The E-Newsletter of First Presbyterian Church of Winona, Mississippi

First Press

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Aug. 25, 10 a.m.
The Lord's Supper will be observed.

Sept. 4, 5 p.m.
Prayer meeting and Bible Study resumes at FPCW in the Pastor's Study.

Sept 8, 4 p.m.
An informal Sunday Night Study at the Pastor's home. We will be discussing the book *In Christ Alone* by Sinclair Ferguson.

Sept. 21, 5 p.m.
Please join us for a church picnic at the Manse. We will also celebrate Mrs. Barnett's birthday.

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From the Pastor's Pen. . .

I just want to say what a blessing this past Lord's Day was to me and my family.

Thank you to all of you who said such nice things about me to my family. I believe my family has suspected/feared for quite some time that I'm crazy, and when you all said such complimentary things to them about me, I believe it helped to assuage their fears!

The church building looked so beautiful. The ladies (and the deacons too) did a superb job readying our facilities to host such a large crowd for the installation. We are grateful all the work that they did to make our facility so welcoming and inviting.

Thanks also to Kay Weaver and Jerry Ellis for that rousing prelude. We all certainly appreciated their many hours of practice!

We had such a moving service Sunday night. I thought the preaching was excellent; it was a powerful presentation of the gospel and of our mission as a church here at the Crossroads.

I am grateful to Bebo Elkin for his charge to you to pray for us; I certainly need it. After all, as Bebo said, your pastor is *not* the Apostle Paul!

Bill May's charge to the minister was very convicting about the life to which your pastor is especially called. I pray that the elders will hold me accountable to the standard set in God's word for His people, which Bill summarized for us Sunday night.

On Monday your Session of Elders met in its stated meeting. Your elders approved the WIC Circle Study for the Fall. Betty Brown will be leading the study which will focus on the Psalms of Ascent using a book by Derek Thomas, *A Voyage of Discovery*.

In the book, Thomas explores various aspects of Christian experience. Join me in praying for our ladies as they grow in grace together this Fall.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

We have considered the teaching of the Scripture last week, particularly that its primary focus is on God. Next, the WSC summarizes the Bible's teaching about God:

Q4. What is God?

A. God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.

This question and answer gives us a list of several "attributes" of God. Each one of these attributes is worthy of our contemplation.

Consider the first, that God is "a Spirit." Christ explains that because God is spirit, those who would worship Him must do so "in Spirit and in Truth" (John 4). That informs the way that we come to God. We do not come to Him through pomp, ceremony, and rites.

Rather, we come to God through the Word read and preached, by prayer, and by singing.

The more you contemplate and consider each of the attributes of God, the more you see just how different God is from us.

In our day, as in every age, people tend to remake God in their own image. People conceive of God simply as an "all-loving, all-forgiving" deity who exists to serve mankind.

The Scripture presents a starkly different view of God as - for example - also *holy*, *just*, and *good*. This means that we who would serve Him must emulate and testify to God's holiness, justice, and goodness.

In our day, we as God's people must take all the more care to understand what God is like and who God is by studying His revealed Word about Himself. It is so easy to succumb to the world's false portrayals of God, rather than worshiping our sovereign Creator and Saviour.

Worship Feelings

In John 4, Jesus says "**we worship what we know**." This is an instructive phrase, and helpful to note that Christ did not say, "*we worship what we feel*" or "*we worship because we feel like worshiping.*" Christ states that **we worship because of the *knowledge* that we have, not because of our feelings**, and often in spite of them.

If you are like me, so often on a Sunday morning do not "feel" like worshiping at all. You've had a spat with your spouse, the dog has made a mess, your business or your job is at risk, your house is dirty, your children are ill, your body aches, and so on.

If you are like the typical Christian, the circumstances of your life are not the *reason* that you come to worship on the Lord's Day.

Life is hard; that is why we sing hymns in worship that confess *truths* about God rather than about our *feelings*. Hymns that tell us about God motivate us to worship all the more.

When we sing great hymns of faith such as *A Mighty Fortress is our God*, we are reminding ourselves and each other about the *truths* of God, and that is why we worship: "Did we in our own strength confide / Our striving would be losing / Were not the right Man on our Side...From age to age the same / and He must win the battle."

In worship, we do not celebrate what we *feel* at that moment or through the week, we celebrate what we *know* that God is and what we *know* He has done for us.

When we sing hymns about the work of Christ on our behalf, the greatness of God who made us, and the work of the Spirit in our hearts, we are telling ourselves and one another *why* our God is worthy of worship and that *knowledge* will profoundly affect - even transcend and shape - our *feelings*.

Next Lord's Day (Aug. 25), we will celebrate the Lord's Supper. The feast, the visible Word, that Christ gave the church so that we may *know* of His love for us and pledge to bring us securely into our eternal rest.

Sunday's Sermon Snapshot

This past Lord's Day we looked together at Romans 3:21-26.

That passage is one of the most important paragraphs in the whole Scripture because it sums up the gospel for us: **Because of our sin, God the Father put forward His Son for those who trust in Him by faith to take on Himself the wrath that they justly deserve from God the righteous judge.**

That is a summary of our message as a church. If we wish to grow *as a church* and *as people of God*, we must faithfully proclaim, study, and meditate on that fundamental, foundational, and indispensible truth.

Many churches in our day no longer preach that message. For them, religion is about simply doing good deeds, service, social action, unity, fellowship, and good, clean living. Sometimes those "churches" even grow numerically because people are attracted to that kind of message.

As we were driving up to Memphis, we passed a big-honkin' church building on the side of the highway. My father looked to me and somberly said, "Ryan, someday you could have a church like that...all you'd have to do is tell everyone that everything is just fine!"

My dad was exactly right; the fastest way to gain fame and a following is to flatter and tell people that they are just fine. The Christian gospel is precisely the opposite. As a church, our witness to the area must be drawn from Christ's command to teach His

words and tell of His actions on behalf of mankind.

This passage in Romans reminds us that *we are to proclaim both the wrath of God against sinners* <u>*as well as*</u> *the mercy and grace of God toward those who repent and by faith call upon the Name of Christ to be saved*.

Recently, a large mainline denomination excluded a hymn from its hymnal because of the phrase, "Till on that cross as Jesus died / The wrath of God was satisfied." Their hymnal committee explained that they did not want to "perpetuate...the view that the cross is primarily about God's need to assuage God's anger."

But you see, our passage teaches us that **the cross was *exactly* about God saving us from His righteous wrath because of our sin**.

The message of the cross, the message of Christ, and the message we proclaim is foolishness to the world around us and foolishness to "churches" that want you to believe that everything is just fine and people are basically good.

When he wrote those words, **Paul was not writing to basically good people, but to sinners who stood condemned by God unless God did something to save them.** Do you believe this?

Such a message will not necessarily make our congregation "burst at the seams," but it will grow us in grace, and as the Spirit moves, God may be pleased to bring people into His church through hearing His word.