life through His Word as a result of this study?

PRAY WITH US

Thank the Lord today for the lessons we learned from the book of Galatians. Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to give us the ability to live in the freedom of the gospel, the life that pleases God. May we remember the message of the Cross and share it with others!

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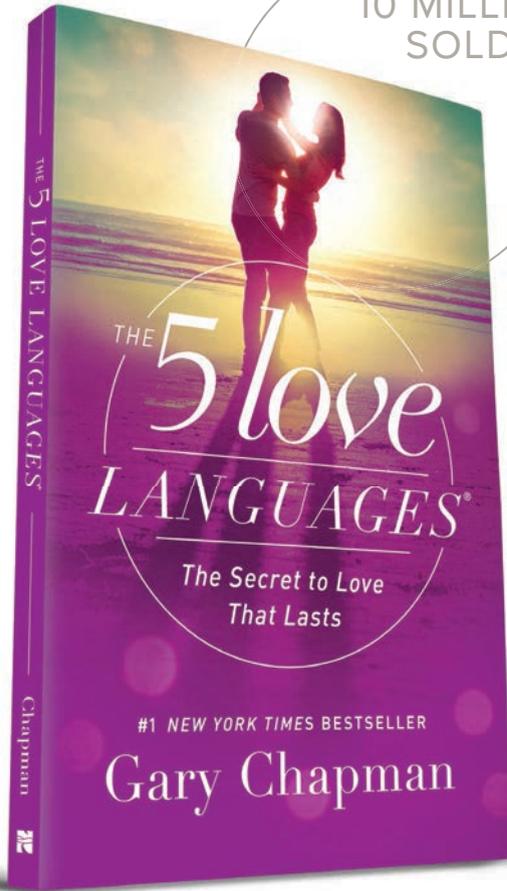
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