

DECEMBER 2013

25th

Anniversary

1988

2013

TODAY IN THE **Word**

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE



The Word
became flesh
and made
his dwelling
among us.

John 1:14

The Image of God: God Revealed
to Us and Shared with Us

TODAY WITH PAUL NYQUIST

President of Moody Bible Institute

A Lineage of Grace



The only two genealogies recorded in the New Testament both belong to the Messiah. If you were to examine these two lineages, you might expect to find a list of the greatest and most godly people in

all the history of Israel. While some spiritual giants can be found in this family tree, there are also names you would never expect to find—names of prostitutes, adulterers, and evil kings.

The genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew traces the lineage of Christ through the line of Joseph (which would have been Jesus' legal heritage since Joseph was His earthly father). Matthew takes a few liberties because he breaks from Jewish tradition and includes the names of several women. These four women would have been outcasts in their day, yet here they appear in the family tree of the Messiah.

First, Matthew lists Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judah (Matt. 1:3). After Tamar's husband died, she became a widow without any heirs. According to the law, Judah was to give Tamar to his next-born son, but his next-born son refused. Tamar took matters into her own hands, and the rest of the story is a sad and sordid tale of incest, prostitution, and deception.

Next, Matthew lists Rahab (Matt. 1:5). It is surprising to see Rahab in this genealogy because she was a prostitute and she was also a Canaanite. The Canaanites

were the people that the Israelites had to destroy when they went into the Promised Land. In Joshua 2, Rahab hid the Israelite spies who came to see the land, and as a result, the Israelites spared the lives of Rahab and her family. Rahab became a true worshiper of God and eventually the great-grandmother of King David.

The third woman in this family tree is Ruth (Matt. 1:5). Unlike the first two women, Ruth had spotless character, but it is surprising to see her name in this genealogy because she was a Moabite. The Jews' hatred of the Moabites dated back many years to an account of incest recorded in Genesis 19. And yet Ruth appears in the family tree of Jesus.

Finally, the last woman in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus is not officially named, though we know her name is Bathsheba (Matt. 1:6). She was the mother of Solomon, the wife of King David. But Solomon was not Bathsheba's first child with King David. Second Samuel records David's affair with Bathsheba, the death of her husband, and the death of their child. Later, she conceived again, gave birth to Solomon, and became a part of the Messiah's genealogy.

God could have included anybody He wanted in the Messiah's lineage. In His grace, He chose adulterers, prostitutes, Canaanites, and Moabites. The end result is a beautiful revelation of God's radical grace and His ability to use imperfect people to carry out His extraordinary plans.

THEOLOGY MATTERS

by John Koessler



The Invisibility of God

The classic hymn begins, “Immortal, invisible, God only wise, / in light inaccessible, hid from our eyes.” This echoes 1 Timothy 6:15–16, which says that God is: “immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.” Earlier this epistle describes God as “the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God” (1 Tim. 1:17).

How should we understand this? Is God literally invisible? When Moses asked to see God’s glory, the Lord warned him that no one could see His face and live (Ex. 33:20). Yet according to Exodus 24:11, the elders of Israel “saw” God on Mount Sinai. The Lord said that He spoke to Moses “face to face” (Num. 12:8). But Moses did not see a face in the literal sense. God the Father is spirit and is immaterial by nature (John 4:24). He does not possess a face, body, or limbs. Even when He revealed Himself as the Angel of Jehovah to the Old Testament Patriarchs, they saw only the appearance of a human form and not a literal body made of flesh and bone (Gen. 18:1).

The miracle of the Incarnation is that in the person of Jesus Christ “all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col.

2:9). Jesus was not a mere man who was somehow elevated to divine status in the virgin birth. He already existed as God before He was born in Bethlehem. Employing the language of Genesis 1, the Gospel of John states that in the beginning Jesus was with God and was God (John 1:1). In the Incarnation, the Word who already existed as God with the Father took to Himself a human nature and was “born of a woman” (Gal. 4:4). Genuine humanity did not make Jesus less divine as a result of this experience. Likewise, the union of two natures in one person did not make Him less human or superhuman. Instead, it ensured that He would be able to serve as a sinless and compassionate high priest for us. Because Jesus had both a human and divine nature, He was “tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin” (Heb. 4:15).

As the God “who became flesh and made his dwelling among us,” Jesus is uniquely qualified to show us the invisible Father (John 1:14). Prior to the Incarnation Jesus was one with the Father. He came from the Father (John 16:28). He alone has “seen” the Father (John 6:46). It is only through Jesus that we can know God as our Father (John 14:7–9).

For Further Study

To learn more about the miracle of Incarnation, read *Incarnation* by Alister E. McGrath (Fortress).

FROM THE EDITORS

by Elena Mafer

Bible Topics, Anniversaries, and God's Faithfulness



Dear readers,

The year of *Today in the Word's* 25th anniversary is coming to an end, and looking back at the quarter century of our devotional's existence we can say: God has been faithful!

We thank Him for the ministry of *Today in the Word*, and we also thank Him for you, our readers. You have studied the Bible with us, prayed with and for Moody, encouraged all of us, and let us know when you didn't agree with us. Many of you also have helped support the ministry of *Today in the Word* financially. We hope this friendship and partnership with our readers continues in the second quarter century.

In 2013 our monthly devotions have covered a lot of biblical ground. We've studied the books of 2 Corinthians, Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. We've learned more about foundations of our faith, prayer, temptation and overcoming sin. We've learned from Bible characters in the Old and New Testaments, and we've been surprised by God's grace in the midst of disappointments.

This year, to commemorate our 25th anniversary, we also produced volume two of *The Best of Today in the Word*, a follow-up to the first volume, published for the 20th anniversary of *Today in the Word*. Volume two is based on the reader survey we conducted at the end of 2012 and includes devotions most liked by our readers: Characters of Faith and Wisdom, Lessons from Children in the Bible, The Gospel of Luke, A Practical Theology of Language, and others. You can request both volumes on the enclosed reply card.

We're excited about the coming year and what God has in store for us. We know that we can count on God's faithfulness in the future as we have in the past. Fittingly, the first topic we'll delve into in the New Year is The Faithfulness of God. We'll study the books of Matthew, Daniel, Philippians, and Deuteronomy. We'll find out what the Bible says about lament, comfort, and hope. We'll also learn more about change, desire, and the Bible's use of important images. We pray that every issue of 2014 helps you grow closer to Christ.

Thank you for reading *Today in the Word*! Thank you for standing with this ministry—it wouldn't be possible without your support. From all of us at *Today in the Word*, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

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TODAY IN THE Word

A MINISTRY OF MOODY BIBLE INSTITUTE

The Image of God: Revealed and Shared with Us

A still small voice. Dreams and visions. The burning bush. In the Old Testament, God spoke to the prophets “at many times and in various ways” (Heb. 1:1). These various ways make us marvel.

But the way He revealed Himself in the New Testament is nothing short of scandalous—He came as a baby. The simple words of a Haitian Christmas song express very well this wonder: *Noel is a strange story indeed! / Jesus, Son of God, King of Kings, / Doesn't even have a cradle. / He sleeps on the straw among animals. / Oh my!*

This month in *Today in the Word*, we'll study various portions of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation. We'll catch a glimpse of the image of God in creation, in humanity, and in the nation of Israel. And ultimately we'll look at Christ, all man and all God, the image of the invisible God, in whom the fullness of God is revealed to us.

We at *Today in the Word* pray that each day's devotional will draw you nearer to God. We hope that you will see Christ more clearly in Scripture and in your life, and you'll come closer to understanding the mystery of mysteries—“Christ in you, the hope of glory, the hope of things to come”—Christ dwelling in the heart of every true believer by the Holy Spirit. And perhaps you won't help repeating the exclamation of the Haitian hymn: *Oh my!*

Thank you for studying with us! And thank you for supporting *Today in the Word's* ministry!

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Behold, He Makes All Things New

When we reflect on great stories we probably think first of their climactic moments, such as the melting Wicked Witch in “The Wizard of Oz” or the destruction of the Death Star in *Star Wars*. But these events resonate in our memory only because of their context within a larger tale. The climax of a story is best appreciated when we understand what preceded it and how it affects the rest of the story.

This month we focus on the Incarnation. The birth, life, and glorification of Jesus form the centerpiece of God’s revelation, but to best understand it we need to see it in context, and we need to see the implications.

When the author of Hebrews begins his description of faith, he begins with creation. “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command” (11:3). When God created, He did so with purpose and intention. We see each

person of the Trinity involved in creation, but one intention of the Father and the Spirit is to put special focus on Christ. As we see in our reading today, He is creation’s heir (v. 15) and creation’s focal point (v. 18).

The apostle John calls Christ the “Word” of God, and we cannot miss the link to Genesis 1 and the words that bring creation into existence. But in Colossians Paul elaborates even further to explain “in Him all things hold together.” Christ makes our very moment-to-moment existence possible.

Earthly fathers love to see their children shine; even more so, God the Father loves to see His Son shine as the “star” of creation itself. The glory freely shared in the life of the Trinity then spills over into the world He made. It is a glory in which we too can partake.

For in him all things
were created:
things in heaven
and on earth,
visible and invisible.

Colossians 1:16

Apply the Word

When we see majestic mountains or infinite stars, when we hear birds sing or waters roar, we behold Christ’s handiwork. The wonders of creation glorify Him and are beacon to us, reminding us of who He is. During this season, take time to acknowledge and worship Jesus by praising Him for His glorious creation. Every snowflake, pine tree, and poinsettia should remind us of our Lord, who is also Creator.

Pray with Us

As we come to the end of 2013 with *Today in the Word*, please lift up in prayer our leadership team headed by Moody president, Dr. Paul Nyquist. Ask the Lord for His grace and guidance in all the decisions for Moody’s ministries in the coming year.

