



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, APRIL 4, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Apr. 6, 4:00 p.m.

Sunday Night Study @ the Manse; we will discuss Ch. 3 of *Man Asks, God Answers*, "How Should I Live My Life on This Earth?"

Apr. 12, 2:00 p.m.

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

Apr. 20, 8:00 a.m.

Deacons' Breakfast for the Congregation.



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From the Pastor's Pen...

In our study of I Corinthians, Paul deals with some very difficult issues. He's already dealt with factionalism, pride, incest, and greed. This coming Lord's Day, we'll look as Paul briefly addresses homosexuality and in weeks to come he is going to deal with other areas of sexual immorality.

We live in an age and country with great civil and sexual freedoms. If you want to get married, you can marry anyone you please; if you want to get divorced, you can get divorced for any (or no) reason. Those may be society's standards, but Christians are to live in obedience to God's standards.

God's Word, teaches very different morals from what is and has been commonly accepted in this country for decades. Increasingly people are saying that it is "unloving" not to accept a person for who he or she 'is' or to question his or her lifestyle decisions.

But that is not what God's word says. In fact, **the most unloving thing in the world that you can do is fail to tell a friend, a loved one that his or her sinful lifestyle is displeasing to God and that God through the Lord Jesus Christ provides forgiveness and release from sin's power and condemnation.**

It is not that we condemn a sinner, but rather we explain the gospel to a sinner. **Apart from Christ, we all stand condemned because of our sins** (whether they be greed, drunkenness, adultery, homosexuality, gossiping, or something else).

If you do not share the gospel with our friends and family, who will? If a person whom you love is in bondage to sin, as you once were, why would you not show your love for him or her, directing your loved one to the only Way of Salvation from sin and its curse? That is what Paul is doing in I Corinthians.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

In our last issue, we considered how we come to take part in the redemption that Christ has accomplished. This is done through the Spirit's work in "effectual calling." Now the Catechism explains that term:

Q. 31. What is effectual calling?

A. Effectual calling is the work of God's Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.

Effectual calling helps us to understand and comprehend what we looked at in the previous question that it is indeed *our faith and our repentance*, but we are entirely dependent on the Holy Spirit's work.

In order for a sinner - someone dead in trespasses and sins - to come to Christ, God must do a work on him or her by His Spirit.

The Spirit of God changes a sinner's heart and mind to *enable* belief. Without this, without the transformation and new life given by the Spirit, it is impossible to turn to God.

The Spirit of God also convinces the person of his or her "sin and misery." That takes a lot of doing, doesn't it? People do not want to admit that they are sinners (of course other people are sinners), that they themselves are wretched and condemned in God's sight because of their own sins.

Only after the Spirit of God transforms a sinner's mind, will, and affections can he or she see his or her great need of a Saviour and turn to "embrace Jesus Christ freely offered in the gospel."

Christ is offered freely to all who will come, all who will repent and believe. But in order to believe, in order to repent, the Spirit of God must do His work of renewal in the hearts of dead sinners.

Looking to the Law of God

For nearly a year, we have been studying the Book of Exodus in Sunday School. Exodus gives the account of the Children of Israel and their liberation from bondage to Pharaoh in Egypt. God brought His people out of their captivity with great demonstrations of His might and power and led them through the wilderness to Mount Sinai to receive his Law and be made into His Holy Nation.

In Sunday School beginning April 27, we will start a brief consideration of that Law as it is summarized in the Ten Commandments. God gave His Law to teach His children how they are to live as His people. God's people are not to be like the pagans, the nations, but distinct and holy as He is holy.

This will be a pivotal time for our congregation. As Christians, the Law of God is a necessary part of the Christian's life in Christ and growth in grace. The Law of God teaches us how we are to live and worship as the people whom the Lord Jesus Christ has purchased with His precious blood. The Law of God also convicts us of our sin and shows us areas of life, attitudes, and behaviors that we need to bring into conformity and submission to God's word and ways.

God's Law teaches us how to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though the Law is from God and is good to teach us how to live as His people, often Christians react very negatively to studying the Law because God's Law tells them they may need to change the way they are living or give up things that they treasure.

There are, broadly speaking, three ways in which people will react negatively to God's law:

One, **they come up with excuses for why that particular command doesn't apply to them anymore.**

Two, **they explain that their habit is not actually breaking the command.**

Or Three, **they dismiss the messenger as "not understanding."**

None of those responses are "Christian," but they are very common and quite natural.

Pray that Christ will move in our congregation such that instead of making excuses, we will be convicted of sin and characterized as people who live lives of repentance and obedience. Only in Christ can a person turn his or her back on sin.

When we study the Law, it is an opportunity for us to reflect upon both our need of God's mercy to us in forgiveness and the greatness of his grace to us in Christ.



Sermon Snapshot: "Reconciliation and Repentance"

As we move along in I Corinthians, the issues Paul addresses become increasingly difficult and personal. In Chapter 6:1-6 Paul transitions from incest and sexual immorality to other kinds of wrongdoing. Paul has made clear - and will continue to do so - that sin in the lives of Christians cannot and must not be tolerated.

The particular issue in Corinth Paul we addressed last week was lawsuits among believers, among church members. Paul is furious and outraged that members of Christ's church, Christ's body, are taking each other to secular courts trying to obtain vindication.

Paul is not, as we said, surprised that there is sinful activity happening in a church. Paul is horrified, however, that the church leadership consistently handles sin in a sinful way. Instead of addressing sin in the congregation, the elders simply allow it to happen and go on unaddressed. Such complacency by the leadership in Corinth - if persisted in - will kill the church and it has already stifled her witness.

Paul explains that saints shouldn't take each other to court. Rather than be obsessed over property and per-

sonal vindication by the courts, the saints ought to consider eternity and God's promises about what they will have in the future. First, they will judge the world, the universe in Christ. Since they are to judge eternally weighty matters with Christ, it makes no sense they would seek judgment in trivial matters from the very same pagan judges whom the saints will judge in eternity. Second, what is a little bit of money or property now in light of eternity?

Instead of appealing to secular courts, the church, the elders, should have stepped in to resolve the dispute between these two professed Christians. If there was a legitimate offense or grievance, the church is fully capable of sorting it out.

Rather than going to court, the elders should have intervened to bring the sinful party to repentance. Rather than seeking vindication, the injured party should be praying for and seeking reconciliation with the offender, since they are both members of Christ's body.

Since Christ has reconciled us to God, we are enabled by His Spirit to seek reconciliation with one another.