

Your Mission Field

Today In Your Reading...

After his conversion, Paul wound up living in Antioch, the place where the followers of God were first called Christians (*Acts 11:26*). It would not be long until God called Paul and his friend Barnabas to travel to nearby cities and share the Gospel. This trip became known as the first of Paul's three missionary journeys.

The two men were joined by John Mark, and the three of them sailed to the island of Cyprus, then to the Roman province known as Galatia. John Mark left them at Perga and returned to Jerusalem. Paul's strategy was simple. He and Barnabas went to the synagogues where the Jews met and worshiped, and there they would ask to speak. Paul would remind the Jews of the stories of ages past, but then he would tell them that their fulfillment was completed in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the Promised Messiah. While some listened and believed, most Jews rejected the news.

Almost immediately, Paul and Barnabas ran into resistance to the Gospel. For example, when they reached Paphos, they met a Jewish sorcerer, a false prophet named Bar-Jesus. He interfered and told people to pay no attention to Paul and Barnabas. Paul confronted Bar-Jesus, saying, "You son of the devil, full of every trickery and villainy, enemy of all that is good, **will you never stop perverting the true ways of the Lord?**" (*13:6-10*).

In every town in Galatia, there were religious leaders who stirred up the crowds against Paul and Barnabas, often running them out of town and even attempting to kill them. They were jealous of Paul, so they slandered him and argued against everything he said. Remember, when Paul was converted, the Lord said, "I will show him (Paul) how much he must suffer for Me" (*Acts 9:16*). Those words were coming true.

Daily Reflection

Like Paul, *God has work for you to do and that work is to share the Gospel with those who will listen*. While you may not feel called to travel to distant lands, **you are called to bear witness to what Jesus has done** to free you from sin.

Where is your mission field? Who are the people with whom you are sharing Christ?

In sharing the Gospel, you should expect two responses. There will be some who will listen and believe, but there will be many who will reject the news. Satan will do what he can to distract and discourage people from hearing the Gospel.

Why does Satan hate the Gospel so much?

What are some ways that the enemy will distract and discourage you from sharing Christ?

Don't be guilty of focusing on your work and neglecting the Lord's.

In Christ Alone

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November 13 — Acts 14:21-28; Galatians 1:1-3:23

Day 317 — 48 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

It was not long after Paul and Barnabas returned from their first mission trip that they received bad news. The true message of the Gospel was being perverted to include Jewish regulations. In other words, false teachers had taken advantage of the people and convinced them to mix the Law of Moses with Christianity. Paul was not pleased. In fact, he wrote a letter to the churches in that region, the book of *Galatians*.

"I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God," he wrote. "You are already following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who twist and change the truth concerning Christ. Let God's curse fall on anyone who preaches any other message than the one we told you about" (1:6-8).

Before Paul confronted this false Gospel, he defended the Gospel message that he taught them. He reminded his readers that he had received it from Christ Himself. "I solemnly assure you that the Good News of salvation, which I preach, is not based on mere human reasoning or logic. For my message came by direct revelation from Jesus Christ Himself. No one else taught me" (v.12). In other words, **a distortion of the true Gospel is no gospel at all.**

Then, Paul pointed out the failure of the Law of Moses to save anyone. "We know that we become right with God, not by doing what the law commands, but by faith in Jesus Christ... For no one will ever be saved by obeying the law" (2:16). He continued, "When I tried to keep the law, I realized that I could never earn God's approval... For if we could be saved through the law, then there was no need for Christ to die" (19, 21). In other words, **if man could be saved by works, then there is no need for grace or faith.**

Those who try to live by God's laws must obey all of them (3:12), which is impossible, for we are fallen creatures, sinful by nature. No one can obey the law perfectly. Therefore, all sinners are under the curse of the law and, therefore, condemned by God to death. But Christ has rescued us from the curse of the law (v.13).

What, then, was the purpose of the Law of God, if not to save us from our sins? Paul answered that question. "It was given to show people how guilty they are" (v.19). **The purpose of the law was not to be a savior but to point us to our need for the Savior.**

Daily Reflection

Any teaching that attempts to convince you to add something to Christ is a false Gospel. Adding something to gain salvation is to diminish the work of Christ on your behalf. **Salvation is by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone.** *Christ plus anything equals nothing, but Christ plus nothing equals everything.*

Just as you cannot earn salvation through your works, *you cannot maintain or perfect your salvation through works.* Paul said it this way, "Have you lost your senses? After starting your Christian lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your own human effort?" (3:3). What does that look like for you?

