



**LIBERATING**  
**FAITH STUDIES**

**SAMPLE**

**HOPE IN  
THE LORD**

# **LIBERATING FAITH STUDIES SUNDAY SCHOOL QUARTERLY OF THE AFRICAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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# The Order of Service

- I. Bell tap or organ voluntary  
as a signal for silence
  - II. Singing
  - III. The Apostles' Creed
  - IV. Prayer, closing with the  
Lord's Prayer in concert
  - V. Singing
  - VI. Calling roll of officers and teachers
  - VII. Responsive reading  
of the lesson text by school
  - VIII. The Decalogue
- 

## The Lesson

- I. Organ interlude while  
the classes are being arranged
  - II. Class study of the lesson
  - III. Warning bell — 5 minutes
  - IV. Closing bell — silence
- 

## The Closing

- I. Singing
- II. Review and application  
of the lesson
- III. Secretary's report
- IV. The Church School Creed
- V. Singing
- VI. Benediction

### Editorial Staff

Publisher • Rev. Dr. Roderick D. Belin

Editor • Rev. Dr. Garland F. Pierce

— Lessons —

Dr. Catherine S. Powell

### The Apostles' Creed

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; the third day He arose from the dead, He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of the saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.

### The Church School Creed

I believe my A.M.E. Church School must grow and grow; and that I must make it a top priority to make it so. Every member a Christian, every Christian a worker, every worker trained so that a worker need not be ashamed. This we ask in Jesus' name.

A.M.E. Discipline

Hello, AME Church School Member!

**T**he Home Daily Bible Readings will continue to appear at the end of each Sunday's lesson but they will be the readings for the following week. We made this change in response to your requests. The readings for the first week are on the following page.

For over a year we have used Zoom and Facebook to facilitate our weekly Connectional Church School with teachers (lay and clergy) from around the AME Connection. They generously share their knowledge, talents, and expertise with a weekly average of 500 participants viewing via Zoom and 1500 on Facebook.

This virtual AME Connectional Church School was birthed due to the limitations imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The blessings from the teachings have been immeasurable. We will continue this Connectional Church School on Sundays at 9:00 a.m. EST. Join us! Zoom Meeting ID: 829 9325 1894. Visit our website- [www.iamame.org](http://www.iamame.org)- to find worship and study resources to empower you and enhance the life of the church.

Like our Facebook page so you will be informed about programming and important announcements from the Publishing House and *The Christian Recorder*: [www.facebook.com/amecpublishing](https://www.facebook.com/amecpublishing).

Join our Facebook Group to continue conversations after Church School and share ideas, thoughts, and best practices with other AME Church School members and teachers: [www.facebook.com/groups/amechurchschool](https://www.facebook.com/groups/amechurchschool).

Thank you for purchasing *Liberating Faith Studies*. We are working every day to fulfill our mission to provide high quality resources to empower us to spread Jesus Christ's liberating gospel, pursue justice, and enhance the social development of all people.

And, always remember, I am praying for you.

Roderick D. Belin  
President/Publisher

**HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS**

**May 27–June 2**

<b>Monday</b>	Isaiah 43:8-13 (God's Witnesses)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Psalms 113 (Praise the Lord!)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Galatians 3:19-29 (God's Children in Christ Through Faith)
<b>Thursday</b>	Proverbs 10:19-25 (The Lord's Blessing Makes Rich)
<b>Friday</b>	Matthew 6:19-24 (Your Treasure Is With Your Heart)
<b>Saturday</b>	Matthew 6:25-34 (Seek First God's Kingdom)
<b>Sunday</b>	Colossians 1:24–2:3 (Christ, the Most Precious Gift)

## Glorious Riches

Lesson Scripture: Colossians 1:19–2:5

Focus Scripture: Colossians 1:24–2:3

*Key Verses: I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Colossians 2:2-3*

### COLOSSIANS 1:24–2:3 (NRSV UE)

24 I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.

25 I became its minister according to God's commission that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,

26 the mystery that has been hidden throughout the ages and generations but has now been revealed to his saints.

27 To them God chose to make known how great among the gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28 It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.

29 For this I toil and strive with all the energy that he powerfully inspires within me.

2:1 For I want you to know how greatly I strive for you and for those in Laodicea and for all who have not seen me face to face.

