



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, FEB. 14, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Feb. 23, 10 a.m.

The Lord's Supper will be observed.

Mar. 2, 11:00 a.m.

Congregational Meeting

Mar 23, 10 a.m.

Installation and Ordination of the Diaconate. Reception to follow.

From the Pastor's Pen...

At FPC we are committed first and foremost to God's word. God's word is our primary focus in worship, in teaching, and in our personal growth. We believe that God's word is the *only* instrument that can change lives and answer our fundamental questions.

In the last century, many religious institutions have lost faith in God's word both its authority and its inspired character. When people begin to doubt the power of God's Word, the character and work of their religious institutions changes profoundly.

Our singular mission at First Presbyterian Church is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, to call sinners to repentance and faith in Christ through the hearing of God's Word.

By contrast, religious institutions that no longer believe in the inspiration and authority of Scripture tend to focus more on social

concerns. In the early 20th Century this became known as the *Social Gospel*.

Religious institutions that embraced the Social Gospel became more concerned with social issues such as correcting oppression and improving society through civil action and service rather than emphasizing the power of God's Word to save sinners.

The church *must* remain true to her mission of proclaiming salvation and redemption and forgiveness in Christ, because if the church does not do it, no one will. It is a lot easier and yields more tangible success to focus simply on feeding the poor and advocating for political causes than to call dead sinners to life in Christ. Yet the church is the only institution that Christ has entrusted with the proclamation of God's plan of redemption and mercy to the world.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

For the last few weeks we've been considering the offices of Christ as our redeemer. The WSC describes Christ's three offices (Prophet, Priest, and King). Earlier, the WSC noted that Christ executes these offices in both his *estates* of humiliation and exaltation. This week and next we'll look at what that means:

Q27. *Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?*

A. Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.

In order to accomplish our redemption, the Lord Jesus Christ had to become one of us. He had to pay the debt that mankind owed, so he had to become a man. For God to become man represents a great humilia-

tion. He had to give up all the glory and honor that He knew in heaven.

Christ's humiliation did not begin when the mob arrived to arrest him, it began with His conception and birth. Can you comprehend, the Lord of Glory by whom all things were made as a helpless infant with diaper rash?

Yet that is what was required because of our sin. Christ had to become fully human; he did not simply take on the *appearance* of a human, he had to become human.

His humanity was such that he was tempted to sin, though He always overcame temptation so that He could be the *perfect* and *final* sacrifice that God's justice required for our sin.

The humiliation and humility of Christ display so clearly the depth of Christ's love for us. To purchase His people, Christ did not simply pay gold or silver, but labored in and endured such humiliation for us.



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Proclaiming *Repentance* and Faith

Recently, I came across a website run by a group of Atheists. On the site there was a page decrying a recent Twitter post by Mark Driscoll in which he asserted that all those who are not Christians will go to hell.

Atheists find great offense in such statements. The author of the page attempted to show the absurdity of what Driscoll said in two primary ways. First, the injustice of condemning someone to hell for 'not being a Christian.' Second, the injustice that someone - no matter 'how much good you may accomplish' in this life - is condemned simply for not being a Christian.

Of course what Driscoll stated was true, but not very well or winsomely stated. The arguments arrayed against Driscoll have missed the "point" of Christianity and the gospel because (among other reasons), Driscoll did not adequately convey the gospel on Twitter.

Christians need to know and understand why non-Christians go to hell. Anyone who does not have faith in Jesus Christ is condemned for his or her own sin, not simply because he or she is "not one of us."

The modern evangelical church has been proactive about calling sinners to have faith in or to believe in Jesus Christ. But the modern church has been very apathetic about calling people to *repentance*. Repentance is a vital part of saving faith.

Repentance is a grief over and a turning from sin because of God's mercy and to strive after new obedience to God. That is the hard stuff of the Christian life; it's easy to "walk the aisle" or be baptized, but those things

do not necessarily imply that a person has truly repented of his or her sin and is seeking to live by faith.

The reason a person who is not a Christian goes to hell is indeed because of his or her own sin. It's not simply that "our belief" (i.e. Christianity) is superior to all others (which it is), but that Christ offers the only way to escape God's just punishment for sin.

In spite of all his talk and feigned interest in "justice," the modern man - particularly the atheist - believes that he can do enough "good" to outweigh all the "bad" that he has done. But of course, no matter how good you are or what scientific advances you achieve, it is never enough to put you in a right standing before God.

God is completely holy and cannot tolerate any sin before Him. He demands perfect obedience and righteousness from all His creatures. Any sin is an act of rebellion against God's Law and He takes offense; God demands and executes perfect justice.

This is why God in the gospel not only calls mankind to *faith* but also to *repentance*. Being a Christian is not simply about having faith in Christ, but also turning from sin and embracing the mercy that God offers to sinners. Christ is the only shield and hiding place from the wrath of God which even the best of us deserve.

The real and ultimate issue is whether you come before God in your own goodness, merit, and righteousness or will you come before Him in Christ. Without Christ's righteousness, no man is "good enough" to come before the Lord who is the Righteous Judge.

Sermon Snapshot: "Not in Talk but in Power"

Last week as we wrapped up the first portion of I Corinthians with 4:14-21 as Paul brings the Corinthians (and us) to reflect upon all of the implications of the gospel and the cross of Christ for their Christian living. Rather than competing for accolades and positions, the Corinthians should have been about the work of serving one another as Christ has served them.

Corinth was a cosmopolitan city filled with great talkers. The church imbibed much of the spirit of Corinth in its own life and conduct, with disastrous consequences. The Corinthian Christians boasted about their maturity and spirituality, yet as we have been seeing and will see this coming Lord's Day, such talk covered up serious and profound spiritual and moral problems.

Paul warns that he is coming and he is not interested in the talking and grand boasts of their leaders, but to see the fruit of their words, their power. Only the gospel of Jesus Christ has the *power* to transform lives.

This week I saw a video endorsing a spiritualized diet plan in which one of the developers said, "there is nothing more powerful than community in helping people

change." But of course there is something more powerful than community: the word of God accompanied by His Spirit.

Paul wants the Corinthian Christians - and you and me - not to be satisfied with sweet sentiments and stock phrases about religion and the spiritual life, but long for real and genuine changed lives.

In America today there are many who are satisfied simply with a religion and a spirituality than consists of saying the right thing and feeling the right way. But that is not Christianity.

Jesus Christ's death on the cross satisfied the wrath of God and makes a way for sinners to come to Him. Faith in Christ is always accompanied by repentance from sins and peace with God. That is the power of the gospel and that is the *power* that Paul is looking to see displayed in Corinth.

He doesn't care how great the people are at talking, he wants to see - and Christ wants to see - people who live their lives for God, who have turned from the ways of the world and embraced service to God.