A Distinctive God

Physics is often considered an intellectually challenging subject. But physics teaches us essential lessons about how the natural world works: laws of motion, energy, and the properties of solids, liquids, and gases. Knowledge of physics is invaluable.

The doctrine of the Trinity is similar in some ways to physics. It is not easy to understand, but it is an essential foundation of our faith and vital to our knowledge of how the spiritual world works. Scripture shows us that we cannot understand Jesus, ourselves, or creation without knowing Christ's "context" within the Godhead.

Yesterday we saw how Christ formed the "glue" of creation itself. Today we take a closer look at Genesis 1, and we see God as Father, Son, and Spirit involved in creation. The Father authored creation (Isa. 44:24; 45:12). But He did so through speech, through the Word—who is Christ—who is God (John 1:1–3).

And God said,
"Let there be light,"
and there was light.

Genesis 1:3

The Holy Spirit also reveals Himself "in the beginning," bringing life from nothing (Gen. 1:2). He does work only God can do (Ps. 104:30, Job 26:13). Psalm 33:6 further shows the essential unity of the Trinity's work in creation. The letter of 1 John declares the Godhead shared between Jesus and God the Father: "No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also" (1 John 2:21).

This same passage testifies also to the distinctive nature of the three Persons of the Trinity. That is, the Father is not the Son, and the Son is not the Father. We maintain the unity of the Godhead while confessing the uniqueness of the Persons. As one commentator stated, "The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are each divine with the same divinity, yet each in his own divine way." The eternal Trinity is the foundation for all of creation.

Apply the Word

Whenever we seek connections with others while maintaining our individuality, we reflect the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Consider the people with whom you are in relationship, whether your family, church, or neighbors. Pray for those people today, and ask the Lord to help your relationships bear witness to the truth of the divine relationship of the Trinity.

Pray with Us

Please keep in your prayers Moody Radio's Satellite Network Operations. May God's kingdom expand through the programs that Bassam Beirut, Andrew Dhuse, Tracy Haney, Eric Hufford, Phil Shappard, and Thomas Svoboda broadcast.

A Distinctive Creation

“Little Johnny looks just like his dad!”
 “Susie has musical talent like her mom!”
 People often see the traits and aptitudes of the parents reflected in their children. But of course children are not clones—each child might have inherited features from his parents, but he is still very much an individual. Every family reflects this concept of unity and diversity in creation that we discussed yesterday.

Just as children result from the love of their parents, so creation itself flows from the relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s creation reflects something of His nature, but will also have its own distinctive identity. Creation is not itself God.

God could have created everything in an instant, but Genesis 1 describes creation happening in different segments over a period of time. God honors each part of His creation with its own special day. God further gives creation the ability

to participate in perpetuating its own uniqueness by reproduction “according to their kinds” (1:12, 21).

We should not see separate or competing creation accounts in Genesis 1 and 2 but rather this same kind of unity and distinctiveness. Genesis 1 gives us the grand overview, while Genesis 2 gives specific focus to humanity, God’s special creation.

But we must also see the essential unity of creation. The God we meet in creation is the same God we encounter in the Person of Jesus Christ. John Wesley wrote, “He

moved upon the face of the deep, as the hen gathereth her chicken under her wings, and hovers over them, to warm and cherish them.” The same imagery is used in Deuteronomy 32:11 to describe God the Father and is used in Matthew 23:37 to describe Jesus. Our God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

The land produced
 vegetation: plants
 bearing seed
 according to
 their kinds.

Genesis 1:12

Apply the Word

With these truths in mind, we can understand better how creation brings glory to God. Whenever we sense a bond with another person, or whenever we feel stirred by the beauty of nature, we testify to our common creation by one God. Whenever we see the distinctions between snowflakes or human smiles, we see the diversity and freedom of the Trinity. These are all opportunities to praise our God!

Pray with Us

Moody Radio edifies, educates, and evangelizes, helping listeners to grow in faith and in the knowledge of God’s Word. Would you pray for Collin Lambert, vice president of Moody Radio, who oversees this ministry?

Made in the Image

When we invite special guests into our homes we usually take the time to clean up and make a nice meal. Showing such care and deliberation honors our guests.

God makes the universe through simple commands, but in verse 26 of our reading today we see something different. Sun, moon, and seas get made in an almost casual manner, but with mankind the Trinity takes counsel, and then He invites His new creation to partake freely of the feast He prepared (1:29–30). Understanding the importance of this will help us understand ourselves, and it also reveals something to us about Jesus, who is the perfect image of God (Heb. 1:3).

First, we know ourselves best by looking to God, not to the rest of creation. Our capacity to know God and love Him separates us from creation. Humanity is equipped and invited to participate in the

love between Father, Son, and Spirit, and we can reflect this love to creation since we are made in His image.

Just as the Spirit hovers over creation (1:2), so Adam cares for the garden (2:9, 15). God also shares in the process of helping shape creation with Adam. Many commentators note that in the ancient Near East naming conferred identity, transferring “new life” to the recipient. In naming the animals and his wife, Adam gives “shape” to creation.

Then God said,
“Let us make
mankind in our
image, in our
likeness.”

Genesis 1:26

While we see a distinction between man and woman, we also see the unity of God reflected. Genesis makes clear that men and women share equally in God’s image (1:27). Creation happened through the Word, which helps us understand that “there is neither Jew nor Gentile . . . nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). The unity of mankind rests on the uniqueness of Christ.

Apply the Word

The fourth-century Christian Gregory of Nazianzus applied these truths to condemn slavery outright, writing that laws permitting slavery “overturn God’s laws for mankind.” If you see each person you meet as a particular creation by God, bearing His image, and also united with you as part of God’s glorious creation of humanity, how will that change the ways that you interact with that person?

Pray with Us

We invite you to uphold in prayer the service of Ken Heullitt, chief financial officer, and his team at Moody. On behalf of his team, we thank Moody’s faithful partners for supporting our ministries through the years.

A Little Lower than the Angels

Politeness requires guests to mind their behavior. Guests should understand that they enter someone else's space and adapt their behavior accordingly. In every way mankind is a guest in creation—but God is an unusual host, because His guests become owners and rulers of His domain.

This unspeakable gift has nothing to do with us, just as it had nothing to do with Adam. For David, this glorification puzzled him, for it seems that creation in all its vastness stands superior to humanity (Ps. 8:3–4). The French scholar Blaise Pascal felt this tension keenly, writing, “By space the universe . . . swallows me up. . . . By thought I comprehend the world.” This power of comprehension gives us the potential to govern God's creation (Ps. 8:5–9).

This sounds inspiring, but is this just an exercise in poetry? We might argue

that humanity comes nowhere close to exercising this noble dominion. But Hebrews 2 shows us how Christ regains through His death what we forfeited. The language might make us wonder if the author refers to mankind or Christ, but we don't have to make a choice. The psalm properly applies to both because of the link between man and Christ. The psalmist speaks of man, but Hebrews shows us that Christ fully realizes these truths as the Man par excellence. As His “brothers and sisters” (Heb. 2:11) we get what He gets.

Christ's victory gives creation back to us and restores something of our original place in creation. But it does more than that. “For a little while” Christ joined us in being “lower than the angels,” but Christ now reigns over them. As Paul indicates, when the kingdom fully comes, “we will judge angels” (1 Cor. 6:3). Humanity's association with Christ is our greatest honor.

You have made
them a little lower
than the angels
and crowned them
with glory and
honor.

Psalm 8:5

Apply the Word

Christ's kingdom has not fully come, but it has started its advance in the lives of those who follow Jesus. We live today as ambassadors of that kingdom. As a representative of Christ, what does it mean for us to exercise noble dominion over creation today? Consider your care for the world around you as part of your testimony for Christ and His care for His creation.

Pray with Us

Tomorrow begins the Candlelight Carols performance at The Moody Church in Chicago. Please use this occasion to pray for the Moody students who will be ministering in worship at this Christmas concert, that their music will glorify our Lord and Savior.

Separation from the Image

In a famous Greek myth a nymph named Echo loves Narcissus and pursues him, but in vain. Narcissus ignores her completely and loves only his own image instead. The story ends tragically, for Narcissus's self-adoration leads to his untimely death.

Adam and Eve had everything, nearly the whole of creation at their feet. Most importantly, they had a relationship with God unsullied by sin. But they threw that away to make themselves gods (Gen. 3:5)—or at least try to. Fruit dies, however, when plucked from the vine, and mankind suffered the same fate (Gen. 2:17).

Like Narcissus, when Adam cut himself off from Love, death became inevitable. We are even clothed in the remnants of death (Gen. 3:23). The "image of God" remained with mankind, but Genesis 5:3 tellingly comments that Seth was born "in [Adam's] own image." Adam irrevocably lost

something. Death cannot bring forth life, and so the curse continued.

Some think it is unjust that Adam's children have to suffer punishment for something we ourselves did not do. But in our reading today Paul makes clear that "all sin" (v. 12), and so all suffer justly. Death comes to each person now as part of the natural order of the world.

Through the
obedience of the
one man the many
will be made
righteous.

Romans 5:19

Reversing nature takes a supernatural act. Far from showing God's injustice, this passage highlights God's mercy. We inherit much more from Christ than Adam (v. 17). This changes everything.

Death came from the first Adam, but he was "a pattern of the one to come" (v. 14). Christ, our brother (Heb. 2:11) and true heir, could give back more than Adam could throw away (vv. 20–21). How can we now continue to gaze foolishly at ourselves, when paradise has been regained for us?

Apply the Word

Showing others the love of God even in small ways is not merely a good deed. Our service and generosity and compassion are ways that we demonstrate the life that is possible through Christ. During this season especially, how can you share love and life with the people around you? It need not be a monetary gift or present; it could be sharing a meal, offering a listening ear, or extending forgiveness.

