



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

# FIRST PRESS

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 19

FRIDAY, DEC. 6, 2013

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Dec. 10, 7 p.m.**

FPC hosts the reception following the Community Service of Lessons and Carols.

**Dec. 22, 4:00 p.m.**

Annual Church Program followed by a light reception sponsored by the church ladies.

### Please Note:

Wednesday Night Study will not meet beginning Dec. 18 until Jan. 8, 2014.



[www.facebook.com/FPCWinona](http://www.facebook.com/FPCWinona)

## From the Pastor's Pen...

It is hard to believe it is already December and we are in the midst of the Holiday Season. As I write, I hurry so as not to be trapped at the office by the Christmas Parade.

This is time of year it is customary for many of us to gather with family and friends and those gatherings can be both enjoyable and exceedingly stressful.

As Christians, we have been adopted into God's family because Christ became our elder brother. The reunions we have with our families in this life are but a poor foretaste of the great reunion that God's people shall have in heaven when He brings the full number of His children home.

As we consider the promises of the gospel for those who love God and the inheritance that awaits those for whom Christ died, it is often sorrowful to consider family members who have rejected Jesus Christ as He is offered in the gospel.

This holiday season provides additional opportunities to talk about the things of God with those dear to us.

As we've been seeing in Corinthians, it's impossible for anyone to comprehend the gospel or convey the gospel except that the Holy Spirit attends the message.

As you go to the holiday gatherings you might prepare by being faithfully in prayer for God to bless your words. But prayer isn't enough; you have to know your Bible and the promises of God's word so as to give a reason for the hope that is within you.

Even though there is a lot of clichéd and cultural use of God's Word in this season, it is still powerful. Being familiar with the wider context and fullness of the promise of the scriptures may enable you to be of great use to the King and eternal benefit to your loved ones. Don't give up hope in God's mercy.

## Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

The WSC devotes a considerable amount of space to examining the results of sin and mankind's rebellion against God. The Westminster Divines wanted to make sure that we had a clear foundation of just how great of a Saviour is needed for mankind.

This week we look at the misery that sin has brought upon our race.

*Q19. What is the misery of that estate whereinto man fell?*

**A. All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.**

To live in this world apart from the Lord Jesus Christ is the most miserable condition because outside of Christ there is no shield from God's wrath.

The decision of our first parents to eat from the forbidden tree was an act of heinous re-

bellion against the creator and made all subsequent generations of mankind subject to misery. Not only the misery of death and being cut off from the life of God, but life on this earth is filled with sorrow and suffering as a result of sin.

Because of Adam's sin, mankind is also due God's wrath. This wrath is seen in small doses in the present age, but will be seen chiefly when Christ comes to judge the world.

Everyone who dies in sin, everyone who dies without saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ will be consigned to hell for all eternity. Hell is not simply having to endure holiday traffic or a bad day at work or an afternoon of clothes shopping on Black Friday. . .

Hell is an "unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12) where God punishes the unrighteous for their sins. Jesus Christ is the only way of escape. It is only Jesus Christ who delivers His people from the wrath to come (1 Thes. 1:10).

# The “War” on Christmas

In recent years there has been much fuss over the alleged “War on Christmas” by the ACLU and the “Leftwingers.” A few years ago there was quite a stir when it was alleged that Wal-Mart forbade its employees from wishing customers a “merry Christmas.”

Culture warrior commentators such as Bill O'Reilly make lots of money and beef up their ratings when they decry the petty casualties of the “War on Christmas.” In fact, on one website you can find a triage categorizing retailers based on their use of the word “Christmas” and calls for boycotts of retailers that do not utilize the expression “Christmas” enough to suit the organization.

The truth is that the observance of Christmas as a holiday in the English-speaking world, and particularly America, is a relatively late tradition. In the early days of the colonies and the Republic, it was uncommon for schools and businesses to be open as normal on Dec. 25.

In fact, Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, and Connecticut colonies banned the observance of Christmas in the 17th Century (and those are the days the “culture warriors” appeal to as a foundation for a “Christian nation”). The original New England colonists would find it quite odd and sacrilegious to celebrate Christmas. For most of

America's history, Dec. 25th was marked with little fanfare at all.

The observance of Christmas in England and America was popularized by an 1841 illustration of Victoria and Albert celebrating the holiday around a Christmas tree first. But Christmas was not declared a Federal Holiday until 1870.



Much of the traditions surrounding Dec. 25 have little actually to do with the Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity at all. In fact, they often distract or dilute the meaning of God taking on our flesh in order to redeem mankind.

The true “War on Christmas” has nothing to do with whether the government schools are allowed to have “Christmas parties” or retailers have “Christmas Sales.” The true War on Christmas has been Satan trying to prevent God from fulfilling His promise in Gen. 3:15 to send an offspring, a seed from the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

The real “War on Christmas” is Satan's attempts to wipe out the line of promise through which the redeemer of God's people would be born. We are studying those promises in Sunday school this month, and I hope you will join us at 9:00 a.m.

## Sermon Snapshot: “Christian Values”

As we journey through the book of I Corinthians together, we'll see that one of the continual subjects that the Apostle Paul addresses is the level of influence that worldly values have on the Corinthians.

He's been addressing one of the results of that worldliness already in their factions and rivalries for quite some time now and will address more as we move forward.

One of the perennial sources of trouble for the church is the fact that God's people live within a culture; they always do. No matter how hard people try, it is impossible for the church to be extracted from the culture in which God has placed her as a witness.

**By its very nature, the culture that surrounds the church, be it in Detroit, Mich. or Madison, Miss. or here in Winona, is dying.** The church stands as a witness of salvation and light to the thousands that are perishing following after the things of this world. The church offers the culture true and everlasting life.

The church is to influence the culture with the gospel of salvation in Christ, but influence can be a two-way street. The problem is that often Christians are not careful to consider just how much the culture is affecting them and influencing them.

You see the result of that in church at Corinth; those

Christians had embraced the gospel, but they continued to be dominated by the norms and practices of Corinthian society.

The Church of God is to be remarkably different from the world. ***Those who have the Spirit of God should not think like the world, but should think like Christ, they should have their minds, values, and presuppositions in line with what God says in his Word.***

As Paul has been saying for some time, and especially in I Cor. 2:6-16, God transforms His people not so that they look like a “Christian version” of the world's values, but to reject the world's values and live in a way that pleases God. God's people look foreign to the world.

The church in America is struggling now because so many churches look so much like the culture. I remember growing up there was a radio station that billed itself as the “Christian version” of pop-radio saying things such as, “if you like Jennifer Lopez, then you'll love the music of [...this ‘Christian’ knockoff of an artist].”

As God's people, as citizens in the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, we are called to not emulate or mimic what the world does. Biblical Christianity will never be as flashy or as hip as the world, but it will always convey the truth and it is the truth that sets you free (John 8).