



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

# FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, NOV. 15, 2013

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Nov. 17, 10 a.m.**

The **Lord's Supper** will be observed in morning worship and

**Christmas Shoe Boxes** are due.

**Nov. 17, 6 p.m.**

Community Thanksgiving Service at **Haven UMC**; Ryan is preaching.

**Nov. 30, 4:00 p.m.**

Come decorate the church building for the holidays and/or join us for a potluck (burgers provided) at **5:30 p.m.** in the Fellowship Hall.



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## From the Pastor's Pen...

At our stated quarterly meeting on Monday, one of the things that the Session decided was to resume our practice of observing the Lord's Supper with real wine instead of juice.

What we would call "grape juice," of course, did not even exist until the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. By using real wine with the Lord's Table we are attempting to be more faithful to our Lord's institution of the Supper as well as strengthen the link between the Passover and the Lord's Supper as corresponding sacraments of the Old and New Covenants.

In fact, Christ instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper with bread and wine, so to change one of the elements in the Lord's Supper is to change what the Lord has instituted.

For the first 1,800 years of her history, the church universally and without question used wine with the Lord's Supper, in accordance with Christ's institution. As late as 1858 even

the *Southern Baptist Abstract of Principles* declared that the Lord's Supper is to be administered with "the elements of bread and wine." The practice of substituting grape juice for the wine emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

In 1890, Presbyterian minister and Princeton Seminary professor A. A. Hodge addressed the issue by reminding us that it is a precarious position for the Christian to argue against wine in the Sacrament on "moral grounds." For to do so is to portray oneself as "more moral than the Son of God."

Our observance of the Lord's Supper will never be perfect or sinless until we feast in the New Heavens and the New Earth with Christ. However, by returning to the ancient practice we are with joy endeavoring to be more faithful to the Lord's commands.

I look forward to communing at Christ's Table with you this Lord's Day.

## Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

In our meditation last week we looked at the particular sin that Adam committed that brought the downfall of mankind. This week the catechism considers particularly and starkly the results of that sinful behavior:

Q17. *Into what estate did the fall bring mankind?*

**A. The fall brought mankind into an estate of sin and misery.**

The sinful and miserable condition of mankind is readily apparent for anyone with eyes to see it. You don't have to look at a place like Detroit or New Orleans to see the wretchedness of mankind, you can spot it in yourself.

Beginning in the Enlightenment and culminating around 1910, mankind started to think that things were always getting better and that mankind is capable of continued improvement.

Such philosophies were shattered by the bloodshed of WWI and utterly demolished by

the devastation wrought by WWII. **Our race is always and continually devising new ways to rebel against God and compound our own misery.** Just consider the Kermit Gosnell trial of earlier this year in Philadelphia.

Prior to sin there was no sickness or malice or aches or pain in the human race, but Adam's sin brought all of that into our common experience. What an inheritance from our first father!

The answer to our sin and misery, as we briefly considered last week, is to come by faith into Christ. Renouncing obedience and allegiance to the ways of Adam and to embrace Christ as He is offered in the gospel.

Christ committed no sin, yet He endured life on this world riddled with sin and endured the misery brought on by Adam's rebellion as he suffered in our place. Christ stands as the answer to human need and offers peace with God for all who are in covenant with Him.

# “We Worship What We Know”

In one of the most profound episodes in John’s Gospel, Jesus visits the Samaritan town of Sychar (John 4).

We looked at this passage on Sunday night and considered what it teaches us about *revival* and how God’s works in bringing people to Himself. Today, I want to consider what this passage teaches us about *worship*.

Jesus meets a woman of low moral character at the well there in Sychar. Our Lord is engaging with her, trying to get her to acknowledge her sin and need of the salvation that He offers. Along the way, she tries to distract Him with all sorts of theological questions and issues. It’s always easier to talk about theology than your own sin!

The Samaritans were a group of people who acknowledged the Lord, but they accepted only the first five books of the Bible as their scripture. As a result, they did not know God in the fullness that He reveals Himself in the rest of the Old Testament.

Because they rejected most of the Jewish Bible, they rejected the place where God had chosen to be worshiped by His people (Mount Zion in Jerusalem).

The Lord Jesus Christ sums up their condition at 4:22 saying, “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know.” The Samaritans had rejected a portion of

the Scripture and thus their knowledge of God was significantly stunted.

Christ said to the woman - and to us - that God is seeking worshipers who will serve Him “in Spirit and in Truth.” The “Samaritan Problem” is the same issue in so many churches in our day: they do not *know* the God whom they propose to worship and thus they cannot worship Him in *Truth*.

Jesus tells us that God wants worshipers who both *know* Him as well as serve Him *spiritually*. How can you know the God that you worship unless you make an effort to know His word. When we don’t make time for devoted and regular study of God’s word, we’re no better than the Samaritans who reject the majority of it.

It’s not enough simply to acknowledge the authority and the inspiration of the Holy Scripture, you have to know it, study it, treasure it in your heart.

Many today want to find a god of their own making who serves their needs for “warm feelings” and introspective “spirituality.” Especially at this time of year we see this as retailers try to connect real spiritual events with sales and impulse buying. Remember that *true religion* is fed by the truth of God’s word rather than impulse or sentiment.

## Sermon Snapshot: “What is Evangelism?”

One of the truths that we saw in our study of the first five verses in 1 Corinthians 2 was Paul’s commitment to evangelism. Paul understands “evangelism” to be proclaiming, the gospel of the salvation of God in Christ.

We must understand evangelism the same way if we want to be Apostolic in character and faithful to the commission that Christ gave to His church prior to His ascension. The wider Christian community today often takes a broader view of “evangelism” to include things like soup kitchens, medical clinics, and other acts of service. Those things may lead to opportunities for sharing the gospel, but are not evangelism, or at least evangelism as the Apostle Paul understood it and as Christ commanded it.

At this point someone usually objects, “But didn’t Francis of Assisi say, ‘preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words?’” Well, first there’s actually no evidence that Francis actually said that. Second, even if he did say that whose word is more important that of Francis or the Apostle Paul? Third, such a statement makes as much sense as someone saying, “feed the poor at all times, and if necessary use food.”

**The gospel is by definition something that can be conveyed only with words** (not with pictures, statues, or drama). In fact, in Romans 10, the Apostle Paul points out that faith only comes by *hearing*.

But the gospel can be *contradicted* by your actions (or inactions). So while what we do is not the gospel, what we do or don’t do can proclaim to everyone whether we

comprehend the gospel or not.

Christ tells His disciples in His word that our good works will glorify our Father who is in Heaven. Moreover, Christ’s brother the Apostle James reminds us that pure religion ***always*** results in good works that include visiting “orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.”

The church is to proclaim the good news of salvation of Jesus Christ: to evangelize, but Christians in response to God’s grace do good works. James summarizes those good works as caring for the poor and turning from sin.

The 19th Century Southern Presbyterian James Henley Thornwell said it well when he declared that the mission of the church is to ***“bring men to the Cross, to reconcile them to God through the blood of the Lamb, to imbue them with the Spirit of the Divine Master, and then send them forth to perform their social duties, to manage society, and to perform the functions that pertain to their social and civil relations.”***

When churches lose sight of that mission, they begin to die; just look at mainline Protestantism in this country. Those denominations have, for the most part, ceased to be about proclaiming salvation from sin and more focused on social causes and moral reform. But the result is that many of them, if trends continue, will cease to exist in a few decades. Preaching the gospel is the only thing the Church is good at, and when she doesn’t do that, she dies. Let us be warned and be faithful to Christ’s commission.