Pray with Us

Moody's annual Christmas pageant, Candlelight Carols, starts today. Please pray for our Event and Guest Services staff—Stacey Craelius, Lysa Ellis, Joy Gruber, and Nathan Jacobs—as they greet guests and oversee the logistics of the performance.

A New Mandate

In 1852, on the 48th anniversary of the coronation of Napoleon I, France crowned his nephew Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte, known as Napoleon III. France wanted to recapture international prestige, but after decades of failed military interventions around the world Napoleon III was forced to surrender to the Prussians in 1870, leading to the fall of the Second French Empire. He was the last monarch of France.

By Genesis 9 we have seen mankind fail in the Garden, then fail again so catastrophically that God sent a global flood. God “resets” humanity through Noah, who functions like a second Adam. Noah gets a renewed mandate that looks very similar to what God said in Genesis 1:28–31. But the subtle differences between Genesis 1 and 9 reveal how much has been lost.

Mankind still has the power to transmit life, but this life now brings alienation

rather than fellowship. Mankind still holds the superior position, but we lost our kinship with creation (vv. 1–2). We rule through fear, and we sustain ourselves by killing other creatures (v. 3). Eating meat is not wrong, but “in the beginning” different conditions existed (Gen. 1:29–30).

But you must
not eat meat that
has its lifeblood
still in it.

Genesis 9:4

God adds, however, that Noah was to avoid meat “with the lifeblood still in it” (v. 4). The obvious meaning prohibits eating animals still alive, but the text points beyond that. Here we get the first instance in Scripture that life “is in the blood” (Lev. 17:11), and

because of this blood can serve as a gateway to our redemption (Eph. 1:7).

While the context in Genesis 9 reflects what mankind lost, it shows that God continues to love us. He does not want us to lose hope. He reiterates the command to “be fruitful” and bring forth new life into the world.

Apply the Word

When Jesus faced a difficult question regarding marriage (Matt. 19:1–6) He did not look first at the reality of man’s fallen state. He began not with our sin, but with our original design. He began not with punishment, but with dignity and purpose. Today let us pray to see even our enemies in a different light. They—and ourselves—were meant for so much more than what we see around us.

Pray with Us

During this second day of Candlelight Carols, please uplift in prayer these employees of Event and Guest Services: Brenda McCord, Julie Jackson, Carmel Swift, Sonya Valeff, and Traci Wappes. Ask for God’s help as they attend to every detail.

A Chosen People

Many political observers lament the triumph of style over substance. But because we cannot personally know the candidates, we have to try to understand them through some mediating image. “Image” itself is not the problem, but false images distort reality.

After sin entered the world, we could not know God directly as Adam and Eve did in the Garden. The image of Him that humanity was supposed to reflect had been distorted. And while the fault lay entirely with humanity, God is the one who begins the work of damage control, of rebuilding what we threw away. God meant for Israel to serve a major role in re-imagining Himself to His creation, to prepare the way for the fullness of His image in His Son.

Many modern readers may cringe at the perceived “intolerance” of God in verses 1 through 5 of our reading today. We should remember, however, the evil

wrought by Adam had spread far and wide, infecting whole nations everywhere. For God to spread His true image to all nations, He needed to stop the spread of the disease of death. Understanding this will help us with other seemingly difficult verses. Some see a god of spite in verse 10, but in protecting His image, God protects His people and makes it possible for them to know Him.

Others see the strong emphasis on obedience (v. 11) and assume a “covenant of works” for Israel. But Israel’s role as an object lesson of God’s reality meant that they were God’s “treasured possession” (v.

6), and as something treasured they were to be set apart.

This passage also highlights God’s grace, with numerous citations of His mercy and love (vv. 7–9). God gave Israel special status, and His faithfulness is their guarantee (v. 8).

The Lord your God
has chosen you out
of all the peoples
on the face of the
earth.

Deuteronomy 7:6

Apply the Word

When Israel’s great king David sinned with Bathsheba, Nathan told him that his actions led other nations to blaspheme God (2 Sam. 12:14). Today, we who claim the name of Christ must realize that our actions impact how others see God. His church is His body, His “image” on earth. Are we causing others to want the life and love that we have? Or are we leading them to conclude that it’s all style over substance?

Pray with Us

The mission of Moody’s media ministries is to proclaim the Word of God and to impact the world for Christ. Please pray for God’s strength for Greg Thornton, senior VP of Media, as he leads Moody Radio and Moody Publishers through the challenges of today’s world.

A Distinctive People

Those who serve in the military know about shiny shoes. Those that play baseball know the importance of high-top sneakers. The shine or cut of a shoe aren't moral imperatives, but when you join a team you wear the uniform. The distinctiveness of the way you dress contributes to the group's unity.

Many of the commands given to Israel are like military regulations for shiny shoes. True, some of the food and cleanliness laws outlined in the book of Leviticus might have made the Israelites healthier, but some have no direct connection to either morals or health, such as laws governing the kind of fabric they could wear (see Lev. 19:19).

Our passage today helps us better understand why Israel was given these instructions. We see the call to recite the dramatic history of Israel's rescue from Egypt (v. 5), and we see instructions about tithing (vv. 12–13). In the midst of this are

instructions about food cleanliness (v. 14), which seems to pale in importance. Why do these things matter?

The King James Version translates verse 18 as "a *peculiar* people." Some of these laws had the dual function of setting Israel apart and of making other nations do a double-take. If the laws seem like excessive minutiae, we must remember the desperate situation in the ancient world in which temple prostitution and even human sacrifice were not uncommon. God shouts through these laws to the nations, "Hey! Look over

The Lord has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession.

Deuteronomy 26:18

here!"

By giving Israel a "peculiar" look, God helped reinforce the unity of the people, which reflects the unity of God Himself (Deut. 6:4). The ancient world needed another option besides the polytheism of its day, where Zeus, Ammon, Marduk, and Jupiter all blended together. We need the same today.

Apply the Word

Israel had distinctive dietary laws to draw attention to the fact that they were God's treasured people. It's important to note that this perspective helps us transcend legalism, which tries to implement rules as a way of looking holy apart from a relationship with God. How is your life distinctive because you are God's beloved child? Does your daily life highlight for others how much God loves you?

Pray with Us

We are thankful for your prayer support today for Moody Publishers' Finance department. Pray that the service of Harrison Gunter, Susan Malnati, and Richard Peterson would always honor Christ.

Israel and the Temple

One of the pleasures of epic stories like *The Odyssey* or *The Lord of the Rings* is how the story expands and contracts, giving readers multiple perspectives. Odysseus can fight sea monsters, and then we see Penelope at her loom. Frodo can participate in a great battle, and then reminisce about life back home.

Scripture does likewise. We see God create a whole universe, but then focus on two people in a garden. The narrative then expands to Adam's descendants, and contracts again to Noah. From Abraham alone God creates the entire nation of Israel, which reaches its peak in Solomon's reign. But in 1 Kings 8 everything contracts again. It's as if Israel exists for no other purpose than this: to have God dwell with man once more, if only in one particular place.

Solomon waited several months after the temple's structural completion until near

the Feast of Tabernacles, when all Israel would assemble to commemorate when they lived in tents during the Exodus. The feast also took place at the end of the harvest, a time of gathering together and appreciating blessing. The enormous number of sacrifices (vv. 5, 62–63) shows that Israel recognized the importance of this occasion.

I have indeed
built a magnificent
temple for you, a
place for you to
dwell forever.

1 Kings 8:12–13

But these countless sacrifices, and the elaborate furnishings (7:15–51) are not the point. Everything about the temple focuses like a laser on the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary (v. 6). After the high priest entered, God showed His acceptance and pleasure by overflowing the temple with His presence (v. 11).

During the Exodus, God led them in a cloud. Here He could "dwell forever" with the Israelites. The temple was a step toward the restoration of communion between God and humanity.

Apply the Word

Because of Christ, each of us is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:18–20). When we see the intricate care for the temple described in this chapter we may lament at how we take our bodies for granted. God cares about how we treat His creation, including our bodies. If you need take steps to treat your body with more care, ask the Lord to guide and strengthen you.

Pray with Us

Keeping in prayer Moody Publishers' Finance department, please add Edgar Santiago, Jeffrey Reynolds, Maryanna Pieleanu, and Thinh Pham to your prayer list. Our prayer is that Moody will always please God in the area of finances.

Light to the Nations

Though Israel never had a large amount of territory, in Solomon's day they had a great deal of power and influence in the ancient Near East. But political divisions between the twelve tribes led to Assyria and Babylon having a chance to dominate the landscape. More significantly, Israel's political divisions sprung from deeply rooted spiritual idolatry (1 Kings 11:33). They among all the nations had God's presence in the temple, and their failure endangered all humanity.

Isaiah 49 shows us that God will make good on His promises and Israel's mission through the "servant" God calls.

Introduced in Isaiah 42:1–6, the "servant" now speaks for himself. God calls him "Israel" (v. 3) but several places indicate that this Servant is an individual. In verse 5 the text distinguishes him from the nation, since the nation comes to him. Some suggest that this servant is Isaiah himself, but as one commentator notes, "What the

speaker says of himself is so unique, so glorious, that it reaches far beyond the performance of any single prophet." The fullness of the identity of the Servant is found in Jesus Himself.

This "gathering" of the people back to God through His Servant involves spiritual reconciliation. Interestingly, Scripture expresses the nature of this redemption in almost exclusively physical terms. Kings and princes will worship, and creation itself is transformed (vv. 7–11). While the Servant uses figurative language here, we should not view his words as merely symbolic.

No line exists between "spiritual" and "physical" sin. Sin dragged creation down with us, and our redemption will therefore restore it as well. The Servant Himself is not merely a notion or a vague idea, but One formed in the womb (vv. 1, 5), who has a real, physical reality. He will make Israel a light to the Gentiles, that the ends of the earth might have salvation.

