



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, DEC. 20, 2013

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Dec. 22, 4:00 p.m.

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

Please Note:

Sunday Night Study will not meet until Jan. 12, 2014.

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



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From the Pastor's Pen...

This will be the last edition of the *First Press* for the year. And what a year it has been! Thank you for the privilege of being your pastor and serving alongside your ruling elders to equip the saints for ministry.

You have all made Ann and me feel so welcome and right at home here in Winona.

We want to thank all of you for the many gifts and cards that you have sent us this month. Your cards and gifts have been a great encouragement to us.

As we close the year, let us pray that the Lord will do a great work of revival in our midst at First Presbyterian Church in 2014. It is not through our efforts that the church is built or revived; only God by His Spirit can accomplish that. There is much need for the gospel and Christian witness here in Montgomery and Carroll Counties.

Let's pray as we go into the next year that each of us would see opportunities to invite friends and neighbors to church.

Pray that you will be bolder at speaking the truth of the need for salvation. Now, I'm not saying that you should be *needlessly offensive* in the way that you share the truth about Jesus Christ (*a la* Phil Robertson), but to share the truth of salvation from God's wrath with love, tact, and wisdom.

The gospel is *always* offensive, the speaking and believing the truth about God is going to get you in enough trouble if you proclaim or share it plainly. Remember that the Good News of Jesus Christ includes both the message of universal condemnation and wrath *as well as* the proclamation of free salvation in Christ. People must know what they're being saved *from*, and that's the offensive part.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

Fittingly as we end the year we consider the message of salvation in Jesus Christ. Last week we considered general fact that God had out mercifully decided to save by sending a redeemer. Now the Catechism introduces us to that redeemer:

21. Who is the Redeemer of God's elect?

A. The only Redeemer of God's elect is the Lord Jesus Christ, who, being the eternal Son of God, became man, and so was, and continueth to be, God and man in two distinct natures, and one person, forever.

This is a very dense catechism question, isn't it? Let's consider just a few items here.

1. **Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation.** That shouldn't surprise us, but given today's "cultural orthodoxy" it is worthy of reminding ourselves. To say that there is another way of salvation is to call Christ's death of anguish on the cross unnecessary.

2. **There was no time when Jesus was not.** Our Saviour and Redeemer was with God at the beginning of Creation and through all of history. That's important to remember because it helps us to understand that there is nothing "unchristlike" in God - whether it be providing bread in the wilderness or the command to wipe out the nations of Canaan in judgment.

3. **There is a man at the right hand of God.** When Christ ascended into heaven, He did not shed His human body. He has taken on our nature for eternity. This is a more important truth than you might think because it emphasizes to us that there is nothing wrong with matter or created things. When we die and are resurrected at the Last Day, we too shall have glorious bodies, but bodies nonetheless. This means that we should treat our bodies with honor not as a *coffin* or *cas-ket* from which our souls must be liberated.

The Office of Deacon

In the last stated Session meeting, the elders adopted a plan for electing the Diaconate in the coming year. Here is a brief outline of the process:

1. Deacon nominations will be open in the month of January. A nominee must accept the nomination before he can be entered as a candidate.

2. Any newly nominated man who has not been ordained as an officer at FPC Winona previously must go through officer training during the month of February. In February, the Session will also examine the nominees and approve the final ballot for Deacons.

3. We will hold elections for deacons in March and then install the diaconate and ordain any newly called deacons as well.

The Office of Deacon is a permanent church office instituted under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Apostles in Acts 6. As such, it is a very solemn thing for us as a congregation to go about the task of electing our diaconate. Deacons, along with elders, are called by Christ and ordained to a spiritual task.

To help us prepare for the task of calling and electing our diaconate, I'll be preaching on some of the relevant texts in the weeks to come. For now, here are some excerpts from the *Book of Church Order* that summarize the Scripture's teaching on the office of Deacon:

9-1 ***"The office of deacon is set forth in the Scriptures as ordinary and perpetual in the Church. The office is one of sympathy and service, after the example of the Lord Jesus; it expresses also the communion of saints, especially in their helping one another in time of need."***

It is important to remember that just as Christ is the Chief Shepherd or elder, Christ is also the Deacon in whose example all other deacons follow.

9-2 ***"It is the duty of the deacons to minister to those who are in need, to the sick, to the friendless, and to any who may be in distress. It is their duty also to develop the grace of liberality in the members of the church. . ."***

Christ has entrusted to the Deacons the care for the physical needs of the church. The Church is not only to care for the spiritual needs of Christ's people, but see to their physical needs as well.

9-3 ***"To the office of deacon, which is spiritual in nature, shall be chosen men of spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly spirit, warm sympathies, and sound judgment."***

It's important to remember that Deacons must be known for their spirituality and piety because their office is fundamentally spiritual, just like that of the elders.

Sermon Snapshot: "God's Ownership of the Church"

Last week in I Cor. 3:5-15, we considered two of Paul's illustrations emphasizing God's sole ownership of the church.

Christ, after all, purchased the church with His own blood and it is called the "Church of Jesus Christ," but it's easy for us to forget who owns it. We can get so caught up and enthusiastic about our own ideas, preferences, projects, initiatives, and programs that God and His glory gets shoved to the background.

The Corinthians had made "church" all about them. They - many of them - were still trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation and clinging to the promises of the gospel, but that had not been what was of "first importance" to them.

For them, church was more about prestige and associations than it was about showing devotion, love, and worship for the God who had saved them. And that as a very perilous place to be.

The Church at Corinth (which was not one congregation, but many; it was a presbytery) was unspiritual and largely immature (as we saw a couple weeks ago). They had not even attempted to come to terms with the implications of their membership in the church and what Christ had done for His church. As a result of this, they

were easily whisked away by unchristian ideas.

We live with the benefit of almost two millennia of church history behind us, so often the unchristian ideas that influence and endanger our piety are far more subtle than those that ensnared our Corinthian forebears.

Because of the subtleties of sin and Satan, we must always be on the lookout for ways that God's ownership in His Church is challenged.

One way that this happens is whenever we do something in worship that is not biblical. God tells us exactly what He wants in worship: prayer, preaching, praising, communing with the Lord and His people, giving, confessing our faith, and baptizing. Beyond that, we are on very shaky ground.

Everything that happens in worship must serve and support those elements. If something is not helpful in enriching our doing of those things, then it is probably sinful to have in worship. For (an absurd) example, consider what it would mean if we were to fire Jerry the organist and replace him with Angus the bagpiper.

Bagpipes, while lovely, are not helpful for singing and praising God who bought us. Thus, it would be sinful to have them in our worship, because they don't promote what God commands in His worship.