



FIRST PRESS

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 33

FRIDAY, APRIL 18, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Apr. 20, 8:00 a.m.

Deacons' Breakfast for the Congregation.

Apr. 20, 9:00 a.m.

Morning Worship (note the time change).

Apr. 20, 4:00 p.m.

Sunday Night Study @ the Manse; we will discuss Ch. 4 of *Man Asks, God Answers*, "What is the purpose of prayer and evangelism?"

Apr. 23, 5:15 p.m.

Wednesday Night Bible Study Cancelled.



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From the Pastor's Pen...

Throughout the New Testament, the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ is one of the most foundational and central truths. As we are seeing in I Corinthians, Christ's resurrection dominates our daily living as Christians.

This Lord's Day, we will take a brief pause from our study in I Corinthians to consider the writing of the Apostle Peter and how he explains and applies Christ's resurrection to the daily life and attitudes of Christians.

Sadly, in our times the Apostles Paul and Peter are often portrayed as preaching different versions of Christianity. However, as our text this Lord's Day will make clear, Peter and Paul preached exactly the same Christianity, a Christianity in which the bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the grave is central and essential to the faith.

In our time, and for the last few centuries, many scholars and professional religionists have

sought to downplay the importance of Christ's *bodily* resurrection. Some have asserted that it was not Christ's body that arose, but simply His spirit. Others have said that Christ did not rise at all, but that the resurrection is simply "us" (i.e. Jesus' followers) sharing His message with those who have not heard it.

Of course, both of those ideas are hogwash and completely Satanic, yet many believe them to this day. Anticipating such objections (from Corinth, no less!), the Apostle Paul writes in I Cor. 15, "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins."

The resurrection is essential to Christianity; without it, there is no Jesus and whatever He said doesn't matter! But the bodily resurrection powerfully declares that God has accepted His sacrifice on behalf of sinners *and* that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Son *and* has conquered death for those who have true faith in Him.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

We begin a consideration of three particular benefits of effectual calling for the Christian in this life. The first is justification.

Q33. *What is justification?*

A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

Martin Luther described the doctrine of justification as the "standing or falling of the church." Justification is the way a person gains right-standing before God. Luther is absolutely correct; if a church gets justification wrong, it ceases to be a church of Jesus Christ and becomes a synagogue of Satan.

There is a lot of sentiment about how a person can get right with God. This week, former NYC mayor Michael Bloomberg, a Jew, asserted that his efforts toward restricting gun rights and large, sugary sodas have

"earned" him a place in heaven. Bloomberg well articulates how many pagans understand justification: it's based on what we do.

That is not, however, what God says in His word. God accepts sinners as righteous only because of the work of Christ on their behalf. As this Catechism question makes clear, the only way to come before God is through the pardon of God *and* the righteousness of Christ *imputed* to you and received by faith.

This means that God treats you as righteous for Christ's sake, not your own. God credits Christ's righteousness to your account and your sin to Christ's account on the cross on account of your faith in Him and His word.

The Bible, as does the WSC, also makes clear that justification before and by God is a declarative, judicial *act* and not a process. This is vitally important to understand; a person is made right with God because God does something for him, not the other way around.

What is Idolatry?

In both the Old and New Testaments, God warns against and forbids His people from idolatry several times; it is almost a recurring theme. There are at least two kinds of idolatry, and God makes very clear two things about idolatry:

The first, is giving God a *shared* position in a person's life; **God does not share the affections of His people with idols, other gods.** And the second, is worshipping God in a way that He has not given in His word; **God forbids the Church from coming to Him, conceiving of Him, or worshiping Him through images.** Christ came to free men from worshipping idols so that they could worship God in Spirit and in Truth.

These are two distinct problems that are both forms of idolatry. Idolatry is not something that only ancient or primitive people practice; idolatry is alive and well in modern, Western society.

Consider the first; there are many who want to have some spirituality, maybe even a spirituality that involves Christ, but they do not want to submit to the Kingship of Christ and be ruled by the Scripture, but rather by what seems right, feels good, and is convenient.

One of the results of this kind of idolatry is that the people crave for spirituality, but spiritual things that confirm what they themselves believe and feel. Rather than look to the Bible - God's Word - to teach them about God and answer questions about life and death, this kind of idolatry enslaves people to a smorgasbord of sentimental spiritual speculation written by men.

The second form of idolatry is much more subtle. It does not involve an outright abandoning of God or worshipping the Lord along side of Vishnu or Wotan or Zeus. It is simply coming to God, revering God, honoring God in a way or ways that He has not commanded.

It was a perennial problem among the Jews to do just this. In Exod. 32 and I Kings 12, the leaders of Israel set up worshipping God through golden calves. In both instances, the people did not intend at all to worship another god, but rather worship the Lord who saved them from Egypt through an image.

The golden calves set up by Israel were intended to remind God's people of His grace and power in redeeming them from bondage in Egypt and drive them to worship Him. Both of these episodes outraged God because He always forbids us to worship, serve or honor him through images. God is never pleased when we make an image and attempt to give Him honor or create a spiritual feeling in ourselves or others through it.

Rather than an image, statue, or calf to either honor God or remind us of God's redemption, God has given us His word. Jesus, speaking to the Samaritan woman, tells us that whoever would worship God must do so "in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4). It is, of course, much easier to give the people an image to conjure up spiritual emotions and feelings, but that is not the worship that God desires. God wants His people to worship Him truly, and that can only be done when we worship Him according to His word and not with images.

Sermon Snapshot: "Christian Liberty"

In I Cor. 6:12-17 Paul is addressing a particular issue of sexual immorality in the Corinthian church, but as he does so he gives us two principles for Christian Liberty. Christian Liberty and the Moral Law guide the Christian to know whether his or her behavior, attitudes, and ideas are biblical, are "Christian."

The first principle Paul articulated was "**All things are Lawful...but not all things are helpful.**" Paul reminds the saints in Corinth (and the Greater Winona Metropolitan Area) that *everything* that we do ought to be for the good of our own growth in grace as well as that of the whole church.

For example, a Christian is free to go out and buy a Bentley if he or she wants. But is such an extravagant purchase good for building up the saints? If God is lord of all your money, is it good stewardship to spend six figures on an automobile when there are people spiritually dying for lack of missionaries? Is it helpful for Christian unity to be flaunting one's money so proudly?

I imagine none of us are contemplating such a purchase, but it does illustrate the point that if you are a

Christian, everything you do must be aimed at building up, helping, and serving the people of God.

The second of Paul's principles to govern the people of God was "**All things are Lawful...but I will not be dominated by anything.**" Paul establishes that we are free in Christ and ought not be mastered by any earthly thing. So many of the indulgences in which we often partake in the name of "Christian Liberty" have the capacity to enslave us and steal our Christian Liberty.

In Corinth, of course, some were enslaved to all manner of illicit sexual activities. As Christians in this sex-dominated society, we too must be on guard against becoming enslaved to *any* kind of sexual pleasure outside of the marriage bed, but sexuality is not the only thing that can enslave us.

Christian liberty governs how we use the things of this world. For example, both food and Facebook can be of great use to the people of God, but can just as easily enslave or be quite unhelpful! In biblical Christianity, there is not a long list of "dos and don'ts," but principles that teach us how to apply God's Word to daily life and living.