I will also make
you a light for
the Gentiles, that
my salvation may
reach to the ends
of the earth.

Isaiah 49:6

Apply the Word

If you have been burdened in bondage to your sin, this passage is good news! The Servant, Jesus Christ, offers you reconciliation with God, freedom from the clutches of sin, and a life of purpose that bears witness to His salvation. Trust Him as your Savior from sin and believe that He is the Son of God who died, was buried, and rose again to defeat sin and death.

Pray with Us

Dr. Larry Davidhizar makes important decisions about the future of our Undergraduate School helping our students follow God's calling in their lives. Please uphold in prayer his responsibilities as vice president and dean of Undergraduate School.

I Said "You Are Gods"

Centuries ago kings in Europe sometimes addressed one another not as "King Henry" or "King Francis," but as "Brother England" or "My Cousin, France." They knew that kings were individuals, but they also recognized that monarchs acted as a composite unity that represented the whole country.

Psalm 82 describes a similar dual status for Israel. The psalmist Asaph shows Israel its high calling and status, but he also shows Israel's inability to live into their calling. Both their status and their failure reveal Christ to us.

One key to understanding this text is the Hebrew word *Elohim*, a frequent name for God in the Old Testament. It is the plural form of *El*, the singular word for God. Some see hints of the Trinity here, since Psalm 82 uses *Elohim* and *El* interchangeably. For instance, verse 1 states, "*Elohim* stands in the

congregation of *El*, he judges among the *elohim*" (NKJV). In verse 6 we see again, "I said, 'You are *elohim*.'"

Translators can pick up contextual clues to render these terms appropriately, but in this text we should not be too quick to starkly differentiate between the usages of *Elohim*. Asaph uses *Elohim* to show the connection between God and mankind and to refer us back to Genesis 1. It also pushes us ahead to Jesus Himself, who, although a "Son of Man," used this text to point to His own divinity (John 10:34). Woven throughout this psalm we see the connections between God, Christ, and us.

This same text also shows our need for redemption. We fail to defend the weak and uphold justice (v. 3), severing the bond between God and creation itself (v. 5). God calls us "gods," but we will die (v. 7). "Rise up, O *Elohim*!" (v. 8).

I said, "You are
'gods';
you are
all sons of the
Most High."

Psalm 82:6

Apply the Word

During this season Christians are preparing to celebrate the birth of Christ but also preparing our hearts for His Second Coming. The final words of Scripture remind us to pray for the return of Jesus: "'Yes, I am coming soon.' Amen. Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). Take time today to pray and focus your heart on the return of Jesus when His peace and justice will prevail completely over sin.

Pray with Us

Paula Siebold, Linda Pankratz, Julie Henshaw, and Claudia Beguin in Academic Dean's Office help Dr. Davidhizar with various administrative tasks. Please include them in your prayers today and ask for God's blessing on their lives.

A Perfect Image

When a Roman emperor assumed power, he created new coinage with his image upon it. As the new coins spread through the empire, his image spread. And as his image spread, the emperor expected the coins to carry his power into the empire.

Hebrews 1:3 likely has this concept of image in mind, and many translations use the word *image* instead of *representation*. Hebrews 1 reinforces Jesus' words that "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). But the author intends our associations to go beyond coinage, all the way back to Genesis 1 when mankind was made in the image of God.

The Son has the attributes of God in relation to making of all things (v. 3), but we also see that the Son is not a mere extension of the Father. His glory now has

roots in His purifying work related to our sin. The Son is not the Father.

Neither is the Son angelic in nature. "For to which of the angels" (v. 5) sets up a contrast between the Son and angels. The Son has an eternal throne (v. 8), whereas the angels are created and worship Him (v. 6). The author also develops a contrast between the purely spiritual nature of angels (v. 7) and the identity of the Son, who has "companions" (v. 9) above whom He is elevated. These "companions" are not angels, however.

If we read chapter 2 we discover that the Son is none other than a particular human, the Man Jesus (2:9). We are the companions spoken of in 1:9, and we get to share in His inheritance. The links between the world's creation, humanity, and the identity of the Son have come into much sharper focus.

The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

Hebrews 1:3

Apply the Word

Some scholars tried to argue that Jesus was just a really good man. In response, some Bible-believing Christians have swung to the opposite pole, focusing only on His deity and ignoring His humanity. Scripture affirms that He was both fully God *and* fully man, and both natures are essential to His work of salvation. Thank Him today that you have access to God through Jesus!

Pray with Us

Please mention while you pray today the service of Lloyd Dodson, vice president of Human Resources. We appreciate his experience and leadership that benefit the whole Moody community.

A World Perfectly Prepared

Job seekers dress well for interviews. Authors try to grab readers within the first few pages. They follow the advice, “You never get a second chance to make a first impression.” This may be why Matthew’s opening verses puzzle many readers. The list of names can cause modern eyes to glaze over. But Matthew places these names here to make just the right first impression.

Matthew borrows language in verse 1 from the genealogies in Genesis (5:1; 10:1). These previous lists communicate the idea that a people derive their place in the world from their ancestors. Here, Matthew indicates that Jesus’ ancestors depend on Him for meaning. Their existence made possible the birth of Christ, and their connection to Him through the genealogy gives them greater purpose and significance.

By beginning with Abraham, Matthew shows the Jewish nature of his Gospel, and since his list is far from exhaustive we can

learn much from the careful choices made about whom to include. Women rarely received mention in ancient genealogies, but Matthew includes Tamar and Rahab, both prostitutes (v. 3, 5–6). He references the adultery of Bathsheba (v. 6). In fact, the great King David (a murderer/adulterer) was the offspring of two Gentile women (Tamar and Ruth). He ends with Mary, and Matthew’s careful language shows that Jesus inherited His humanity from Mary alone (v. 16).

Thus there
were fourteen
generations in all .
. . . from the exile to
the Messiah.

Matthew 1:17

God had chosen Israel as His special people, but Matthew shows this special focus had the goal of bringing Christ to the entire world. God always had the whole of humanity in mind. Women, Gentiles, and sinners—those not normally with status in Israel’s world—all had a vital role to play in God’s plan. This Jewish Messiah comes for everyone. Matthew’s summation in verse 17 shows that He came at just the right time.

Apply the Word

For much of Israel’s history, things seemed bleak. At times they wandered in the desert; at other times they suffered exile due to disobedience. But from Abraham to David, from David until captivity, from exile until Christ’s coming God’s purposes never failed. He always had an eye on His people. And no matter our circumstances, He will always have His eye on us.

Pray with Us

Lloyd Dodson, vice president of Human Resources, leads a dedicated team at Moody whose work influences both employees and students. Praise God today for the service of Jill Douglas, Mia Gale, Candra Garrett, Luci Harris, and Serene Hudson.

Question and Answer

By David Rim, Professor of Theology



Do Christians and Muslims worship the same God? Since both Christianity and Islam are monotheistic religions, what is wrong in claiming that we believe in the same God?



This question has particular relevance in our world today. At first glance, the answer might appear to be “yes”:

both religions affirm that God is the creator of the universe, that He is all-knowing and all-powerful, that He stands above and beyond creation, and that He will judge all humanity. Both religions trace their roots back to Abraham.

Former President George W. Bush declared that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Pope John Paul II thought both groups believe in the one and living God who will bring His creatures to perfection. Rick Love, former international director of Frontiers, adamantly affirms that Muslims worship the true God. He places Muslims in the same position as the Athenians in Acts 17, who the apostle Paul proclaimed worshiped in ignorance. Not idolatry, mind you, but an incomplete or misunderstood picture of God.

But the majority of evangelicals—about 80 percent at the time of President Bush’s declaration—vehemently deny that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. For example, John Piper believes that it is a disservice and an obstacle to evangelism when Christians provide false

hope to Muslims by affirming that they worship the true God. He points to passages such as John 8 where the religious leaders of the day insist that they have one Father—God. Instead of equating their God with His Father, Jesus surprised His audience and the readers by identifying their God with the Devil. If Jesus could say this about the monotheism of His own people, Piper argues, how much more the monotheism of the Muslims.

A few observations: First, the differences between the conceptions of God in the two religions should not be minimized. The Christian concept of God allows for an immanence not found in Islam. *Immanence* is the term used to describe Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, becoming human in such a manner that He is eternally the God-man. When human history is consummated, Jesus will still display the scars of His love for us. In fact, Christian theology in general holds that God became so much like us that He was able to die on the cross. I do not believe Muslim theologians can even affirm the very possibility of this for Allah. For them, a dying God is an oxymoron.

Second, for the Christian, God is love, in that divine Persons experience self-giving love for each other prior to creation. Eternally and necessarily the very nature of the Christian God is love. But for the Muslim Allah, self-giving love is an accidental property. In other words, since Allah exists in isolation as a divine individual prior to creation, there is no other for him to love. Only in creating others can one say that there is self-giving love for the other in Allah. Unlike the Christian God, love is a

Continued on next page

The majority of evangelicals vehemently deny that Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

Continued from previous page

contingent state for Allah. This is a significant difference.

Third, Islamic theology teaches that there is one divine nature *and* one divine person. Christian theology affirms one divine nature, but also three divine Persons. This triune nature of God cannot be reduced to the strict monotheism that resembles Islam. For clarity's sake, perhaps we should label ourselves "triune monotheists" or "Christological monotheists."

Finally, the central question in this debate for evangelicals is one's perspective on the Person of Jesus Christ. This is the key that provides the answer to the question. No matter how many similarities may exist between Christianity and Islam, it boils down to the most important question: *What do you think of this man, Jesus?* How people answer this question determines whether or not they are walking on the same path.

