



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, JULY 18, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

July 20, 9 a.m.

Sunday School in the Pastor's Study: "The Seventh Commandment"

July 20, 10 a.m.

Morning Worship: Psalm 130, "Repentance Unto Life"

July 28, 6:00 p.m.

Stated Session Meeting

Aug. 3, 10:00 a.m.

The Lord's Supper Observed

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



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From the Pastor's Pen...

A couple of weeks ago in our Sunday School class we considered the Fifth Commandment, which teaches us how we are to live under all lawful authority. God in His word teaches us that He is the one who establishes and puts in place all authority and rulers. As such, he commands His people (and all people) to honor all those who are in authority.

The Christian does not have the right to disregard or dishonor a civil ruler simply because he or she dislikes or disagrees with him or his policies. Many in Christian communities believe it is acceptable to speak rudely of a President, Governor, Senator, Judge, or other ruler simply because in that person's estimation the ruler is not doing what he or she ought to do or obeying God's mandates.

But such a position is foreign to historic Christianity and utterly opposed to the commands of God in His word.

Consider two examples of how God commands His people to live toward their rulers:

I Peter 2:13-17 "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution...Fear God. Honor the emperor."

Romans 13:1-7 "...there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God...whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed...he is God's servant...Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes...revenue...respect...honor..."

We should note that respect and honor do not always entail blind obedience, for we must always obey God over men. Nonetheless, in both of these instructions the Apostles wrote of *pagan* governments who were actively persecuting Christ's Church and promoting wickedness. Christ did not die so that Christians could disregard or disrespect authorities whom they don't like.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

We began last week the section of the Shorter Catechism that expounds the Ten Commandments of God. The Commandments comprise God's rules and direction for all areas of human ethical and moral activity. Mankind has always been accountable to God's Moral Law.

Q40. *What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?*

A. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law.

The Moral Law of God has been in force since the beginning; it was the standard by which Adam and Eve were to live and every human coming after them. God's Moral Law is in force today as well and that is the standard by which God judges everyone.

The Moral Law is based on God's character and concerns right and wrong, good and evil. Since the Moral Law is based on God's character it abides forever unchanging.

There are other laws in the Old Testament

which are not a part of the "Moral Law." Those Laws fall into two other categories: **Civil Law** or **Ceremonial Law**. Both the Civil and Ceremonial Laws were temporary by design to prepare the people of God for Messiah's coming.

The **Civil Laws** governed the Hebrew Commonwealth during the days when the church had an earthly land and a nation. Those laws revealed God's character, but they were specific for the operation of the Hebrew nation. With the expiration of that state, those laws no longer are in force except for what they teach us about God and His character generally.

The **Ceremonial Laws** governed worship under the Old Covenant and prepared people for Christ. The sacrifices, altars, candles, incense all were designed by God to prepare the people for the worship that would take place after the coming of the long expected One, the Messiah. As such, all of those ordinances taught the people about Christ.

On the “Self-Help” Genre

Have you ever been in a bookstore and passed by a massive section labeled “Self-Help”? I recently searched on Amazon.com and there were 195,664 titles in Amazon’s Self-Help Book Department. These included titles such as *Let Go...and Embrace Who You Are*, *How to Love Yourself*, and *Get Out of Your Own Way*.

The secular mindset proclaims that we simply need to get over our “negative self-image” to be happy and productive. The world teaches that the answer to our sorrow, stress, and failings can simply be remedied by learning to love oneself, accept oneself, and improve oneself. Books of this genre have made bazillions of dollars for their authors from millions of people who recognize that they are not what they should be.

The Bible, as it so often does, offers a profoundly different solution to our sorrow, stress, and failings, to finding joy and purpose, and to the problem that everyone realizes: we are not what we should be. Whereas

the “self-help” books would have us to believe that we need only “release the power within,” **the Bible teaches that we are the problem and that the solution is outside of us.**

This is not a message the world wants to hear today, is it? People want to continually be affirmed and feel good about themselves (after all, isn’t that what TV preachers typically do so well: fill people with empty platitudes?). But the Bible says that only after you have come to terms with your own unworthiness, wretchedness, and guilt before your Creator can you begin to have any real abiding joy.

The Lord Jesus Christ took on our flesh not so that He could help us help ourselves (akin to Oprah, “Dr.” Phil or “Dr.” Oz), but so that He could be our Saviour, to *save His people from their sins*. One of the fundamental principles of Christianity is that you cannot help yourself, but you must wait upon God.

Sermon Snapshot: “Fourfold Hopelessness”

Last week we considered Ephesians 2:1-10. In those verses the Apostle Paul accentuates the great gulf between God and Man as well as the great transformation that God brings about when He saves sinners.

One of the ways Paul highlights the gulf between God and man is by giving four reasons why a person is helpless to save himself and hopeless outside of Christ.

1. They Follow the Course of the World. People who are outside of Christ are caught up with the world and its ways. We all want approval, and the person outside of Christ gets that approval from the world so he or she follows its fashions and thought systems. The world doesn’t tolerate any dissent; we are seeing how forcefully the “mainstream” culture comes down on those who dare to challenge it.

2. They Follow the Devil. Outside of Christ and His Church a person is vulnerable and without any protection from the wiles, schemes, temptations, and leadings of the Devil and his agents. The Devil does not want people to acknowledge his existence, but seeks secretly to work in the lives men and women to wreck their joy and compound their trouble and hopelessness.

3. They Follow the Passions of their Body. Outside of Christ, a person in his or her natural state desires only to do evil and act in accordance with a sinful nature. While people outside of Christ are influenced by both the world and evil supernatural powers, they also do exactly as they want to do. They are trapped in a pattern and lifestyle of sin and personal pleasure.

4. They are Objects of Wrath. The greatest problem for anyone outside of Christ is that he or she is subject to God’s justice, which punishes all sin. The most serious of their problems is that they have “fallen short of the glory of God” and stand justly condemned for *their own sins*. No one can claim to have been condemned by God unjustly. God is a perfectly righteous judge and those whom He condemns deserve it completely. People don’t like to talk about the wrath of God these days, but that is just another sign that they are influenced and following the world’s ways, isn’t it? Paul has a very clear purpose in mind as he brings up the matter of God’s wrath.

Paul wants us to see that no matter how dear or how nice a person is, if he or she does not have a living and saving relationship with Christ and is not a part of Christ’s Church, there is no hope for that person. No amount of moral reformation or apologizing or turning over a new leaf can suffice to save. Every single person is helpless and hopeless to save himself or herself from sin. That is a hard pill to swallow indeed.

The hope that Paul offers, God offers is Christ and faith in Him alone. Only by turning from sin to Christ can a person escape not only the power of the world, the flesh, and the devil, but also God’s wrath. Without Christ, there is absolutely no hope regardless of how much a person is beloved or what works of philanthropy a person does. God offered His Son for sinners; what can sinners offer to compare with Him?