2 I want their hearts to be encouraged and united in love, so that they may have all the riches of assured understanding and have the knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ,

3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

### COLOSSIANS 1:24–2:3 (KJV)

24 Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

25 Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God;

26 Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints:

27 To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory:

28 Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus:

29 Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

2:1 For I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;

2 That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ;

3 In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

## KEY TERMS

- **Epaphras (ep'-a-fras)** – A Christian preacher from Colossae, who is credited with having founded the Colossian church and for having informed Paul of heretical teachings that threatened the church's unity and spiritual growth.
- **Gnosticism** – Stems from the Greek word "gnosis" or "knowledge." Gnostics rejected beliefs that Christ alone could be the way to salvation because they believed being accepted by God required having "special knowledge."
- **Polytheism** – Believing in and/or worshipping more than one god.
- **Syncretism** – The combination or amalgamation of different religious beliefs; efforts to blend Christianity with other religions or human-inspired philosophies created problems for the church at Colossae.

The title of this quarter's lessons is "Hope in the Lord." Unit I is entitled "Expressions of Christian Hope."

## INTRODUCTION

The title of this quarter's lessons is "Hope

in the Lord." Unit I is entitled "Expressions of Christian Hope." Hope, as used in this context, fuels anticipations of favorable outcomes under God's guidance and certainty that as we have been blessed by God in the past, we can trust him for future blessings. As we begin this lesson series, you are encouraged to ask yourself this question: "To what degree am I willing to invest in the spiritual lives of others to ensure that the Gospel, according to Jesus Christ, is taught so that lives may be continuously transformed?" In this first lesson, *Glorious Riches*, Apostle Paul uses his own life to help believers answer this question. Paul conveyed his message in a letter to the church at Colossae, which we know as the book of Colossians.

At the time of this writing, Paul was a prisoner in Rome. He did not know the recipients of his letter because he had never visited this church. However, he became concerned for the church's spiritual welfare and growth upon hearing reports that new and dangerous teachings,



reflective of polytheism, syncretism, and Gnosticism, were being promoted and gaining significant influence among the church's believers.


### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

The news about the church was probably conveyed to Paul during visits by his friend, Epaphras, the church's founder. Paul resolutely determined to counteract further advancement of false teachings and their leaders by denouncing them and highlighting their inferiority to Jesus Christ and true Christianity. In our **Focus Scripture**, Colossians 1:24–2:3, Paul seeks to convince the church of his love and labors for them in spite of the fact they had never met.

#### **Paul's Role in God's Salvation Plans, Colossians 1:24-29**

Paul asserted his credibility as an apostle, chosen and sent by God as a missionary or ambassador. Surely Paul understood that Jesus completed his mission, which included suffering and dying to make

salvation available to all sinners. Yet, Paul claimed to have been sent to “complete what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” Later, Paul explained that his suffering was for the purpose of telling the story of what Jesus has done to people who don't know or understand. In essence,



Paul resolutely determined to counteract further advancement of false teachings and their leaders by denouncing them and highlighting their inferiority to Jesus Christ and true Christianity.

Paul was suffering as he fulfilled Jesus' commandment to “go into the world and preach the gospel to all creatures” (Mark 16:15). Paul viewed his circumstances with delight, and he expressed joy in his sufferings. Undoubtedly, Paul envisioned the glory to be derived from fulfillment of God's special assignments, whether for him or other believers.

Paul did not lose sight of the false teachers, who were creating problems for the congregation. Among their teachings were beliefs that spiritual perfection was a secretly hidden plan that only a few people were privileged to know. Paul repudiated



such teachings by emphasizing the simplicity of God's salvation plans, which for many were long-standing mysteries that God allowed to gradually unfold. Hebrews 1:1-2 tells us that "long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the world." Paul revealed the glorious mystery as the presence of Christ in all believers. From this relationship, transformation is born and continues as disciples learn more and model the precepts and principles known to believers as their hope in Christ transforms their lives.

**Paul Labors  
Inclusively,  
Colossians 2:1-3**

Like the church at Colossae, the church at Laodicea is believed to have been founded by one of Paul's converts. Paul wanted his letter to be shared with that church because similar problems

with false teachings may have been threatening the congregation. Paul revealed his love and labors for that church also. He expressed desires for ties of love to unify the disciples and empower them to resist false teachings and avoid vulnerabilities to the influences of false teachers. Staying on course to remain committed to God's salvation plans was to be their top priority.

**SANKOFA**

Researching the question, "How have false biblical teachings impacted African American Christians?" yields a plethora of articles too numerous to name in this space. However, the publishing of the *Slave Bible* in 1807, the founding of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in 1816, and the proliferation of

Christian Nationalism in today's society are three prominent examples. Obviously, the positives of some far outweigh the influences of others.