This is why I believe that Calvinists and Arminians, whose conceptions of God can have some variations, still worship the same God—because of their common stance on Jesus. This is why I believe those who emphasize the oneness of the Christian God and those who emphasize the threeness of divine persons worship the same God—their affirmation of the deity of Jesus. If you reject Him, your God is the Devil; if you are ignorant of Him, your picture of God is incomplete.



Do Christians and Jews worship the same God?



The answer to this question requires a bit more nuance.

At first glance, it might appear that since Jews reject the divinity of Jesus Christ and therefore a triune view of God, we would conclude that Jews and Christians do not worship the same God. But the Old and the New Testaments have continuity, and both Testaments are the inspired Word of God. The writers of the New Testament refer to the God of the Old Testament, making it clear that God remains the same. The Bible does not contain an account of two different Gods.

It's more accurate to draw a distinction between the Jewish *worship* of God as described in the Old Testament, and the worship of God within Judaism today that rejects the new revelation found in Jesus Christ. The God of Abraham, King David, and Isaiah is the same God as the God Christians worship. Once Judaism rejected the final and ultimate revelation of what God was like in Jesus Christ, its conception of God became sufficiently distorted so that it could no longer be considered *worship* of the same God. In the New Testament, the name above every name, the name of Yahweh, is given to Jesus Christ. Since Judaism does not accept the deity of Jesus as part of God's revelation of Himself, their ability to understand and to worship God is both constrained and deficient.

The Creator Cannot Be Created

The job of the art restorer is controversial in the art world. Some believe that classic works of art should be left to decay, to let “nature take its course.” Others protest because restoring a painting necessitates using substances that the artist never used, making the painting something different than the original itself.

When we look at our texts today, we see God continuing His mission to restore humanity. But if the Messiah were a mere man, then He would be part of the problem and not able to solve it. If He were a “foreign substance,” then He could not show us the way or stand in our place. To renew creation He must stand outside of it and enter it at the same time, for the Creator cannot be created.

The doctrine of the Virgin Birth makes sense theologically despite the mystery surrounding this miraculous event, and

“How will this be,”
Mary asked the
angel, “since I am
a virgin?”

Luke 1:34

Scripture also testifies to its truth. Some pagan myths talk of gods consorting with women, employing force and deceit to attain their desire. Some critics have used these myths to blaspheme and argue that God assaulted Mary. But in the Gospel of Luke the angel appears to her openly and speaks plainly, and Mary joyfully accepts her role in redemption.

The mysterious and the common interact in Matthew’s Gospel as well. Matthew begins by tracing the human lineage of Jesus to establish the full Jewish humanity of Jesus. The Son

of God came to us as a real flesh-and-blood person, not as a disembodied spirit. But God also helps Joseph to realize that Mary’s pregnancy is the work of the Holy Spirit. Neither Mary, Joseph, or us today can fully understand this mystery, but like them we must accept it on faith and accept it with joy, for it makes our salvation possible.

Apply the Word

The Virgin Birth confronts us with a great mystery, and Mary provides us with a perfect model for how to respond to this truth. She had an eternal perspective that allowed her to endure the suffering that came with accepting God’s call. “My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation” (see Luke 1:46–55).

Pray with Us

In your prayers, please mention the rest of our Human Resources department: Lud Anderson, Jean Jacobsen, Michael Lin, and Peter Miller. Thank the Lord for their contribution to the hiring process and helping the staff with various aspects of employment.

A Human God

In *Gods Like Us*, author Ty Burr examines how Hollywood makes movie stars and how the public responds to them. Marilyn Monroe, for example, symbolized beauty for many people, which meant they could never imagine her having bad breath. Contrary to our intention, we do not honor people when we turn people into symbols, for we forget their essential humanity and who they really are.

It's important then to note that Jesus doesn't symbolize salvation. He *is* redemption itself. He is not a concept or ideal or value. Scripture shows us that to truly honor Christ we must know His humanity.

Luke begins his Gospel with grand themes, angelic appearances, and a miraculous birth. Now he shifts focus and reminds us of the basic ordinariness of Jesus' life. We see that Joseph and Mary were observant Jews, taking time to travel to Jerusalem for Passover (v. 42). We identify

with their terror at losing their son for three days and easily understand Mary's frustration (v. 48).

Jesus shows early inklings of His own identity and mission with His reply in verse 49. In fact, Luke uses a Greek construction, the word *dei* which means "it is necessary," and he repeats this at crucial points throughout Jesus' ministry (i.e., 4:43; 9:22; 19:5; 24:7). In some sense, Jesus' wisdom derived from the fact that He is *the* Word of God (John 1:1).

And Jesus grew
in wisdom and
stature, and in
favor with God and
man.

Luke 2:52

But Luke ends this story reminding us that Jesus was a normal young boy. He obeyed His parents (v. 51). The wisdom He attained did not come fully formed at birth; His wisdom grew as did His stature. Approximately twenty years pass before we read of any other event in Jesus' life—twenty years of regular life that the Father used to form His Son.

Apply the Word

In taking on humanity, Jesus gives meaning to all aspects of our lives, including the mundane. Where has God placed you? He might have you in a season of preparation, or you might be engaged in ministry that will shape others beyond what you can imagine. Listen to the voice of your Father and grow in grace and knowledge.

Pray with Us

Our undergraduate faculty would appreciate your prayers! Join us in prayer for professors in the Communications department: Angela Brown, Rosalie de Rosset, David Fetzer, and Karyn Hecht. May God bless their ministry to the students!

This Is My Beloved Son

Early in Matthew 3 we meet John the Baptist, who baptized “for repentance” (v. 11). Many Christians are confused, then, on the necessity of Jesus’ baptism since He had no sin. Jesus’ desire confused the Baptist himself (v. 14), so we have good company. Jesus said that His baptism would “fulfill all righteousness,” an enigmatic phrase, which a broad biblical context helps to explain (v. 15).

Matthew 2:13–15 quotes from Hosea and Jeremiah to explain Jesus’ flight and return from Egypt. This shows both Jesus’ identity as God’s true Son and His identification with Israel’s history. Paul described Israel’s baptism at the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2). Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan River recalls Israel passing into the Promised Land to receive their inheritance as God’s “son” (Hosea 11:1). Therefore, Jesus’ baptism demonstrates how He fulfills Israel’s promise of a Messiah. Jesus reboots Israel’s history, and gets it right.

This is my Son,
whom I love; with
him I am well
pleased.

Matthew 3:17

Jesus’ baptism refers further beyond Israel back to creation. Once again, we see the Spirit hovering over water. In Genesis the appearance of the Spirit is the prelude to the creation of life drawn from the water. Here the presence of the Spirit confirms that Life Himself is being baptized in the water. Jesus’ baptism represents the new creation available to those who follow Him.

In addition to these grand themes this story also has a dimension of humility. We aren’t told whether Jesus knew of the ordeal and temptation to follow in the desert, but we can be sure His Father had full knowledge. The words of the Father were meant for all “with ears to hear” (cf. John 12:29), but especially for His Son, who was not above needing encouragement.

Jesus’ humility shines forth in His baptism, and the love and approval are evident in the Father’s declaration.

Apply the Word

Though the Gospels focus almost exclusively on Jesus, in fact He was never alone. There may be times in life when God seems like a silent partner, but we must take God at His word. He will never leave us or forsake us (Deut. 31:6; Heb. 13:5). If you are feeling lonely in your current life situation, ask the Lord for a special sense of His presence today.

Pray with Us

God led to Moody dedicated Christian educators to prepare our students for worldwide ministry. We are truly proud of our faculty! Today, let’s pray for Jamie Janosz, Brian Kammerzelt, Maria Mocuta, Jill White, and Kelli Worrall in the Communications department.

Tempted like Us

Many people admire military men of a certain type. Alexander the Great personally led cavalry charges. George Washington put himself at the head of his column at the Battle of Princeton. General James Longstreet said, “You can’t lead from behind.” Great leaders share the burdens of those they command.

Jesus’ leadership of His people exhibits this same principle. Some suppose that because of His deity everything was easier for Him. The fullness of Jesus’ humanity (Heb. 2:14), however, means that He faced everything we face. What’s more, Jesus “leads from the front” and pioneers a way to salvation.

The author of Hebrews has the military analogy in mind in 2:10, for he uses the word “pioneer,” the same word used to describe Joshua in Numbers 13:2–3. He earns this title through suffering, because He cannot lead others if He has not shared in their burdens. Our encouragement

should increase when we realize that just as the twelve “captains” represented the people of Israel, so too Jesus represents all His followers (Heb. 2:11).

Once again note Jesus’ temptation in the desert in the context of Israel’s history. After their baptism in the Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:2), Israel’s disobedience led to forty years of desert wandering. After His baptism, Jesus underwent His own wilderness experience, and He stayed faithful. Now, like Joshua, He can lead us to the Promised Land.

Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Hebrews 2:18

Satan’s temptations focused on getting Jesus to question His identity (Matt. 4:3, 6). But he saved perhaps his strongest test for last when he offered Jesus power without suffering. Jesus rejected Satan, and in refusing to abandon suffering He also refuses to abandon His “brothers and sisters” (Heb. 2:11). His union with humanity means more to Him than all the kingdoms that Satan could offer.

Apply the Word

Christians can sometimes confuse temptation with sin. Facing temptation does not mean that one has sinned. Jesus too faced temptation. If you struggle with a particular sin, be encouraged. First, Jesus knows all about temptation. Second, Satan would not tempt you if you posed no threat to him. Rely on the power of the Spirit to remain faithful to God and remember the example of Jesus.

Pray with Us

As the fall semester comes to an end and Moody Theological Seminary students are taking their final exams, let’s lift in prayer the Seminary’s faculty on the Chicago campus: Jayanthi Benjamin, James Cookley, Ryan Cook, Daniel Green, and Sajan Mathews.

