



FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 15, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Aug. 17, 9 a.m.

Sunday School in the Pastor's Study: "The Book of the Covenant"

Aug. 17, 10 a.m.

Morning Worship: Luke 5:27-32, "Our Mission Statement"

Sept. 3, 5:15 p.m.

Midweek Bible Study, "What Do Presbyterians Believe About God's Covenant with Man?"

From the Pastor's Pen...

Last week, my wife and I rented the new Russell Crowe flick, *Noah*. It was, on the whole, rather mediocre and mildly entertaining. Some of you may remember when the movie first premiered there was a great hullabaloo and conflagration in some Christian circles bemoaning the fact that the story was not faithful to the biblical narrative.

While it's true that *Noah* was not faithful to the Biblical narrative that is hardly newsworthy. Why should Christians expect to get a biblically faithful retelling of a miraculous event from Hollywood? Moreover, what many Christians may not know (perhaps because they have never actually read the Bible's account of Noah) is that the whole story takes only five chapters of Genesis. It should not surprise Christians that a feature length Hollywood Epic does not faithfully convey the account of Scripture.

Movies like *Noah* give Christians a unique

opportunity to discuss eternal, spiritual truths with people in the world and culture. To do this, Christians must both know the Bible well enough to spot Hollywood's artistic license as well as be sufficiently familiar with the overall teaching of Scripture to know where and how Noah and the ark fit into the history of redemption. Do you? Are you being faithful in your own feeding on God's word?

The Biblical account of Noah presents us with a picture of God's gracious commitment to His creation. In spite of man's sinful attempts to destroy himself, God was faithful to the covenant he made with Adam in Gen. 3 to send a Redeemer. God could have wiped out mankind because of man's wild depravity. Instead, God chose to baptize the world in judgment and save eight people as a testimony to his unfailing commitment to send the Redeemer who would save His people from their sins.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

This next question in the Catechism explains briefly what God is saying in the preface to the Ten Commandments in Exod. 20:2.

Q.44. What doth the preface to the ten commandments teach us?

A. The preface to the ten commandments teacheth us, that because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.

As we noted last week, the preface here gives us the context for the Law. God did not give the church His Law and then require them to earn their redemption. Quite to the contrary, the Law was given to Israel *after* God had redeemed them from slavery.

Accordingly, we do not keep God's Law in order to earn our salvation. Moreover, not even our *attempts* to keep the Law of God gain us favor with him. God saved His people because of His love, not because of their faithfulness at keeping His law.

In fact, Pastor Rob Hill notes that "the root of all false religions is the attempt to be righteous by one's deeds." Christianity is the only religion in the world that plainly teaches "by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight" (Rom. 3:20).

God gave His Law to sinners to govern us and restrain our sinfulness as well as to show us our inability to please Him on our own. The Law humbles us and drives us to the Lord Jesus Christ. The Law shows us how great and mighty God's salvation is and how utterly lost we were apart from Christ who endured the penalty due to lawbreakers.

When we appreciate the depth of Christ's sacrifice and the greatness of His redemption, the proper response is grateful obedience. That is, of course, why God gave His law *after* He redeemed His people, so that they would know how to live as His people in thanksgiving of His kindness to us.



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Beware “NASCAR Spirituality”

A couple of weeks ago, we considered here the dangers of “Forrest Gump Spirituality.” Which, you recall, is a religion not grounded in transcendent truths revealed from God but based simply on what “mama always said” or what we have always done. Forrest Gump Spirituality afflicts and lures away many from Christianity without them even realizing it.

Also very dangerous to Christian growth and living in our setting is what I call “NASCAR Spirituality.” NASCAR, as you know, is one of the most popular sports in the country and has come to exemplify a subculture in the American Republic that esteems family-friendly values, hard work, spirituality, and the outdoors. There is nothing objectionable to any of those things either.

The problem with “NASCAR Spirituality” is that many hop on the bandwagon of their culture and assume that their own culture is Christian without examining what the Bible says a Christian looks like. In “NASCAR Spirituality,” there is frequent mention made of God, Jesus, crosses, blessing, prayer, etc. because they are a part of the cultural values in “NASCAR Spirituality.” The problem and danger of such spirituality is that while Biblical ideas and persons may be mentioned, there is no real devotion to or faithful relationship with God, but rather simply cultural references to Him.

In America, across her many subcultures, there are many Judeo-Christian symbols, persons, and ideas that

are very dear to the adherents, but these ideas are entirely secular in nature. The Supreme Court has noted that American Civic Religion often makes use of Christian symbols and ideas, but that is not a government establishment of religion because those Christian ideas are used in a *secular* way. For example the Ten Commandments feature prominently in many courthouses as a part of a display on the nature of law and lawgivers.

This Civic Religion is confused by many for Christianity. People often think that if they are abiding by societal standards, using the spiritual language of their subculture which includes references to God and the Bible, that they are a part of God’s Kingdom.

Real Christianity, in contrast to “NASCAR Spirituality” (or Civic Religion in all its varied forms), is not merely about appreciating one’s cultural heritage and making mention of God and blessing. Real Christianity, true religion is not about claiming to be a part of something or even using the right words.

True religion is founded in God’s *word* of promise to all who turn from sin and the world and embrace Jesus Christ by faith. True religion is not words, it is a living relationship with God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is one thing to mention the Baby Jesus or assert that you are “blessed,” but it is quite another thing entirely to be growing, repenting, and walking by faith with the Resurrected Lord.

Sermon Snapshot: “The ‘Good’ Son”

We finished considering the Prodigal Son this past Lord’s Day. Jesus was telling the parables in Luke 15 to illustrate the joy that is in heaven when lost, dead sinners are found by God and come to saving faith and repentance. We looked closely last week at the younger son, for whom the parable has been named, and this week we considered the elder brother.

Most would probably have assumed that the elder brother was the “good son.” He, after all, stayed with his father, cared for his father, and managed the family estate. But in spite of all outward appearances, the elder son was just as wicked in his heart toward his father as his kid brother.

The elder brother represented the religious elites, the scribes and Pharisees, who resented Jesus’ attention to and compassion on sinful people. The Pharisees had no patience for folks who lived a sinful, deviant lifestyle, in violation of the Law of God and traditions of the Jews.

Jesus came proclaiming salvation from God not based on works of the Law, but based on faith. The Pharisees

were happy with a religion in which God accepted those who obeyed His Laws (and *their* traditions) and condemned those who violated them. For Jesus to proclaim access to God by grace through faith was a stark challenge to the elaborate system of the Pharisees.

The tragedy of the Pharisees is that in their rejection of the gracious gospel proclaimed by the Lord Jesus Christ, they rejected the God whom they claimed to serve, worship, and adore. They saw themselves as good people, God’s good children who, in contrast to their forefathers, obeyed His Law and revered His word. But then they crucified the Christ because he threatened their power and position and didn’t affirm them in what they already believed.

This presents us with the stark reality that no matter how good we think we are or how good others think we are, if we attempt to come to God on the basis of our own good works, our own clean living, we will approach God’s bar of justice without Christ. Christ came to bring sinners - and sinners only - to God.