Have you ever thought you might lose your salvation because of something you did or didn't do? If so, then you are trying to perfect yourself with your efforts. Have you ever thought you might fall out of favor with God if you didn't read your Bible, pray, or go to church? That is a false Gospel. *You cannot do anything that would cause God to love you more.* Likewise, *you cannot do anything that would cause God to love you less.* **Because of Christ, you are free from all self-justification!** Rest in Him!

Under the Influence

Today In Your Reading...

Paul continued his case against the false doctrine that one needs to follow Jewish regulations to be saved from sin. "You are trying to find favor with God by what you do or don't do..." which is impossible (*Galatians 4:10*). "If you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ... Christ has set you free, so don't get tied up again in slavery to the law" (*5:1, 4*).

We have been called to a new life of freedom, both freedom from religious requirements and freedom from our sinful nature.

Before we were saved from sin, we were slaves to it. No amount of self-determination could overcome its power. However, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome our desire to fulfill our sinful passions.

Since our sinful nature and the Holy Spirit are both present in our lives, these forces wage a war in us. Thus, living a life that honors the Lord is a constant struggle for Christians (see *Romans 7:14-25*). Though our hearts have been made new by Christ, we are justified before God because of Him, **this new life is trapped inside of our sinful bodies** (flesh). Therefore, both forces can influence us at any time.

Paul challenged his readers "to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit, then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The old sinful nature loves to do evil, which is just the opposite from what the Holy Spirit wants; and the Spirit gives us desires that are opposite from what the sinful nature desires. **These two forces are constantly fighting each other, and your choices are never free from this conflict**" (*5:16, 17*).

However, Paul provided a list of fruit that helps us to identify the source that influences us the

most (*v.19-23, 26*). It is also a way to help identify who has or has not given his life to Christ. It is important to note that the desires of the sinful nature can be present in the life of a Christian, but *they will not be his practice*. Likewise, in the life of an unbeliever, spiritual characteristics can be present, but *they will not be his practice*. While fruit in one's life is not a definitive marker of one's salvation, it is certainly a help. **The pattern one exhibits over time is a helpful indication of who or what is influencing one's actions.**

Daily Reflection

"Those who belong to Christ," Paul wrote, "have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to His cross and crucified them there. If we are living by the Holy Spirit, then let us follow the Holy Spirit's leading in every part of our lives" (*5:24, 25*).

How would you describe this battle in your life? Have you crucified your sinful desires on the cross or are they still causing you to stumble? What pattern is most evident in your life?

Let it be obvious for others to see that you are a child of God. Let there be no doubt, when others watch you or listen to you, that **you are under the influence of the Spirit** and that you are genuinely seeking to live a life worthy of the One who saved you. Don't send mixed messages that cause others to wonder about your salvation, but rather let them be assured of it by the fruit in your life.

One Person at a Time

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November 15 — Acts 15:22-17:15

Day 319 — 46 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

After Paul and Barnabas completed their first missionary journey and returned to Antioch, it was not long until they decided to go again, this time to check on the churches they had started (Acts 15:36). However, God had different plans in mind for them. After a sharp disagreement arose regarding John Mark, who had quit during the first mission trip, Paul and Barnabas decided to go their separate ways. Barnabas and John Mark went back to Cyprus, while Paul and Silas went back to Galatia (v.37-41).

While Paul and Silas did not experience a great deal of success in Asia Minor, as the Holy Spirit would not let them stay long (16:6-8), they did meet a young man named **Timothy**. He was a disciple of Christ, half-Jew, well thought of by the people of Lystra. Paul and Silas convinced him to join them on their journey. Of course, he would eventually become a great leader in the early Church.

Because the Spirit did not present opportunities for them in Asia, Paul was convinced by a dream that God wanted them to travel to Macedonia (16:6-10). While this may seem like a trivial course correction, it was actually a momentous occasion. The Gospel was going to Europe for the first time. An entire continent was introduced to Christ. *The impact that Christianity would one day have in Europe would change the world, and it all began here with this "Macedonian Call."* Along the way, Paul and Silas met a physician named **Luke** (v.10), who was the man God used to pen one of the Gospel accounts, as well as the book of Acts.