Words of Power

Many people think they would be wonderful parents—until they have their own children. When they have to apply their theories and opinions to real-life situations, they find that they can't make Mary like her music lessons or stop Bobby from fidgeting in church or keep the baby asleep past 5 a.m. Like the rest of humanity, parents have limited control over other people and situations.

The Gospel of Mark moves quickly to establish Jesus' credentials as a great teacher, but it's also clear that Jesus was no ordinary teacher. The "teachers of the law" (2:6) don't get much right in the Gospels, but they do recognize the radical nature of Jesus' claims (2:7, 18–21). His words on the Sabbath reveal His identity in a powerful way.

Jesus first shows how the Pharisees had misinterpreted the whole point of the Sabbath. They had made it a list of

"don'ts" designed to help them stay in God's favor. Jesus shows instead that God never intended the Sabbath as a burden to restrict life but rather as a gift to enhance life. It is because Jesus is the Son of Man that He can have authority over what is made for man.

Who is this? Even
the wind and the
waves obey him!

Mark 4:41

Second, Jesus claims His deity here as well: the Sabbath was "made for man," but also established by God as part of the rhythm of creation (cf. Gen. 2:2–3, Ex. 20:11). Jesus can bring "new wine" because He has authority over creation itself. We see this authority when Jesus calms the storm. The "wind and the waves obey Him" because He made them both. Just as in Genesis 1, Jesus needs no other medium other than His Word to accomplish His will. In our texts today Jesus shows His power as God, and He demonstrates divine control over situations including the weather.

Apply the Word

Much of our stress and anxiety and anger comes from trying to control other people and situations. If you find yourself frustrated because you've encountered the limits of what you can control, choose instead to trust that your heavenly Father loves you and holds you in His hands. The winds and waves of life may come, but our God has authority over them and has promised that He will be with us always.

Pray with Us

Keeping our prayer focus on the MTS faculty in Chicago, please add to your prayer list Andrew Pflederer, William Thrasher, Julius Wong Loi Sing, and David Woodall. Ask the Lord to guide these men as they impart biblical wisdom to the students.

A Different Kind of Man

Take a moment to recall visual images you've seen depicting Jesus. Perhaps a gentle teacher, explaining things to His curious followers? Or a tender shepherd, cradling a lamb? Especially at this time of year, a chubby infant swaddled in a manger? We rarely see a rough-hewn carpenter from Galilee or a defiant man confronting the religious leaders.

Many seek to “sanitize” Jesus theologically as well by saying He was merely a great moral teacher, but Scripture never gives us this option. The first few chapters of the Gospel of Luke are filled with angelic appearances, demon possession, miraculous healing, and a crowd that wants to kill Jesus. We see clearly that Jesus is no ordinary man.

In our reading today, Jesus demonstrates divine power over impossible conditions as part of His call to His disciples. These were professional, experienced

fishermen—and their professional failure on this day was the occasion for Jesus to demonstrate that He was no ordinary man. He had command over nature, and He called an unlikely cast of characters together to be His disciples.

In verse 8, Peter has one of his great moments of insight. Peter recognized that Jesus was someone different from anyone he had ever known. In the face of Jesus' power, Peter acknowledged that he was an unworthy sinner. Peter would come to learn, however, that Jesus can control demons, men, and

creation itself—but He uses that power to bring people into relationship with God. Peter was sinful, but Jesus doesn't turn him away. He invites this flawed fisherman to join Him. This Jesus doesn't merely teach moral lessons. He transforms lives and gives purpose and restoration and healing. He did it for Peter, and He can do it for us.

Simon Peter . . . fell at Jesus' knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”

Luke 5:8

Apply the Word

When we consider the holiness of God and our own weak sinfulness, we can understand why Peter trembled in the face of Jesus' power. But the Lord is gracious—Jesus told Peter, “Don't be afraid.” God knows our sin, but He also has the power to restore us to fellowship. Don't settle for a sanitized, tame Jesus. Trust the One who has the power to calm storms and the authority to forgive sins.

Pray with Us

Would you uphold in prayer Christine Gorz, vice president of Marketing Communications? Ask for the Holy Spirit's guidance for Christine and the teams she leads in communicating boldly and clearly the vision and the mission of Moody's ministries.

Knowing God Through Creation

Throughout church history Christianity has struggled against heresies that declare that the spiritual world is pure while the material world is either evil or illusory. For example, the second-century philosopher Celsus argued against Christianity in part by stating, "If you shut your eyes to the world of sense . . . only then will you see God."

Scripture consistently denies this premise of Greek philosophy. When speaking of knowing God the Bible rarely mentions personal insight or illumination. God created the material world and called it good. The Son of God became fully human with human flesh and blood. Our story today shows that God can be known through the senses, even in a man born blind.

We might wonder why Jesus added seemingly unnecessary complications for this healing. Some commentators think that the procession for Feast of

Tabernacles began at the Pool of Siloam, and Jesus might have wanted the blind man to connect his healing with Jesus' words in John 7:37. John 9 also recalls 2 Kings 5 where Elisha heals Naaman in similar fashion, which would alert people that Jesus is also a great prophet.

In the Old Testament spit nearly always has a negative connotation (Lev. 15:8; Num. 12:14), but Jesus healed on a variety of occasions with spit (Mark 7:33; 8:23). The Pharisees often objected to Jesus' miracles as a violation of Mosaic Law. In

using spit, Jesus established His authority over the Law and hearkened back to the creation of man as His main reference point (cf. Gen. 2:7; Matt. 19:3–5). God made all things good, which is why He can be revealed through flesh and blood (John 1:14). Indeed, Jesus used the healing of the man's physical blindness in order to reveal the salvation available to him.

Do you believe in
the Son of Man?

John 9:35

Apply the Word

God doesn't value only our souls—He also made and loves our bodies. In fact, He will resurrect them to live with Him eternally! (see 1 Corinthians 15). Do you have a godly perspective on His creation of your body? This will help us avoid the cultural traps of caring only for our fleshly desires or of devaluing the gift of our physical being.

Pray with Us

Your prayers will be an encouragement for the Moody Alumni Association staff: Nancy Hastings, Katharine Hultquist, and Tiffany Mariani. We are grateful for all they do to keep the Moody family connected!

The Death of the God–Man

Throughout the Gospels Jesus confounds the expectations of His audience. He made grand claims about Himself, yet He was not prideful. His words had immediate relevance, but He never bothered much with the burning question of his day—Israel’s occupation by Rome. Most expected a politically triumphant Messiah. But Jesus cast His mission largely in terms of His suffering and death, something His disciples—and we today—have a hard time understanding.

Jesus’ words, “Now the Son of Man is glorified,” give us pause (v. 31). Surely Christ already had glory as the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, but Jesus here is referring to His glory as the Son of Man. For God to receive glory from His actions, Jesus’ life must reveal God to us (John 14:9).

For Jesus, suffering did not come only in His death. His whole ministry involved rejection and an abandonment of power

(cf. Phil 2:5–11). His life gives full meaning to love, making His instruction to “love one another” (v. 34) truly new. Indeed, this is a revelation from God Himself about His essential character (1 John 4:8).

Along with love, “glory” takes on new dimensions. The Father and Son glorify each other, and Jesus gives us the perfect example of a human will aligned with God’s will and purpose. Jesus shows us how to obey and please God, and we see how the Father completes this mutual relationship of love by responding with love for His Son.

Now the Son of
Man is glorified
and God is
glorified in him.

John 13:31

Jesus was the victorious Messiah—but His victory required suffering, humility, and obedience. We might not always understand how suffering can be redeemed by God to become triumph, but we have the example of Jesus to assure us of God’s love and power to make things right.

Apply the Word

Christ’s cry, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46; see Ps. 22:1) came from real physical and spiritual agony on the cross. Psalm 22 begins with despair, but it ends on a note of triumph. Jesus knew that His victory would arise from suffering. We can have this confidence as well. We can be honest with God about our pain and still trust Him to bring us through and give us joy.

Pray with Us

Steven Mogck, executive VP and chief operating officer, requests your prayers today for the men and women who serve at Moody and keep our three campuses in Chicago, Spokane, and Plymouth running smoothly. They are a vital part of Moody’s effective ministry.

Death Could Not Hold Him

After his costly triumph over Rome at the Battle of Ascalum King Pyrrhus declared, “If we are victorious [again] we shall be utterly ruined.” The term *Pyrrhic victory* came from this episode, referring to a winning moment that is so costly that it ends up causing defeat. In the crucifixion Satan thought he had triumphed over Christ, but no more Pyrrhic victory could be imagined. In winning that battle, Satan ensured his defeat.

In his Pentecost speech Peter used an interesting phrase to describe Christ’s death, one that gets at the heart of the resurrection. Jesus was “handed over to you” (v. 23). He did not die because He was overpowered. Throughout the Gospels we see Jesus escaping death when it suited Him (i.e., Luke 4:28–30). Through His arrest and trial Jesus maintained control (John 18:6). Christ had already shown power over death (John 11), so Jesus submitted to death of His own will.

But God raised
him from the dead
. . . because it was
impossible for
death to keep its
hold on him.

Acts 2:24

John wrote, “In him was life” (1:4). As the creator of all life, Christ *is* Life itself, making the reality of His death a mystery. In taking Life within itself, Death ensured its defeat. As one commentator wrote regarding 2:24, “Death’s agony became its birth pangs: death was in labor and unable to hold back the ‘delivery’ of Jesus.”

In quoting from Psalm 16, Peter’s sermon shows how Jesus’ triumph over death was inevitable. David had faith that because of God’s reign, death cannot have the last word over holiness. Peter shows that David cannot have spoken of himself, perhaps recalling Jesus’ own words in Matthew 22:44. The verdict is clear: Jesus must be the Messiah, for He fulfilled God’s messianic plan. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, Christ became the “first fruits” of a new humanity (1 Cor. 15:20). Satan thought he won, but it was instead God’s triumph.