*The Slave Bible*, of course, was devoid of scriptures that spoke of God's

He expressed desires for ties of love to unify the disciples and empower them to resist false teachings and avoid vulnerabilities to the influences of false teachers.

inclusiveness and unconditional love for everyone, regardless of race, creed, color, or other differences in human characteristics. Instead this Bible was used to preach to slaves. It was designed to convince slaves that their status was ordained by God. Therefore, they should willingly serve and obey slave owners. Docility and subservience were the desired outcomes!

Of course, the AME Church was founded in protest to inhumane treatments experienced by African American worshippers at St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Although one Bible was apparently preached at St. George, implementation of the scriptures definitely did not represent the teachings of Jesus Christ. Freedom to worship God in St.

George was denied African Americans. Our founder and first bishop, Richard Allen, is to be forever loved and appreciated for using godly wisdom and

Holy Spirit empowerment to lead the abused congregants out of St. George so that all could worship freely as God intends.

Christian Nationalism is a contemporary movement that intertwines religion with culture and politics. Its proponents generally believe that the American nation is defined by Christianity (as they define it), and that the government should

take action to maintain “Anglo-Protestant” identities and freedoms. Preservation of the adherents’ cultural inheritance is a high priority. White supremacy is perceived to be an emerging product. Contrary to the teachings of Jesus Christ, many mainstream pastors are associated with the movement, despite evidence of increasing racial and political divides among

Christians and the American public at large. Yet, all are reportedly reading, preaching, and teaching from the same Bible.

Of course, the AME Church was founded in protest to inhumane treatments experienced by African American worshippers at St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**CASE STUDY**

Olympian Simone Biles presents a case study of a different type than the Colossian and Laodicean churches. She demonstrates the importance of staying committed to one's own beliefs and ignoring the noise of dissenting voices. Her story is well known! Despite her popularity and legacy as the most decorated gymnast in U.S. history, Ms. Biles withdrew from competition at the 2021 Tokyo Olympics due to a mental health crisis. Unapologetically, she refused to continue and explained that she had the "twisties," which has been described as a dangerous condition wherein the brain and body of a gymnast are not in sync. As a result of *twisties*, gymnasts may lose track of their positions midair.

As she listened to her own voice and prioritized her mental health over continuing to compete to please others, Ms. Biles was subjected to a period of severely harsh

backlash. Because of her departure, the U.S. team won silver instead of gold as was expected. Ms. Biles was blamed and criticized. With a two-year absence for personal care, many people considered Ms. Biles' career as a gymnast to be over. However, her extraordinary October 2023 "come-back" performance at the World Artistic Gymnastics Championships

Wisdom portrayed and rewarded in the case of this young gymnast gives invaluable insights and motivations to value one's own convictions. For Christians, the voice and guidance of the Holy Spirit are to be prized above all worldly influences.

created new paradigms for gymnasts as well as gymnastics. Wisdom portrayed and rewarded in the case of this young gymnast gives invaluable insights and motivations to value one's own convictions. For Christians, the voice and guidance of the Holy Spirit are to be prized above all worldly influences.

**LIFE APPLICATION**

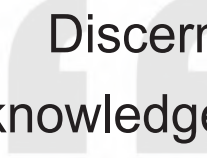
How well are you prepared to counteract false teachers and messages that are inconsistent with the Word of God? In Matthew 24:3-14, Jesus warned disciples several times that



prior to his second coming, many false prophets and teachers will arrive and deceive many. Evidence of this prophecy is quite visible in our everyday lives – from radio and television ministries to books, religious cults, and so forth – they thrive on erroneous, perverted views and interpretations of God’s Word, particularly the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Discernment and knowledge essential to

the ability to spot false teachers depend on daily prayerfulness as well as sincere efforts to study and apply God’s Word in our lives. As was the case with the Colossians and Laodiceans, knowing and seeking to remain committed to our faith foundations is also critically important to remaining confident in our beliefs and stability as committed disciples. Consider, for example, the rich rewards to be derived from re-focusing on our doctrinal affirmation, including Section I, *Apostle’s Creed* and Section II, *Articles of Religion* (*The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2021, pp. 23-29).



Discernment and knowledge essential to the ability to spot false teachers depend on daily prayerfulness as well as sincere efforts to study and apply God’s Word in our lives.

Considering all that is presented in this lesson to protect us from being deceived, including the relevant histories of the Colossian and Laodicean churches, we are truly blessed with special tools to protect our faith. Along with these blessings, however, each of us has to accept personal responsibility to use “the lessons learned” to not only strengthen ourselves, but also to help others who

may be struggling with doubt and uncertainty about their faith.

