



FIRST PRESS

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 20

FRIDAY, DEC. 13, 2013

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Dec. 22, 4:00 p.m.

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

Please Note:

This week will be the last Sunday Night Study of the year at 4:00 p.m.

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



www.facebook.com/FPCWinona

From the Pastor's Pen...

This past year we had a very good time together on Wednesday nights at Bible study and Prayer meeting. We began with a long series on the Apostles' Creed in which we looked at just what the words of the creed are saying.

Over the past couple of weeks, we've been studying some hymns of Christ and considering the richness of the poetry that we sing every year, especially in December.

Next year, God willing, when we resume our Wednesday night studies, I'd like to lead us through a study in what is sometimes referred to as "Covenant Theology" or "Federal Theology."

Don't let those fancy names fool you, we're simply going to look at the concept and meaning of the covenants that God makes with His people in the Bible.

God makes several covenants in the history of redemption and - in many ways - the Bible itself is organized around those covenants.

God always relates to His people through Covenants, and as you read through the Bible, you can see especially how central covenants were to what God has been doing. As you understand the covenants better, you will understand the Bible better.

By studying the covenants of the Scripture together, one of the things I hope that we all see is the unified purpose of God in the salvation and redemption of humanity.

I do hope you will join us on Wednesday nights in this coming year. I think you will find our study both enlightening and more importantly, helpful to your own personal study of God's word.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

Last week we considered the helpless condition of mankind following the Fall. By rebelling against God and disobeying His commands, humanity brought death and God's wrath upon themselves.

This week we consider the beginning of God's redemptive plan and activity.

Q. 20. Did God leave all mankind to perish in the estate of sin and misery?

A. God, having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.

Here summarized is a particularly important truth to remember: God's redemptive activity actually began *before* mankind even sinned. Before our first parents sinned and rose up against God, God had already planned to deliver His beloved creatures from sin.

Salvation is not dependant on man's ability to restore his relationship with God, but rather upon God's "mere good pleasure." Indeed, salvation and redemption took place simply because it pleased God to do so. That is one of the uniquely beautiful truths of the gospel; God brings joy and pleasure to Himself by saving sinners by grace through faith.

The means of this salvation is, as the Catechism reminds is, through a redeemer. God's plan of salvation involved satisfying His justice for sin through that redeemer. It is not simply that God forgives, but His forgiveness comes because of the transaction made on our behalf by the redeemer.

Also, do not overlook that those who are saved are particularly those chosen by God. Salvation does not come to those who are especially good, intelligent, or skilled in math, but to those whom - on the basis of nothing within them - God chose to save.

Nine Lessons and Carols

For our annual program this year we will be adapting the *Festival of Nine Lessons and Carols* for our own edification and praise of God. The order was designed by English Bishop Edward W. Benson and first performed in 1880. The most famous version is the one performed each year at King's College in Cambridge. The service has been performed every year there since 1918.

Since the service comes to us from the Anglican tradition, we will of course have to remove certain elements that our Presbyterian forebears rejected centuries ago as "will-worship" and unsuitable for the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Festival is formatted around nine Scripture readings that foretell, retell, and explain the coming of the Messiah to mankind. The readings begin in Genesis 3 with the Fall of mankind and end in John 1, which harkens back to eternity as John helps us to marvel at the God-Man dwelling among us.

The program is very well constructed as it hits many of the "highpoints" of Old Testament prophecy. Additionally, the program does a fine job of emphasizing that Christ's birth was long-expected and came in keeping with the plan that God laid down before the

foundation of the earth and slowly revealed through His prophets over thousands of years.

Many of the hymns of the incarnation that we sing throughout the year, and especially during the month of December, do a very able job of reminding us to look for Christ and the promise of His mission in the Old Testament, but it's rare that we can look at so many of them in such quick succession.

In between the readings from the Scripture, we will have the opportunity to sing to God and one another some of our favorite hymns.

As we consider the incarnation of Christ in song, it's remarkable how many of the hymns we sing date back centuries and even millennia. This week and last week we were looking at some of those hymns on Wednesday nights. It certainly gives us some perspective when we're able to sing a hymn that has been sung since the 400s such as "Let all Mortal Flesh Keep Silence" or the 1100s like "O Come, O Come Emmanuel."

We'll get to sing together on Sunday night some of the ancient hymns of Christ as well as some more modern ones.

After the church program, we'll get to enjoy some fellowship as the ladies have offered to prepare yet another sumptuous reception.

Sermon Snapshot: "The Fundamental Problem"

This past Lord's Day as we considered 1 Cor. 2:14-3:4 we examined Paul's first criticism against the church at Corinth. It is a very serious indictment, particularly coming from the Apostle Paul. Paul tells the Christians there that their problem is that they are not spiritual people.

Can you imagine someone writing to us here at First Presbyterian Church and saying that we are not spiritual people, but rather fleshly, worldly, and infantile?! And that is exactly what the Apostle does in 1 Cor. 3.

Was Paul wrong to so? Was Paul simply being "mean" and "judgmental" when he wrote that? We certainly would not - and the Corinthians for sure did not - appreciate someone saying that to us. So did Paul have any right to write such a thing to the church there?

Of course he did! For one thing, it was true; they were more characterized by the flesh and the world than by the Spirit of Christ. Additionally, Paul is eminently qualified to make such a charge as an apostle who speaks and writes under the inspiration of the Spirit.

Moreover, remember the idea that we are "never to judge" is a pagan idea. The pagans believe you can live as you want no matter what. The Bible, however, teaches us that those whom God saves through the death of His son, He conforms to the image of His Son. The Bible

says that God's people must not be *conformed* to the pattern of this world but *transformed by the renewing of the mind* (Rom 12). We look for fruit in God's people.

The problem in Corinth was that the church looked just like the world around them. There was no marked distinction between the church and the city. Paul is very concerned that their life as a congregation shows little evidence of the Spirit's Work. And evidence of the Spirit's work is necessary in the life of a Christian.

Paul writes that because the Corinthians have the Spirit of God and are not "merely human," they should reject - and are *enabled* to reject - the worldly attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors that they have embraced.

For the most part, Paul does not doubt that these people in the Church at Corinth are truly Christians, but he also does not give them the option of remaining as they are (infantile and worldly). That is always the case; if you are a Christian, you will endeavor daily to repent of sin and live unto righteousness, and Paul is calling the Corinthian Christians to make great efforts in that area.

But he warns them that persisting in this worldliness may prove that they indeed never were Christians at all. That's why he's so earnest in his warning, because he wants his readers to realize their eternal peril.