Apply the Word

The finality of death can overwhelm us, for death remains “the last enemy” (1 Cor. 15:26). Jesus’ deity ensures His victory, and His humanity means that we can share in it. “For since death came through a man, the resurrection . . . comes also through a man” (1 Cor. 15:21). We mourn the death of loved ones while at the same time rejoicing that death is not the end of the story.

Pray with Us

For the next two days, it’s our privilege to pray for the staff of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness on Moody’s Chicago campus. Ben Chelladurai, Gregory Gaertner, and Norma Malave ensure that Moody follows best business practices in our operations.

Perfect Sacrifice, Perfect Restoration

Many people look at the Old Testament sacrificial system with a mixture of horror and confusion. The so-called “God of the Old Testament” seems preoccupied with death. The Day of Atonement, for instance, climaxed when the high priest presented blood from the offerings in the Holy of Holies (see Leviticus 16).

In order to understand why this interpretation is incorrect, we must see how the sacrifices in the Old Testament foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus, and how they were all about life, not just death. God instituted the sacrifices because of sin, but death comes from sin, and sin has no place in God’s presence. The presentation of the blood of the animal symbolized the life of the animal, for the “life is in the blood” (Lev. 17:11). But in order to obtain the blood to present before God, the animal had to die.

As our reading notes, Jesus also presents His life before God as the final and

complete sacrifice for sin (Heb. 10:10). The blood of bulls could not provide permanent atonement for sins (10:3), and what God really wanted was obedient *life* (10:7–8).

Now that Christ’s life has been presented before God, the shadow system of animal sacrifice has no purpose; it is a “vain repetition” (10:11). As the Son of Man, Christ can atone for mankind, and now that His work is done, He can “sit down” (10:12) and enjoy the completion of His task (cf. Heb. 4:1–10).

And where
these have been
forgiven, sacrifice
for sin is no longer
necessary.

Hebrews 10:18

This gives new meaning to John 16. The Holy Spirit comes to dwell with man. But this is impossible in our sin, for God is holy. Jesus cannot have His life cover ours unless He ascends to God’s presence. God delights in life, though Jesus adds an ominous warning: there will be those who still believe that God takes pleasure in death (16:2).

Apply the Word

This Christmas Eve, spend time thanking God that He alone can bring life from death. Tomorrow we celebrate the birth of Jesus, but we should be forever praising Him for his resurrection that made our salvation from sin possible. The spiritual principle of redemption works in our lives, too. God can take all our pain and sorrow and suffering and transform it into something good (Rom. 8:28).

Pray with Us

As we continue to pray for the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, please mention Daniel Hassler, Paul Perrin, and Camille Ward during your time with God. We are thankful for their service in the areas of accreditation, surveys, and research.

Jesus the Gift Giver

Today is Christmas Day, a time when families celebrate together by sharing gifts with each other. Some families spend lavishly on a huge pile of presents; others take a trip or do an activity together; and others present loved ones with gifts of time or service instead of trinkets bought in a store. The dollar amount is less important than the gesture of giving and generosity to signal love for a family member.

In Ephesians 1 Paul seeks to reassure readers of the sureness of their status in Christ, and verse 11 uses the key word “inheritance.”

Children of the Father have a guarantee that is a pure gift. And if Jesus calls us “brothers and sisters,” we are children of God along with Him. He shares with us the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit!

Throughout Jesus’ ministry He had an intimate connection with the Holy

Spirit. Jesus is conceived by the Spirit (Luke 1:35). The Spirit appears at His baptism (Luke 3:22). The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness (Luke 3:22, 4:1), and anoints His ministry (Luke 4:18). Though Christ is God, in His humanity He needed the Spirit’s presence and power.

When you believed,
you were marked
in him with a seal,
the promised
Holy Spirit

Ephesians 1:13

Jesus is “Immanuel,” God with us, and He in turn had God with Him. Jesus was so full of God’s presence that He spoke of His own body as God’s temple.

In receiving the Spirit (v. 13) our own bodies become temples for God—and this serves as a “deposit” of what more will come! Jesus’ victory allows Him to give even more gifts (see Eph. 4:7–16). The Incarnation has made all of this possible. Today as we give gifts to one another, let us remember the amazing, eternal gifts that Jesus gave us.

Apply the Word

As you spend time today with loved ones, also spend time praising God for His abundant good gifts to you. You can even make a list in your notebook or spiritual journal of God’s goodness, starting with things in our devotional reading today. We have salvation through Jesus and the presence of the Holy Spirit! God has included us in His family and is delighted to bestow gifts upon us (James 1:17).

Pray with Us

This Christmas holiday, as we exalt Christ, thank the Father for the miracle of Incarnation, for Immanuel—God with us. We pray that this month’s study in *Today in the Word* will deepen your understanding and enhance your worship of the Lord.

God for the World

The early chapters of Genesis describe a time when various peoples separated themselves and fought (Gen. 4:16–26). Humanity attempted to reunify through building the Tower of Babel, but God intervened by confusing their languages (Gen. 11:7). Their success would have furthered their separation from God. The division of people groups was a price God accepted, but it should not be confused with God's perfect intent for humanity.

Because of Jesus' death, resurrection, and ascension the process of rewinding the effects of sin began. Pentecost shows us that we don't simply return to the old beginning, but move forward toward something new and more glorious.

Pentecost had its roots in the Mosaic Law as a festival that involved two key elements: wheat and loaves. Jesus often used wheat as an image for humanity (Matt. 3:11–12; John 4:35), and we can see Jesus here as the great harvester of souls. In contrast to Passover, Pentecost called

for leaven in the two symbolic loaves (see Lev. 23:17). Unleavened bread reminded Jews of captivity. Leavened bread speaks of peace and fullness.

As the perfect God-Man, Jesus is the "firstfruits" (1 Cor. 15:23; Lev. 23:20) of a new humanity, which begins to spread at Pentecost. God-fearers from all over came to Jerusalem, and they witnessed a miracle. God does not overturn Babel—but that old unity was only skin-deep, rooted in language and custom. Now humanity can have real unity rooted in the Spirit, breaking down the barrier between Jew and Gentile (Gal. 3:28).

Often we associate "last days" with fear, but Peter's sermon announces that they are days of wonder and promise. Age, race, and gender divisions lose their divisive power when the Spirit comes (Acts 2:17–18). When we fumble away blessings, He gives back more than we originally lost.

And everyone who
calls on the name
of the Lord will
be saved.

Acts 2:21

Apply the Word

Christians must find a way to reach across these divisions of habits and preferences. Our primary concern must be the new kingdom Jesus builds and the Spirit that binds across cultural and national lines. Does your church welcome people who are different, whether it's economic status, race, or cultural preferences? These things should not describe divisions in the body of Christ.

Pray with Us

Dr. Junias Venugopal serves as provost and dean of education at Moody. We thank God for his expertise and leadership in this area. Pray with us for the Lord's continued blessing on Moody's education ministry.

A “Distinctive” Body

Throughout history rulers have had various ways to demonstrate their authority, and one of the most important was the distribution of gifts, jobs, or status. Distributing gifts after a victorious battle not only helped bind the allegiance of his warriors, it also showed how much the king possessed. Royal titles created an aristocracy that would support the monarch. Even U.S. presidents had a patronage system through which they could reward their political supporters with jobs.

Without Christ’s victory over sin and death, He would have no gifts to give, and we could not share in His spoils. In our reading today, we see that Christ’s victory brings unity through the Spirit, reflecting the unity of God in the body of Christ (vv. 4–6). Through the saving work of Jesus, we have the gift of grace and a relationship

with God that we could never earn on our own (v. 7).

Paul quotes from Psalm 68, which now takes on new meaning in light of Christ’s work. Christ leaves no stone unturned, so in His Ascension he can truly “fill the whole universe” (v.10). With all fullness now in Christ, He needs nothing, and so can give a great variety of gifts rather than receive them.

When he ascended
on high,
he took many
captives
and gave gifts to
his people.

Ephesians 4:8

The diversity of gifts present in the body of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12) should not surprise us, for it reflects the diversity of creation. The “new creations” Jesus makes (2 Cor. 5:17) must

reflect Him and His works. These gifts reflect the “diversity” that is still present within the unity of the Godhead: Father, Son, and Spirit. In our unity as the body of Christ and in the diversity of the gifts that our Lord has given us, we bear His image.

Apply the Word

Jesus’ Parable of the Talents (Matt. 25:14–30) reminds us to use God’s gifts by trusting Him. We aren’t supposed to hoard our gifts or bury them out of fear. Christ has already conquered! When we use our gifts boldly, we are participating with our Savior in the work of His kingdom. As the new year approaches, pray that the Lord will show you opportunities to use your gifts.

Pray with Us

Counseling Services on Moody’s Chicago campus help students deal with various issues of their lives. Ask God to give Stephen Brasel, Gayla Gates, and Holly Porter strength and joy every day to walk in His love and share it with students they counsel.

Partakers of the Divine Nature

Towards the end of C. S. Lewis's classic story *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Aslan gathers a group of animals to fight the Witch, enlisting another lion (among others) for help. The lion marvels, "Did you hear what he said? *Us Lions*. . . . That's what I like about Aslan. No side, no stand-offishness. *Us Lions*."

Christians often think of Christ's work as removing the curse and penalty of sin, and rightly so. But we must not stop there, for Scripture shows us that God has much more than removing sin in mind. Christ's coming opens the way for humanity not only to bear the image of God, but also to become like Him (Gen. 1:26). With the Incarnation the "image of God" takes definite shape. Jesus as God shows us the Father. As Man, Jesus opens the way for us to copy Him, and therefore to become more like our Savior.