### QUESTIONS:

1. Can you give at least one example of a false teaching that is being spread in our nation and/or culture?
2. How would you advise others to determine what teachings or teachers should not be trusted?
3. How would you explain the “glorious riches” discussed in today’s lesson?

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Song:** “My Hope Is Built” (AMEC Hymnal #364)

**Closing Prayer:** Dear Lord, your Word is a light unto our paths and a lamp unto our feet. In all things, we trust you and

praise you because you are so worthy to be praised. Thank you again for teaching us and transforming us to become more like Jesus. Please forgive all our

transgressions and bless us to stay the course to reach eternal life. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 3-June 9

<b>Monday</b>	Acts 28:23-31 (Boldy Proclaiming the Kingdom)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Exodus 19:9-11, 16-25 (The Awesome Presence of God)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Hebrews 12:18-29 (The Consuming Fire)
<b>Thursday</b>	Acts 4:23-31 (The Church Prays for Boldness)
<b>Friday</b>	Exodus 34:28-35 (Transfigured by the Power of God)
<b>Saturday</b>	Deuteronomy 31:1-8 (Be Strong and Bold)
<b>Sunday</b>	2 Corinthians 3:5-18 (Ministers of a New Covenant)

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## Bold Ministers

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Lesson Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:1-18

Focus Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:5-18

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*Key Verse: All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18*

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### 2 CORINTHIANS 3:5-18 (NRSV UE)

5 Not that we are qualified of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our qualification is from God,

6 who has made us qualified to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit, for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

7 Now if the ministry of death, chiseled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses's face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside,

8 how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory?

9 For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory!

10 Indeed, what once had glory has in this respect lost its glory because of the greater glory,

11 for if what was set aside came through glory, much more has the permanent come in glory!

12 Since, then, we have such a hope, we act with complete frankness,

13 not like Moses, who put a veil over his face to keep the people of Israel from gazing at the end of the glory that was being set aside.

14 But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, the same veil is still there; it is not unveiled since in Christ it is set aside.

15 Indeed, to this very day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their minds,

16 but when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

### 2 CORINTHIANS 3:5-18 (KJV)

5 Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

6 Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

7 But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away:

8 How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

9 For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

10 For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

11 For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

12 Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech:

13 And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished:

14 But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ.

15 But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.



17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

18 And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another, for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit.

16 Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.

17 Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

### KEY TERMS

- **Bold** – Derives from the word *boldness*, which describes the confidence with which Christians, because of the redeeming work of Christ, are empowered to approach God and his work.
- **Corinth** – One of ancient Greece's largest, wealthiest, and most prestigious cities. The proliferation of idolatry and extreme immorality are notable characteristics of the city.
- **Credentials** – Records of previous achievements, training, and preparation used to validate qualifications for a particular role, assignment, or profession.

He is noted for having written at least three letters to this church. The first is believed to have been lost.

at Corinth near the close of his second missionary journey, prior to his moving on to Ephesus. He is noted for having written at least three letters to this church. The first is believed to have been

lost. The second and third are canonized in the New Testament as 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians. Today's lesson is found in 2 Corinthians. As we transition from Paul's letter to the churches at Colossae and Laodicea, which we studied last week, to today's letter, a pivotal trend in Paul's missionary journeys

emerges. Wherever he journeyed, Paul had to struggle with false teachers, who inevitably followed him, attempted to discredit his teachings and apostolic authorities, and in some cases tried to kill him.

### INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul founded the church

## TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

As previously noted, Paul has moved on from Corinth to Ephesus. While in Ephesus, Paul hears that problems are brewing within the church at Corinth. This is a weak, fledgling congregation, struggling to resist the sinful influences of their past and to strengthen their faith in the new life that Jesus promised. Hence, Paul must have been elated to receive news from Titus (2 Cor. 7:6-13) that a prior letter of instruction from him had been well received by the congregation. However, the good news was quickly countered by other news that false teachers were at work among the congregants, seeking to influence them with teachings that negated

Paul's ministry and the pure doctrines of Jesus Christ. So Paul wrote his letters to the congregants.


Paul's letter in 1 Corinthians dealt with moral issues in the church. He wrote 2 Corinthians, the focus of today's studies, to assert his apostolic authority, which was being assailed by false teachers

and to denounce false teachings that were distorting God's Word. Paul also wanted the believers to be "overcomers" who would transition from weakness to becoming bold witnesses for Jesus Christ.

