



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Mar. 23, 10 a.m.

Installation and Ordination of the Diaconate. Lunch to follow.

Mar. 23, 4 p.m.

Sunday Night Study @ the Manse. We will discuss Ch. I of *Man Asks, God Answers*, "Is there a God and is He in Control"

Apr. 12, 2:00 p.m.

Ladies tea to honor Krista Homer, the fiancée of Taylor Blakely.



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From the Pastor's Pen...

Have you ever had one of the "those" conversations? The kind in which you are discussing some important ethical or spiritual matter and before too long someone says something along the lines of, "well, I think God would want..." or "you know, God always intended..." and then what follows is the person's own opinion or sentiment.

We don't need to speculate about what God thinks or desires in terms of morality or spirituality, because He has told us in His Word. On Sunday nights this spring, we're going to look at seven common spiritual questions and then consider what the Bible tells us God has said in answer to them.

Mankind was created by God as inquisitive and reflective. People want to know and understand what the world is "all about." As Christians, God has by His grace shown us

where we can find answers to the "Great Questions" that have been asked throughout history. We'll take up the following questions this spring:

1. **Is There a God and Is He in Control?**
2. **How Do I Get to Heaven?**
3. **How Should I Live My Life?**
4. **What is the Purpose of Prayer and Evangelism?**
5. **Where Did Evil Come From?**
6. **Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?**
7. **What Happens to Babies Who Die?**

These are questions that many of us may already basically know the answer to, but would you know where to go in the Bible to find out how to explain the answer to a friend or neighbor who asks? I hope that this study will prepare and teach us to do just that.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

We are in a section of the Shorter Catechism that considers the application of redemption. In our last issue, we considered how we come to benefit from the redemption Christ has purchased. The Catechism explained it was accomplished through Christ's Holy Spirit applying it to us. Now we consider how the Spirit does this:

30. How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?

A. The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.

This question and the next proceed through what we might call the "anatomy of conversion." A person becomes a Christian through and by faith, but that faith is not merely dead hopefulness, but a gift from God worked in him or her by the Spirit of God.

A person must exercise faith in order be

saved from his or her sins. But a person cannot exercise that faith unless the Spirit of Christ does a work on him or her.

Conversion is entirely dependent upon the gracious activity of God for us. The Spirit of Christ works in us to create and give faith where there was none; a sinner cannot work up faith by himself. This is why evangelism is not simply employing the right methods or giving people enough information to make the "right decision." Faith must be given by God out of His love and mercy: "We love because He first loved us."

And yet the faith that we Christians exercise is truly our own. It is not the Spirit's faith, it is *our faith*. So while our salvation and conversion are dependant on God, we must believe upon Him, but only the Spirit can enable us to believe upon His name. If you are a Christian, then praise God that He made it possible for you to believe in Him.

Picking Pieces of Paul

The Corinthian Church was in a lot of trouble. In fact, she was in danger of complete apostasy because she failed to obey God's word. A church cannot disregard God's Word with impunity. She will either cease to exist (e.g. her members will die off or leave) or she will continue in some other capacity (e.g. she becomes concerned with "social justice" rather than proclaiming redemption and forgiveness offered in the gospel).

Moreover, some of the leadership in Corinth didn't personally care much for the Apostle Paul. They thought he was not really a worthy apostle since he didn't match their expectations for a religious leader.

Since they didn't like Paul and they didn't agree with what Paul wrote on some matters, they planned to simply disregard his teachings on those points altogether.

Today you'll sometimes find people who have that same kind of idea about the Bible, and particularly the Apostle Paul (since he wrote so much of the New Testament). People today, as they did almost 2000 years ago in Corinth, want to have a religion that doesn't demand too much and that functions like a cafeteria or buffet: you can take what you want and leave what you don't.

The modern man, just like the Corinthian doesn't like what the Bible says about divorce, human sexuality, gender roles, or respect and submission that is due to civil

magistrates, so he comes up with excuses for why Paul's teachings on those subjects points don't matter.

Just like the Corinthians, the modern man will dismiss a part of the Bible, particularly Paul's writings, by saying things along the line of: "Oh, Paul was just being cultural, so that isn't an abiding principle" or "well, love trumps everything else, so it doesn't matter."

But that's not the way it works at all. The Apostle Paul was Christ's Apostle; Paul was commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ to be His ambassador, His emissary to the Gentiles. Paul was sent by Christ to give Christ's message of salvation.

Paul wasn't giving his own version of Christianity, he was articulating Christ's words for the nations. **Paul explained, taught, and commanded Christ desires, instructions, and teachings.**

Christianity is not a philosophy that we get to decide what we like and follow it; we can't pick pieces of Paul and

leave the rest. **We must receive Christianity as it has been given to us through the apostles and prophets sent by the Lord Jesus Christ.**

If we adopt a "cafeteria style" Christianity, not only do we place the continued existence of FPC Winona in jeopardy, we are rejecting the words of the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only Saviour of sinners. And if we reject His word, how can we know He died for us?



Sermon Snapshot: "Tolerating Sin"

Last week we considered Paul's concluding remarks on the particular matter of sexual immorality in the Corinthian church in I Cor. 5:9-13.

Paul makes it absolutely clear that this person must be expelled from the Corinthian church because he claims to be a Christian and yet continues unashamedly in this public sin.

The God who saves us from our sins is a holy God who does not tolerate sin. Christ on the cross was suffering the penalty of the sins of His people. On the cross, we see the nature of sin properly, we see its cost and its heinousness. On the cross we see what sin deserves and what sin brings: anguish, death, and separation from God.

Understanding that by faith brings repentance and new obedience. It doesn't bring perfect obedience in this life, but it does motivate and enable us to struggle against sin and seek to please God in the way we live.

The reason Paul is so adamant about excommunicating this man is because the man has shown by his life and lack of repentance that He either does not know of

Christ's sacrifice or does not care about Christ's work on the cross. Either way, he clearly is not a Christian and has deceived himself.

When we consider such situations, it provides an opportunity for us to examine ourselves and our own lives and growth in holiness (sanctification).

In our passage last Lord's Day, Paul did not simply say that the sexually immoral must be expelled from church membership, but anyone who continues in immoral and unethical activities of all sorts.

Have you considered that Paul puts greed and foul talk on the same level as drunkenness and sexual immorality? Even if you're not frequenting brothels or watching porn in the closet, it doesn't mean that you don't stand in need of God's grace and sanctifying Spirit.

Paul never wants us to lose sight of two things. The first is **the unfathomable riches of the grace of God to sinners who repent and come to Him by faith in Christ.** The second is the fact that **we all must be continually turning from sin and looking to Christ and His Word to show us how to live as His people.**