His divine power
has given us
everything we
need for a godly
life through our
knowledge of him
who called us by
his own glory and
goodness.

2 Peter 1:3

Jesus is God's only begotten Son, but in conforming ourselves to Christ, we are "born of him" (1 John 2:29). Our very nature changes, and this should make us different from others. When Christ comes John says that then "we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). If we see God fully revealed in Christ, we *should* be transformed! We should not be content to remain defined by our sin.

After Adam's sin his nature aligned with death, and he was clothed with death (Gen. 3:21). Now, Peter writes, we participate (or as the NKJV puts it, "partake") of Life itself. With the Spirit, this becomes reality. Christ will always be God, and we

will not, but Jesus has narrowed the gap. Because of Him it is now, "Us Lions."

Apply the Word

The command to "be perfect" (Matt. 5:48) is impossible for us without Christ. But the power of the Holy Spirit will make us into people that can fulfill this impossible command. One day we will reflect Him as a bright mirror reflects light. This process will take time and involve pain, but ultimately we should want nothing less. Thank God that He leads us on this amazing journey.

Pray with Us

Frank Leber, vice president of Information Systems, requests your prayers for his team that provides uninterrupted technical support and maintenance of our computer systems. Their service is vital for the success of Moody's ministries.

A Groaning World

When Jesus entered Jerusalem seated upon a donkey colt, people responded with shouts of “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!” The religious leaders were offended by this praise and ordered Jesus to rebuke His followers. Jesus replied, “If they keep quiet, the stones will cry out” (see Luke 19:28–40).

As we have seen throughout our study this month, Scripture speaks clearly to God’s purposeful intent in creation, and creation matters to God (cf. Jonah 4). Furthermore, God always uses creation to reveal Himself (Rom. 1:19–20). Creation has always been part of God’s plan, and it bears witness to the Creator and gives Him praise.

All of creation did not sin in the garden—only humanity willfully disobeyed God. But all of creation suffers nonetheless. Adam

had stewardship over creation, and in naming the animals he had responsibility over them. The consequences of his sin extended to all of creation (Gen. 2:15–20). In our reading today, Paul expands on this, stating that God “subjected” creation “in hope” (v. 20). In its fallen state, creation still speaks to us, forcing us to look for our true homes in God (Gen. 3:16–19, 22–24). Creation suffers for our benefit.

After the Fall, redemption could not come without suffering. Christ had to suffer to achieve His victory. So will we, and so too creation. God allows creation to suffer that it too may receive its liberation (v.

21). For if it “fell” because of our sin, it can also experience redemption when we are redeemed. Like an expectant mother, it too waits for Christ’s revealing. The effects of the Fall reverberated throughout all the cosmos, and Christ will undo sin’s misery on a cosmic scale.

Creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

Romans 8:21

Apply the Word

The chorus of a gospel song declares, “Never let a rock cry out in my place—He’s worthy of all my praise!” The Lord will be praised by His creation, and if His redeemed children neglect to praise Him, then the rocks will take over. Spend time today in the midst of this holiday season to praise God. Give Him glory for who He is and for what He has done.

Pray with Us

Daniel Schombert and Scott Schaeffer maintain the Chicago campus phone system in excellent working order. Express appreciation for them in prayer and ask God to give them grace, strength, and encouragement through His Spirit in the New Year.

Refined through Fire

Forestry experts state that not all wildfires are created equal. In fact, some forest fires act as cleansing agents for old and overgrown forests and make them healthier. We often think of fire in purely destructive terms, but Scripture also uses fire in the context of renewal (cf. Matt. 3:11), and this helps us understand our passage for today.

It seems that 2 Peter 3 contradicts yesterday's text (Rom 8:18–23), where we saw a link between our redemption and that of creation itself. Our reading suggests that creation will be destroyed and not redeemed. How do we understand this seeming tension?

First, note that Peter compares the Flood to the coming "Day of the Lord" (vv. 5–7) in terms of the suddenness of judgment and its effect. God brought the Flood to cleanse the world of sin (Gen. 6:5–7), and at its culmination the world was covered in water with only a dove hovering

above it (Gen. 8:8; see Gen. 1:2). Through the Flood, God "recreated" creation with Noah, a new Adam. So too Christ's coming will fully renew the created order. The idea of judgment as a "refining fire" has its roots in the Old Testament (i.e., Micah 3:2–4).

The day of the
Lord will come
like a thief.

2 Peter 3:10

Second, translations over the centuries have sometimes indicated that creation will be "burned up" (NKJV), but "will be laid bare" is truer to the Greek word used here, *heurethesetai*, which literally means, "will be found." First Peter 1:7 uses this same verb to describe how we are refined by the fire of trials. As we go through them, we are to look forward to a new heavens and a new earth, which will be characterized by righteousness. In anticipation of this, we should make every effort to be found spotless, blameless, and at peace with God.

Apply the Word

Because of Christ we no longer need to hide from God's judgment in fear (cf. Gen 3:8–9; Heb. 12:6). We want to be found so that we might be known (1 Cor. 8:3). When we have been "laid bare," then we will have become all that God intends for us, and when we are truly known, we can truly know Him (1 Cor. 8:3).

Pray with Us

Bruce Everhart, VP of Donor Development and Channel Strategy, welcomes your prayers today. Ask the Lord to guide Bruce and his team as they implement new ways of reaching Moody's constituents in our digital age.

A New Creation

Author Ben Sweetland said, “Success is in the journey, not the destination.” Quotes like this abound in our culture—but Christians should know that we can’t find meaning without a fixed point of reference. We might be having a marvelous time during our journey, but if we’re headed the wrong direction we’ll still end up lost.

Some may wonder about the necessity of Christ’s Second Coming. After all, humanity could simply live on earth, die, and go to heaven for eternity. Why should Jesus have to come again? This misunderstands the purpose of the Incarnation.

Christ did not become man merely to save our souls, but to redeem the totality of His beloved people (body and soul), and the totality of His creation.

In our text for today, John saw the new heavens and new earth “coming down” (vv. 2, 10) from above. What exactly this means for current creation is uncertain,

but John clearly wants to get across the true physicality of salvation. It is not true, as the Gnostic heresies claimed, that God cares only for the spiritual reality and condemns His physical and material creation. Christ “came down from heaven” (John 6:38) to dwell as Immanuel, God in flesh living on earth. Jesus Himself is the reference point of creation, as Colossians 1:17 declares: “In him all things hold together.”

It is done. I am
the Alpha and
the Omega,
the Beginning
and the End.

Revelation 21:6

Whether John’s description of the holy city is symbolic or actual, we see a sense of completion. The city’s enormous size reflects the immensity of salvation. The twelve foundation stones

recall Joshua’s twelve stones erected after crossing the Jordan (Joshua 4:9). The narrative symmetry in the history of God’s people is reflected in the equal dimensions of the city (v. 16). Now all things become holy (v. 23–24), and Christ truly becomes Alpha and Omega (v. 6). This is the only destination worth seeking.

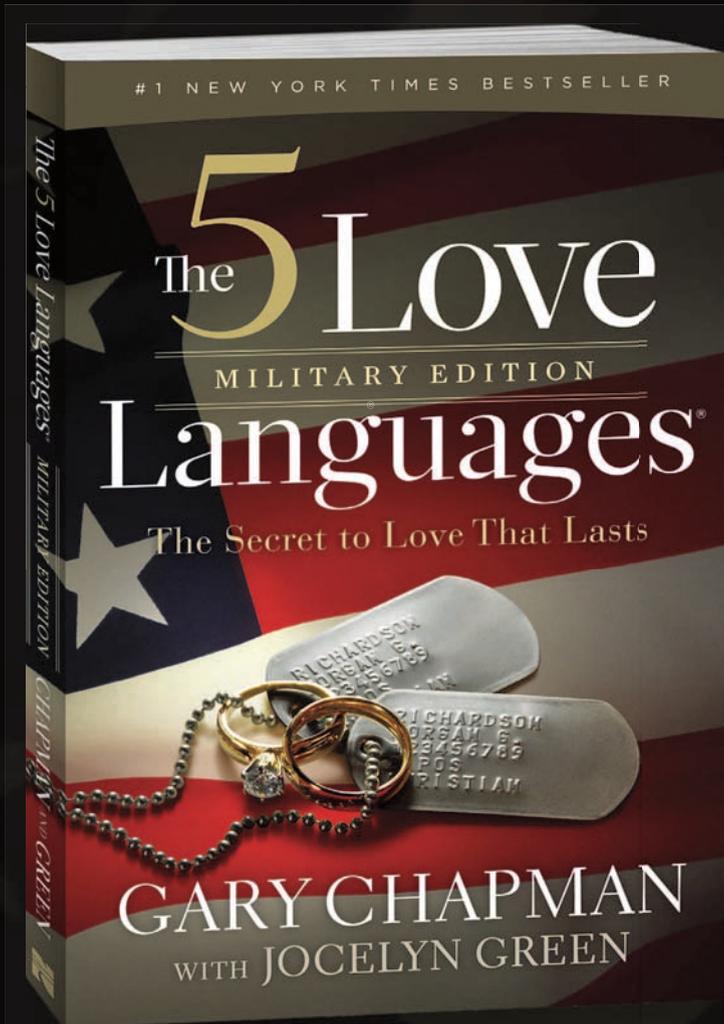
Apply the Word

Our spiritual journey only matters if we are going toward the destination of becoming more like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. If He is our destination, then our journey can be filled with joy and meaning. On this last day of the year, reflect on what we’ve learned about Jesus and His Incarnation this month, and renew your commitment to following Him.

Pray with Us

Records Management at Moody is headed by Scott Pinnow who serves on our Chicago campus. As we conclude our prayer month today, please pray for Scott’s ministry and that the Lord would grant him peace and joy in the year to come.

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