### Paul's Apostolic Credentials, 2 Corinthians 3:1-6

Unfortunately, as is the case with many Christians today, Paul's opponents valued credentials more than transformed hearts and lives. Some false teachers actually carried forged letters of recommendation to authenticate their status or rank. Conversely, Paul dismissed such practices for himself. Instead, he pointed to the "fruits of his labor,"

the believers to whom he had preached and taught the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul presented the believers and their new lives as superior letters to any others that might be produced. Paul also used imagery to call attention to the need to transition from the letter of the law to the spirit of the law – the dispensation of grace



Paul presented the believers and their new lives as superior letters to any others that might be produced.

and the call for “circumcised hearts.”

Also, unlike the false teachers, Paul took no credit for either the success of his ministry, or the confidence and boldness that was evident in his ministerial approaches. Rightfully and humbly, Paul gave God the credit for his successes and emphasized the roles of the power of the new covenant as indicated in the following assertion: “not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life” (v. 6). Summarily, efforts to be saved by keeping the law will result in death, but by believing in Jesus Christ, believers can be saved through the Holy Spirit, who gives new life.

### **The Greater Glory of the New Covenant, 2 Corinthians 3:7-11**

Paul sought to aid believers’ abilities to differentiate the law, which he called “the ministry of death” from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which brings righteousness and eternal life. Notably, despite his negative characterization of the old covenant, Paul

still referred to it as “glorious” because it was God’s provision and tangible evidence of his divine intervention into the lives of his people. Yet, that law was transitory, according to Paul. Finally, Paul used rhetorical questions (vs. 7-11) to enable believers to discover why they should appreciate the benefits of new life in the spirit as opposed to the burdens of the law.

Although Paul humbly credited God instead of humankind for his credentials, he now declares himself and his companions to be very bold. Their boldness derives from hope in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

### **The New Kind of Boldness, 2 Corinthians 3:12-18**

Although Paul humbly credited God instead of humankind for his credentials, he now declares himself and his companions to be very bold. Their boldness derives from hope in Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. Interestingly, Paul gives greater revelations about the purpose for which Moses veiled his face as he descended from

the presence of God on Mount Sinai with the law (Exodus 34:29-35). Paul explains that, because of the veil, the Israelites were unable to see the transitory nature



of the law, and their minds were “made dull” (v. 14). Additionally, Paul asserts that the same veil “covers their hearts” when the law is read (v. 15). He concludes by explaining that the veil is removed only as believers turn to God through Jesus Christ. As glory is contemplated (with no need for veils), transformation into his image occurs. Our boldness is therefore

dependent upon relationship with Jesus Christ and obedience to the Holy Spirit. We are increasingly enabled to experience God’s glory. The more we follow Jesus Christ, the more we become like him, and the more we live in the spirit of God!

### **SANKOFA**

First African Methodist Episcopal (AME)

Church of Los Angeles, California is a sterling example of what can be achieved by bold believers/ministers. The church was founded in 1872 by Biddy Mason, a woman who personified the kind of boldness Apostle Paul embraced. Ms. Mason arrived in Los Angeles as a slave. With incomparable boldness and determination, she won her freedom in a

court suit. Other notable accomplishments include her having become a nurse, a real estate entrepreneur, and a philanthropist.

Ms. Mason’s dedication to ministry is most recognizable today in the history and prosperity of First AME Church. The first meeting was held in Ms. Mason’s home, with twelve other people in attendance.

First AME has not been exempted from

Jesus’ prophecy that “in this life, [we] will have trouble” (John 16:33). However, its growth and continuous service commitments are most memorable and applauded today. From the small group, who met in that first meeting in Ms. Mason’s home, First AME has more than 19,000 members today. More information is available

at [www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/first-african-methodist-episcopal-church-1872/](http://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/first-african-methodist-episcopal-church-1872/).

### **CASE STUDY**

Boldness, among Christians, is gained and expressed in many different ways. The late Marian Anderson, who was and continues to be highly acclaimed

“First African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church of Los Angeles, California is a sterling example of what can be achieved by bold believers/ministers.”

as one of America's most famous contraltos, is an example. Stories of her extraordinary successes as a "first in music," and as "a first among African Americans" in many capacities, despite living in a deeply segregated society, are too numerous to recall in this space. Perhaps the most revealing example of Ms. Anderson's character and faith is found in a March 1954 edition of *Guidepost Magazine*. In this story, Ms. Anderson openly discusses a time when she experienced failure and was so distressed about her performance that she began to doubt her gifts as a singer. She abandoned her career and refused to perform publicly for a whole year. It was after one year of "embracing grief," according to Ms. Anderson, that she decided to pray.