While Paul and the others met with resistance in Europe, as they did everywhere else, they also met with success in a place called Philippi. A woman named **Lydia** was the first European convert. They were also able to convert a **jailer**

and his family to Christianity, after God sent a startling earthquake. The Lord was doing some amazing things, and He was using Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy to do so. Their persistence, despite opposition, brought people to Christ.

Daily Reflection

The Apostle Paul was a special emissary for the Lord. His impact for the Kingdom of God will never be matched. However, his strategy for reaching the world for Christ was simple — **one person at a time**. It was Timothy, then Luke and Lydia, then the jailer and his family. Though Paul had the ability to reach thousands at a time, he did what we can do — *personal evangelism*. We simply tell the people we know and meet about the salvation found in Jesus Christ.

Who was it that told you about Christ?

While God can and does use evangelists to save thousands at a time, more than likely your conversion happened because someone you know told you about Christ. Likewise, God wants to use you to tell others in your sphere of influence about him — family, friends, co-workers, and neighbors — **one person at a time**.

Paul could not be everywhere, so he revealed the second strategy for spreading the Gospel — *churches*. He encouraged and organized those who converted to join together into local bodies of believers, to minister to each other and to the community. **The Church is God's means for reaching the lost**. Still, even the Church requires individuals, like you, to share their faith. Are you participating in your local church? Are you sharing your faith with others? "How can they believe in Him whom they've not heard, and how can they hear unless someone tells them?" (Romans 10:14, 15).

Foolishness to the Perishing

BiAY.org | Daily Reflections

November 16 — Acts 17:16-18:3; 1 Thessalonians

Day 320 — 45 Days to Go

Today In Your Reading...

During Paul's second missionary journey, the Lord led him to travel to Macedonia and then to Greece. Thus, the Gospel made it to the continent of Europe for the first time. His strategy was the same wherever he went. First, he started with the Jews, talking with them in their synagogues on the Sabbath. At every place he went, some believed and some bickered; but, if enough people were converted, then Paul would start a church there.

While in Greece, Paul had the opportunity to stop by Athens, one of the most intriguing cities of the ancient world. He noticed that the town was full of statues, temples, and idols. The most famous temple was called the Areopagus or "Council of Philosophers," where the Athenians invited him to speak. Of course, he took the opportunity and decided to use a statue dedicated "To the Unknown God" to introduce everyone to the One True God — the God who made the world and everything in it (*Acts 17:22-34*).

The men of Athens listened intently until Paul got to the part where Jesus was resurrected from the dead. At that point, some laughed and their attention ended (v.32). What is interesting is that the very topic that these men thought laughable was what Paul used to comfort the Christians in Thessalonica. He wrote to them, "I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so that you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, He will bring back all the Christians who have died... Those who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with Him forever. Comfort and encourage each other with these words" (*1 Thessalonians 4:13-18*).

Daily Reflection

Later, Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "**The message of the cross is foolish to those who are headed for destruction**; but, we who are being saved know that it is very power of God. As the Scriptures say, 'I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and discard the intelligence of the intelligent.' So where does this leave the philosophers, the scholars, and the world's brilliant debaters? **God has made the wisdom of this world look foolish.** Since God in His wisdom saw to it that the world would never know Him through human wisdom, He has used our foolish preaching to save those who believe. It is foolish to the Greeks who seek human wisdom... So when we preach that Christ was crucified, the Gentiles say it is all nonsense... But this foolish plan of God is wiser than the wisest of human plans..." (*1 Corinthians 1:18-25*).

What is the difference here? Why do some find the good news of Jesus Christ so hard to accept, while others find comfort and hope in Him?

Paul addressed this question later in the same letter. "When we tell you these things, we do not use words that come from human wisdom. Instead, we speak words given to us by the Spirit... But people who aren't spiritual can't receive these truths from God's Spirit. It all sounds foolish to them and they can't understand it..." (*2:13, 14*).

Praise God, that **He has given you the Spirit, to open your eyes and understand these things.** To others they are foolishness, but to you they are the power of God for salvation.

