



# FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, MAY 9, 2014

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**May 12, 6:00 p.m.**

Stated Meeting of the Session

**May 13, 5:00 p.m.**

Catfish fry @ Westminster PCA in Greenwood. Marvin Olasky is the Speaker.

**May 14, 5:15 p.m.**

Wednesday Night Bible Study: "What Do Presbyterians Believe?"

**May 18, 5:15 p.m.**

Fellowship Lunch following worship.



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## From the Pastor's Pen...

This month we are looking at John Chapter 3 and the conversation Jesus has with Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a religious leader in Israel during Christ's ministry. In fact, Jesus refers to him as "the teacher of Israel," indicating that he was revered as the greatest Bible scholars of his day. He held a position of great responsibility in Israel, instructing the church in God's word.

**The conversation with Nicodemus has many applications for us and our friends and neighbors as Jesus explains some of the primary things of the Kingdom of God.**

Nicodemus was a life-long church member, he was a member of the Ruling Council, similar to the State Supreme Court today. He was a widely respected member of the strictest and most conservative sect in the nation. He was a good person as the world understands "good."

This Lord's Day we'll consider how Jesus explains to Nicodemus that there must be a sacri-

ifice for sin, even the sins of Nicodemus. Nicodemus, like all the Pharisees, understood that he had done enough to cover his sins, of which there weren't very many anyway since he so rigorously and faithfully obeyed the Law.

**Jesus explains that in order for a person to attain eternal life he must not only be born again, but he must have his sins covered.**

People today don't want to talk about "sin" because it makes them uncomfortable and suggests that they might actually have "shortcomings," but that's precisely where Jesus goes. He confronts Nicodemus his own need of a substitute to save him from perishing.

In John 3 Jesus seems particularly set on making us uncomfortable and even seems rude in some of his tactics and statements; but after all, the gospel is rude by the world's standards. Jesus' purpose is to have us see even *our* sinfulness and bring us to repentance and faith.

## Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

We have been looking at a section of the Catechism that addresses the benefits of God's calling a sinner out of darkness into His most glorious light. Last week we looked at adoption, and this week we'll consider sanctification:

Q. 35. *What is sanctification?*

**A. Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.**

Sanctification is the Christian's growth in holiness that *results* from his or her salvation and union with Christ. *Sanctification* comes from the Latin word for holy: *sanctus*.

The God who saves sinners is holy, and so His people must likewise be holy. God's salvation, justification, is a declarative *act*, but sanctification is a *process* that is begun at the New Birth and completed only in death.

Every Christian undergoes sanctification, growth in holiness and grace. If you are a Christian, you will be turning from sin day by day and become more like the Lord Jesus Christ day by day. This is a slow process, painfully so at times, but it is both sure and certain.

God only saves sinners; he never saves people who are righteous already or presently holy. Because God only saves sinful people, He transforms them and gives them the power to live like His people.

The Holy Spirit of Christ working in the believer enables him or her to freely choose what pleases God and turn from sin. It is the Holy Spirit who is at work within us, but we are not passive in our sanctification as we were in our justification. Our work alongside of the Holy Spirit is the principal way that we show our love for Christ. As Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments."

# Summer Sermon Series: the gospel basics

Do you know what the gospel is? If someone asked you to explain why you are a Christian, what it means to be a Christian, could you? This summer, we'll take a break from studying First Corinthians to look at the "first things" of Christianity and especially how Christianity applies to our lives today.

There is a great deal of confusion about the gospel and what it is today. In fact, many who call themselves Christians have little or no idea what it is. This has been the case since the beginning of Christianity. In Galatia, for example, Paul addressed the tragic results of people coming in and preaching a false-gospel, which caused many to abandon the true gospel.

Paul is very dogmatic about what the gospel is, and he writes that anyone who preaches another gospel is to be accounted accursed, damned, cut off from God's people. Today, as in the days of Paul, there are all sorts of false gospels floating around giving people false comfort and leading people astray.

For example, the gospel is **not** to have your life all sorted out with financial and relational peace. The gospel is **not** "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." The gospel is **not** "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life." Yet all of those are commonly mistaken for the gospel today.

The word *gospel* means "good news," but the gospel message contains both good news and bad news. Without the bad news the good news doesn't make sense!

The bad news is: **The wrath of God is coming upon sinners** (Col. 3:6). The good news is: **God saves sinners because Christ has died for sinners** (Rom. 5:8).

This is fundamentally different from every other religion or "spiritual path" which all require man to do something to appease the gods. Even in the popular American Folk Deism, people believe they are accepted by God because their good deeds will outweigh their bad deeds or are "pretty good" people.

All other systems have a very low view of God's justice and a very high view of man's ability to do good. Christianity confronts people with their natural, innate "badness" and warns them to flee the wrath to come and take refuge in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The gospel does not sit well with our narcissistic culture in which people love themselves most of all and are taught to "believe in yourself." As unpopular as the gospel is, it is the only message the church has to proclaim, and we depend not upon the attractiveness of the message, but God's sovereign grace to transform dead sinners and enable them to respond in repentance and faith to the message. Pray for that this summer.



## Sermon Snapshot: "New Birth Necessary"

In John 3:1-8 last Lord's Day we looked at the beginning of the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus. Nicodemus was curious and vexed by what Jesus is doing so he goes to Jesus for answers.

Nicodemus was reared in the church and likely had the whole of the Old Testament memorized. In spite of all of his privileges, He could not comprehend the most basic spiritual truths. **He had rested and trusted in his upbringing and faithfulness to God's Law to place him in a right standing before God. But, as Jesus explains and develops, nothing could be farther from the truth.**

Jesus declares quite plainly that if a person is to stand before God, if a person is to receive eternal life, if a person is to be a part of the Kingdom of God, he or she must be "born again." This is, of course, something that only God by His Holy Spirit can do to a person.

No matter how good you are or how much you do

for the community or how well respected you are by your colleagues, you must be born again. Nicodemus and his fellow Pharisees did not understand that they too needed God's transforming grace.

The Pharisees were so dedicated to following their traditional interpretation of God's Law, that they had blinded themselves to their own desperate need of grace. This is a trap into which many in our society fall: believing that we are basically good and might perhaps need a little bit of grace from God, but overall we're okay.

**Jesus is teaching in John 3 that no one is basically good, but that every person is in dire need of God's transforming grace and saving mercy.**

Jesus explains that the prophets of old looked forward to the day when God will cleanse His people from their sins and give them all a new heart. The Kingdom, Christianity, Jesus says, is not simply about doing the right thing, it is God making you right.

NOT GOOD ENOUGH FOR JESUS

why you can never work hard enough

Sermons from John 3 this May  
First Presbyterian Church @ 10:00