She also reported that "in those tearful hours there slowly came the thought that there is a time when even the most self-sufficient cannot find enough strength to stand alone. Then one prays with a fervor one never had before." What a powerful

testimony from one whom most never expected to face failure!

As a result of prayer, Ms. Anderson reports having experienced a strong awareness of not being alone in her sorrows, but a sense of having someone "I could pour out the greatest need of my heart and soul." True to his promises, God delivered her – from her prison of despair and self-

pity, and he replaced them with newer, stronger motivation to successfully resume her career.

### LIFE APPLICATION

Paul's unique way of presenting himself as an apostle should resonate with us. He gives insight and rationale for all believers to contemplate whether and how our work as Christians is reflected in the lives of others

as well as our own. Testimonials are wonderful in that they can inspire others and help them grow spiritually. However, we can conclude from Paul's teachings that how we live and how we sow into the lives of others, with and without the

As a result of prayer, Ms. Anderson reports having experienced a strong awareness of not being alone in her sorrows, but a sense of having someone "I could pour out the greatest need of my heart and soul."

Holy Spirit's guidance, can be likened to letters of recommendation that can either encourage or discourage others to believe in Jesus Christ.

### QUESTIONS:

1. How comfortable are you with using 2 Corinthians 3:2-3 to introduce yourself?
2. How would you use the metaphor of the "veil" to discuss prayer and Bible study?
3. If you should encounter false biblical teachers, what actions would you take?

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Song:** "There Is a Name I Love to Hear" (*AMEC Hymnal* #185)

**Closing Prayer:** Lord, we thank you again for all of your blessings. We praise you for this opportunity to study your Word again and learn more about how to serve and please you. Please forgive us for all our sins and transgressions, and as Jesus taught us, please bless us to let our lights so shine before people that they may see your good works and glorify you in heaven. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

June 10-June 16

<b>Monday</b>	Luke 22:25-30 (Servant Leadership)
<b>Tuesday</b>	Acts 1:1-11 (You Shall Receive Power)
<b>Wednesday</b>	Isaiah 61 (Anointed by God)
<b>Thursday</b>	Psalms 133–134 (How Pleasant to Live in Unity)
<b>Friday</b>	Ephesians 4:1-7 (Bear With One Another in Love)
<b>Saturday</b>	Philippians 2:1-13 (Embrace the Mind of Christ)
<b>Sunday</b>	Romans 15:1-13 (Prayer for Hope, Joy, and Peace)



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## Empowered Servants

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Lesson Scripture: Romans 15:1-13

Focus Scripture: Romans 15:1-13

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*Key Verses: May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus, so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Roman 15:5-6*

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### ROMANS 15:1-13 (NRSV UE)

1 We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.

2 Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor.

3 For Christ did not please himself, but, as it is written, "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me."

4 For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, so that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope.

5 May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another, in accordance with Christ Jesus,

6 so that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the ancestors

9 and that the gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will confess you among the gentiles and sing praises to your name";

10 and again he says, "Rejoice, O gentiles, with his people";

11 and again, "Praise the Lord, all you gentiles, and let all the peoples praise him";

12 and again Isaiah says, "The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the gen-

### ROMANS 15:1-13 (KJV)

1 We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

2 Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

3 For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

4 For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

5 Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus:

6 That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7 Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

8 Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers:

9 And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.

10 And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.

11 And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud him, all ye people.

12 And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over

tiles; in him the gentiles shall hope.”

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust.

13 Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.

### KEY TERMS

- **Ambassador** – Derives from the Hebrew word *tsir*; this term is commonly used to designate a high ranking official, who is chosen to represent a nation. As used by Apostle Paul, *ambassador* is a special designation for those appointed by God to declare his Word to all nations.
- **Empowered** – Having power or authority to achieve something.
- **Reconciliation** – The act of merging or resolving differences between two or more parties.

Although he had not met them, Paul was concerned about these Christians because he had heard there were divisions among them.

Paul had never visited the Christians in Rome. Nor had any of the other apostles. The church is believed to have been started by Jews, who had converted to Christianity during Pentecost (Acts 2) and started the church after returning to Rome from Jerusalem. Although he had not met them, Paul was concerned about these Christians because he had heard there were divisions among them. Unable to visit them, he relied upon this letter to communicate with them, hoping to effect reconciliation between them and God’s plans as well as between

each other.

### INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul addressed the letter in today’s lesson to Christians living in Rome. Like the Christians in the church at Colossae, which we studied recently,

### TELLING THE BIBLE STORY

Members of the Roman church were a diverse community of Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free people, some of whom were poor, and others of whom were rich. Also, some members were strong in their

faith and others were weak, struggling to grow spiritually. Paul began his letter by addressing the foundations of Christianity – the basic facts on what Christians should believe. Beginning with chapter 12 of the book of Romans, Paul focused on practical guidelines for acceptable behavior. He transitioned from discussing the need to accumulate knowledge about Jesus Christ and his teachings to advise the Christians to seek and enjoy “new lives in unity,” despite their diversity. The new unified life would be sustained by transformed hearts that would allow God to impact every aspect of each individual’s life. For example, in Romans 14:1 (ESV), Paul wrote, “As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.” Paul’s advice continues in today’s scriptures as he explains how to cultivate loving relationships.

### **Build Each Other Up, Romans 15:1-2**

The idea of building each other up may sound simple but doing so in ways that please God requires transformed

hearts and minds. In our world, the word “strength” is used to connote power or authority over others, with or without their consent. Paul, however, uses the term to connote one’s ability to serve God and humankind. Therefore, in Romans 15:1, Paul says “we who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.” Summarily,

Paul insisted that instead of criticizing or marginalizing those considered to be weak, all should engage as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, working to “build each other up.”

Paul insisted that instead of criticizing or marginalizing those considered to be weak, all should engage as brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, working to “build each other up.”

### **Emulate Jesus and Glorify God, Romans 15:3-7**

Although they are not always verbalized, “show me how and why” are common responses to new or different instructions about how we should live. To learn how to live as Christians, Paul encouraged the members to accept and follow Jesus as a role-model. In essence, if Jesus, with all of his strength and power, could love and bless us in our weaknesses, we should find ways to

do the same for our brothers and sisters. Paul also stressed the importance of knowing and studying the scriptures. By doing so, believers will not only gain more knowledge about Jesus, but they will also learn more about God and his history of intervening in human life. This knowledge helps believers to become more personally secure and open to accepting and uniting with others as Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of unified relationships among servants with a common cause. Paul urges believers to focus on reconciling their differences. He emphasized God's grace in reconciling humankind to Godself as justification for reconciliations among the members. Surely, any grievances or different perspectives among the members would be much less impactful upon the body of believers than the sins that God forgave as Jesus Christ effected reconciliation on humankind's behalf.

### **Be Rooted in the Hope of Jesus Christ, Romans 15:8-1**

Paul explained that Jesus came to reveal the truth of God's plans to the Jews and

to show that God keeps his promises. His purpose in coming also included bringing the good news of salvation to the Gentiles so that they might glorify God in appreciation for his mercy. In Romans 15:9-12, Paul quoted several Old Testament prophets, who had preached the same message. In summary, because of Jesus' Gospel of reconciliation, both

Paul quoted several Old Testament prophets, who had preached the same message. In summary, because of Jesus' Gospel of reconciliation, both groups had reasons to glorify God.

groups had reasons to glorify God. The "Root of Jesse" is the savior of all. Together, these reconciled groups, both Jews and Gentiles, are to carry the Gospel of reconciliation to the rest of the world.

### **SANKOFA**

For Christians, the search for peace and harmony that Paul advocated must extend beyond the church into

everyday life experiences. Thus, it is important to focus on contemporary life. In the United States, for example, recent decisions relating to baseball provide significant insights. Although baseball is known as America's "favorite pastime," a long history of discriminating and marginalizing minority players resulted



in depriving the players and the nation of fair representation of all players and a complete accounting of statistical data.

Because of discrimination, black baseball players, despite their performance records, were forced to play in their own, separate organizations, known today as the Negro Leagues. This practice is known to have existed from 1920-1948. Dissolution of the leagues is reported to have begun one year after Jackie Robinson became Major League Baseball's first black player with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947.


On December 16, 2020, the commissioner of baseball announced decisions to correct "a longtime oversight in the game's history by officially elevating the Negro League to 'Major League Status.'" With this action, about 3400 Negro League ball players were given Major League caliber status. Their statistical records will also be included in Major League Baseball's history. Hence, we can see how reconciliation, in this case, benefits the individual players and their

families, the nation as a whole, as well as the world of baseball.