Settle Down and Get to Work

Today In Your Reading...

Paul wrote a second letter to the church in Thessalonica, primarily to clear up some questions they had regarding a topic in his first letter. In his first letter, Paul tried to encourage them regarding what happened to Christians who had died, so “they would not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope” (*1 Thessalonians 4:13*). However, Paul’s reference to the end times evidently sparked much discussion about how and when these things would take place. Thus, Paul wrote to them again, “Now, let us tell you about the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ and how we will be gathered together to meet Him” (*2 Thessalonians 2:1*).

Some false teachers took advantage of Paul’s words and claimed that the “Day of the Lord” had already begun. Paul warned his readers not to be troubled by these people, because they did not know what they were saying. He then went on to describe an indication that the Day of the Lord was approaching — there would be “a great rebellion against God and the man of lawlessness will be revealed, the one who brings destruction” (*2:3*). This lawless man is a reference to the prophecy of Daniel (*9:27*), which describes the Anti-Christ, one who works to undermine the purposes of God and who unites the world against God’s people (Jews).

The second half of Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians dealt with those people who did little or nothing, because they thought Jesus’ return was imminent (*3:6-15*). They took advantage of the church’s charity and lived a life of laziness (*v.11*). Paul warned his readers “to stay away from any Christian who lives in idleness and doesn’t follow the tradition of hard work we gave you... We gave you this rule: ‘Whoever does not work should not eat...’ We command such people — **settle down and get to work**. Earn your own living” (*v.6, 10, 12, 13*).

Daily Reflection

Idleness, both inside and outside the church, is a sin for several reasons. What are some of them?

Isn’t the rule “Whoever does not work should not eat” cruel and unloving? Why or why not?

Where would you draw the line with one living an idle life and being “needy,” receiving charity?

Christians are notorious for doing much but accomplishing little. Would you agree or disagree? Could that be considered living an idle life?

Settle down and get to work! “Never get tired of doing good” (*v.13*). Are you avoiding idleness?

The Kingdom of Self

Today In Your Reading...

Paul began his third missionary journey, essentially retracing the path of his second trip. While he was in Ephesus (Asia Minor), he wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, addressing some of their issues. Evidently, the new believers there struggled with worldliness and spiritual immaturity. Paul wrote to them, "When I was with you, I couldn't talk to you as I would to mature Christians. I had to talk as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in the Christian life. I had to feed you with milk and not with solid food, because you couldn't handle anything stronger" (1 Cor. 3:1, 2).

The first issue Paul addressed, regarding their immaturity, was the **division in their church**. "Stop arguing among yourselves," he wrote. "Let there be real harmony so there won't be divisions in the church. I plead with you to be of one mind, united in thought and purpose... You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other... You are acting like people who don't belong to the Lord" (1:10; 3:3).

Division among God's people is a sign of selfishness. We are all one in Christ, and as we emphasize our common bond in Him, we will yield our sinful, selfish preferences and strive for unity. *Disunity should never be a trait of a group of believers*; yet Satan has had great success dividing us on so many issues — doctrinal differences, ministry focus, programs, styles of worship, social and political issues, etc. — when **we are all on the same team**.

On this issue of seeking out the fulfillment of our selfish preferences in the church, Paul gave a stern warning — **use caution when building on the foundation of Christ**. *We must make sure that what we are building is a structure that glorifies Him and not ourselves*. "Anyone who builds on that foundation may use gold,

silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. There is coming a time of testing at judgment day, to see what kind of work each builder has done. Everyone's work will be put through the fire to see whether or not it keeps its value..." (3:10-15). Here is the bottom line — *all that we have done to honor Christ will be rewarded*; all that we have done to honor ourselves will burn up.

Daily Reflection

How would you describe your influence in the local church? Have you been an agent of unity or disunity? Have you sought to honor Christ with your words and actions, or have you worked hard to get your way or make yourself look good? Explain your answer.

What about your Christian life? What have you built on the foundation of Christ, since coming to Him in salvation? Have you built a life for yourself or for Him? Will your works survive the test of judgment day or will they burn up?

We are all building something in our lives. It is either the kingdom of self or the Kingdom of God. How can we build the Kingdom of God together if we focus only on our own structure?