



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, JUNE 6, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

June 9, 5:30 p.m.

WIC Meeting in the Fellowship Hall

Please note that the Session has suspended Wednesday and Sunday evening activities for the summer. They will resume, God willing, after Labor Day.

From the Pastor's Pen...

This summer we are taking a break from our study in First Corinthians to look closely at the fundamental truths of God's saving power in the gospel. These are the "first things" that Paul proclaimed when he arrived in Corinth, and the gospel truths are what Paul has been applying as he writes First Corinthians.

The gospel proclaims to all who hear it their own sinfulness. That is not a message people want to hear. Our society, as with nearly every society in the history of mankind, is very hostile to the idea that people are *sinful* and *sinner*s. There are few things that will get you in more trouble nowadays than asserting the sinfulness and needs of all mankind. Yet that is precisely what we do as a church.

We proclaim that message because it is a message that has the power to not only restore a sinner to a right relationship, right standing with God, but also transform a sinner.

The gospel takes people whose sins not only defiled them before God, but also defined them and makes them new creatures in Christ.

When a person embraces Christ as He is offered in the gospel, that redeemed sinner is enabled to turn his or her back on those sins that were once so beloved and engrossing and instead follow after the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is how we can begin to tell if a person is truly a Christian or not, if he or she has truly been affected by the gospel: does he or she struggle against sin and strive for holiness.

This is what the worldling cannot and does not understand about Christianity; Christianity changes people. The world doesn't comprehend that when the Bible calls someone a sinner, it is at the same time calling him or her to forsake sin and embrace the mercy of God in Christ. But the gospel doesn't just call us to repentance, it enables us to respond in faith.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

Over the past month or so we've been looking at the gospel's benefits for a Christian in this life. This week, we consider the benefits that the saints have at their death:

Q37. *What benefits do believers receive from Christ at death?*

A. The souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory; and their bodies, being still united in Christ, do rest in their graves, till the resurrection.

The Christian life is *never* easy; it is always filled with trials, temptations, persecutions, sorrows, and hardships for Christ's sake. Jesus said that the world would hate His people because the world hated Him. Yet through all hardships and battles of the Christian life, we find joy because of what Christ has given us: union and inheritance in Him through His blood covering our sins. In this life, Christians have great blessing and delight from knowing Christ.

This question focuses our minds on the glorious blessings that await the Christian at his or her death.

First, *the Christian's soul is perfected in holiness*. If you are a Christian, all through this life you have been dogged by your own slow growth in holiness, your remaining sin, and lack of love for God. The Bible says that at death, sanctification is completed. What a comfort to know that God is faithful to make us fit for heaven.

Second, *the Christian's soul goes to be with the Lord*. Paul writes that to be absent from the body is to be "with the Lord." At death, all God's people are immediately gathered to their Lord. Since their souls have been perfected in holiness, there is no need for an intermediate step of purification or for purging sin.

Third, *the Christian awaits the bodily resurrection*. While after death we are with Christ, we look forward to Christ's return in triumph when we receive a new, perfected body.



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Listening for the Voice of God

Human beings are profoundly spiritual. God made us in His image and we are all born with an innate understanding that God exists and we are accountable to Him. Moreover, the Creation gives ample evidence of God's power and divinity. Many of the cultural institutions go to great lengths to help people suppress any knowledge of God and convince us that we are not accountable to God but only to society.

In spite of all their efforts, people today still look for supernatural guidance to know how to respond to life's events, decisions, and challenges. People around us are continually seeking signs and longing for clear directions to know what God's will is for their lives or what God wants them to do.

People have responded to this desire for clear, divine direction in various ways. For millennia people have looked to the stars and trusted in astrologers or horoscopes so that they will know what to do and how to respond to what is coming their way. Others look for clarity in such things as tarot cards or calls to "Miss Cleo" (do you remember her?).

More recently, people have been told to look inside themselves for the answers. One celebrated American even encouraged people to, "Listen to yourself and in that quietude you might hear the voice of God." What a fitting summary for our narcissistic age, no?

In fact, all of these methods are entirely Anti-Christian and utterly wicked. God has revealed to us in

His Word His will for our lives and given divine guidance for every situation. It not only shows an ignorance of God's word to look elsewhere for guidance, but it also shows a great contempt for the God who inspired the Holy Bible.

The Bible teaches us how to live and how to worship just as much as it teaches us how to be saved. God's Word has the answers for all of life's questions, both big and small.

The Bible is a big book and, of course, it doesn't have an "index." That is why, if you are a Christian, you need to know your Bible well so that the Holy Spirit can call to mind the truths of the Scripture that you have read and studied your whole life long.

If you want to have God speak to you, then you must read the Bible. God has spoken directly to very few people, His prophets, and even to them he only spoke directly very rarely. Most of the time, the prophets were simply applying the word that God had already spoken in the Holy Scripture.

People today want shortcuts and a Christianity that doesn't demand anything; people want to be spiritual without godliness, they want religion without holiness, and they want truth without authority. But such religion does not save. If you want to know how to live, if you want guidance then you must pray for the Spirit of God to bless your own daily study of God's inspired Word where He speaks to His saints.

Sermon Snapshot: "Gospel Eagerness"

We began our new sermon series this past Lord's Day. We looked a little bit at Romans 1:15-17 where Paul outlines what the gospel is. But Paul begins by telling the church at Rome that he is eager to come and preach the gospel to them.

The Apostle Paul had never been to Rome and was looking forward to going there to have new fellowship with the saints there in the Imperial City. He was looking forward to expounding the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to and with them and being a witness to its transformative power in the city and the church.

As Paul prepares to talk about the gospel power and message, it fills him with eagerness to go and join the saints in Rome.

We should continually ask ourselves whether we are eager to hear the gospel. Is the gospel, is God's word something that you make a regular part of your life? There is always the danger that we simply come to "assume" our Christianity, that we take it for granted that we are Christians because of our up-

bringing, disposition, or habits. But upbringing, disposition, and habits are quite different from true and saving faith in the message of the gospel. Only if you know the gospel's power in your own life will you be eager to hear it, study it, and share it.

Many in our community do not love to hear the gospel, many simply come to church because it is a habit and are eager to get on with the next event (e.g. lunch). That is a very tragic disposition and it reveals a heart that has not been touched with gospel power, but one hardened in sin and rebellion.

If you are a Christian, then the Holy Spirit is at work in you to desire to hear and know more about the salvation you enjoy and the God who has saved you at the cost of the blood of His Son.

This is why, historically, Presbyterians have made worship such an important part of their Christian life, in it they are nourished by the gospel. Are you eager to hear the gospel? Do you know its power in your own life?