### CASE STUDY

Paul's teachings on reconciliation are not limited to today's scriptures. Reconciliation is a major theme throughout his ministry. In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul discusses how God has reconciled us to himself and how he has made us ministers

of reconciliation. Therefore, according to Paul, we are ambassadors for Jesus Christ, responsible for carrying the message of reconciliation. The need for ambassadors, of course, extends beyond the church. The work of the Honorable Linda Thomas-Greenfield, United States ambassador to the United Nations, is



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a stellar example.

Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield is an African American female who was born in Baker, Louisiana, and attended and graduated from a segregated high school in 1970. She was also the first in her family to graduate high school.

However, her academic and professional achievements are extraordinary! She is an exemplary role-model for peacemaking and facilitating reconciliations as she represents the United States, impacting world-wide initiatives on conflict resolution, human rights, freedom, and democracy. After a lengthy, distinguished career in other foreign service roles and capacities, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield was nominated by the Biden administration and confirmed as the United States ambassador to the United Nations, a cabinet-level position, on February 23, 2021. On March 1, 2021, she became the president of the United Nations Security Council. She currently serves in both capacities. For more information, visit [www.academyofdiplomacy.org/member/linda-thomas-greenfield/](http://www.academyofdiplomacy.org/member/linda-thomas-greenfield/).

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### LIFE APPLICATION

Understanding unity does not mean we should expect sameness! Instead, it means we should expect and accept

differences. Human diversity is often metaphorically described as being like different pieces or scraps of materials that can be sown together to create one beautiful quilt. Although each piece retains its own shape, color, and identity, when joined with the others, a beautiful new creation emerges. This is a good description for primary or noticeable diversity traits, but what about secondary, less discernable traits?

Apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 12, explains that as Christians we are all one body, but not all members have the same office. Unfortunately, this truth is often overlooked in our interactions. Consequently, disputes and conflicts arise because as we look at each other, there is a tendency to see and expect “sameness.”

However, many factors, such as education, backgrounds, previous experiences, spiritual maturity, and so forth may fuel divisions among us. In all cases, the advice which Apostle Paul

gave to the Roman church is as relevant to us today as it was to the Romans.

### QUESTIONS:

1. How comfortable are you with accepting people who are different from you?
2. What positive traits can you identify in Paul as an ambassador for Christ?
3. How would you use Paul's instructions to maintain peace within your church?

### CLOSING DEVOTIONS

**Closing Song:** "Help Us Accept Each Other" (*AMEC Hymnal* #558)

**Closing Prayer:** Gracious God, we thank you for all of your love, your patience, your forgiveness, and all of your blessings. Your Word tells us that if we acknowledge you in all our ways, you will direct our paths. Father, we come in faith, believing this and all of your promises. Please continue to teach us and strengthen us so that each of us can remain faithful and daily seek to emulate Jesus, our role-model, for righteous living that leads to eternal life. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

### HOME DAILY BIBLE READINGS

**June 17-June 23**

<b>Monday</b>	Psalm 42 (Hope in God Our Help)
<b>Tuesday</b>	1 John 5:1-13 (Whoever Has the Son Has Life)
<b>Wednesday</b>	1 John 5:14-21 (Boldness in Christ for Prayer)
<b>Thursday</b>	Psalm 23 (The Lord Is My Shepherd)
<b>Friday</b>	Isaiah 12 (Trust in God Our Salvation)
<b>Saturday</b>	Hebrews 6:1-8 (Maturing in Christ)
<b>Sunday</b>	Hebrews 6:9-20 (Trust God's Promises)

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# DECALOGUE

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**Superintendent**—And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not make unto thyself any graven image, nor the likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord hath made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested on the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

My soul be on thy guard;  
Ten thousand foes arise:  
And hosts of sins are pressing hard  
To draw thee from the skies.

**Superintendent**—Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not kill.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not commit adultery.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not steal.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep this law.

**Superintendent**—Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

**School**—Lord, have mercy upon us, and write these laws upon our hearts.

Nearer, my God, to thee,  
Nearer to thee!  
E'en though it be a cross  
That raiseth me;  
Still all my song shall be,  
Nearer, my God, to thee!  
Nearer to thee!

**Superintendent**—Hear what Christ, our Savior, saith: thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great Commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two Commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

**All**—Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.





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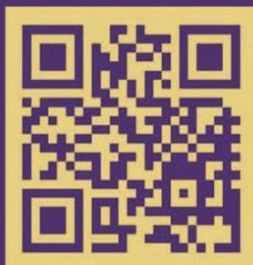
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