

FIRST PRESS

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 45

FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 2014

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Aug. 31, 9 a.m.

Sunday School in
the Pastor's Study:
Exodus 24, "The
Covenant Ratification
Ceremony"

Aug. 31, 10 a.m.

Morning Worship:
Romans 5:6-11,
"Justification and Rec-
onciliation"

Sept. 3, 5:15 p.m.

Midweek Bible
Study, "What Do
Presbyterians Be-
lieve: God's Covenant
with Man"

Sept. 7, 4:00 p.m.

Sunday Night Study
Resumes @ FPCW



www.facebook.com/FPCWinona

From the Pastor's Pen...

As most of you know, our first daughter was born to us last week on August 22 at 1:56 a.m. Dabney doesn't know it yet, but she has a rich spiritual heritage going back thousands of years to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and other men of great faith. God has richly blessed Dabney by causing her to be born a member of His church.

Very soon, Dabney will receive the New Covenant sign and seal of membership in God's people, baptism. Under the Old Covenant, circumcision was the sign of belonging to God's people and was applied only to boys. Now, in the greater fullness and glory of the gospel, both boys and girls receive the covenant sign.

Recently, people have questioned the ancient practice of infant baptism. In fact, in our context, more people than not misunderstand the Bible's teaching on baptism. Many understand baptism as a sign of one's own commitment to God. The Bible, however, teaches that Baptism is a covenant sign showing forth God's covenant mercies,

not our own commitment. Let's consider a few passages of Scripture that teach us about baptism.

Remember that Baptism is the sacrament that fulfills what circumcision represented (Col. 2), but also consider what Peter said to the Jews gathered at Pentecost about the promised salvation sealed in baptism, "the promise is for you *and for your children...*" (Acts 2). Peter's original Jewish audience, rooted in God's covenant grace to families understood that very differently than the individualistic American of today! From the very beginning of the Holy Spirit's outpouring on the church, the Apostles made clear that God's covenant promises in Christ included not only believers but also their children. Additionally, it was not uncommon for *whole households* to be baptized by the Apostles (cf. Acts 16), not just the adults.

Baptism represents Christ's cleansing work for sinners and is a call for sinners to put their faith in Christ's work on behalf of those who could not help themselves.

Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

After a number of weeks looking at the Catechism's introduction to the Decalogue, we are finally considering the First Commandment:

Q45. *Which is the first commandment?*

A45. The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

This is the command that begins the Decalogue and asserts God's claim on all our worship. Many people, when asked, say that religion (or spirituality) plays an important role in their lives. Worship is natural for us since, God created us as spiritual beings, not simply collections of molecules.

The First Commandment declares that God wants us to worship Him and worship Him *alone*. In the early and middle of the 20th Century, American culture emphasized and encouraged people to worship. If you were to go back, for example, and watch American propaganda films from WWII, you will quickly pick up that Americans are a worshipping people; Americans went to church, temple, and mosque faithfully and freely. Worship played a key role in American society

then, and if a person did not worship somewhere he or she was accounted as odd.

But what is also clear about the early and middle 20th Century is that while Americans were a worshipping people, they were not a Christian people. Here in the First Commandment God makes clear that it is not enough that everyone worship "in his own way," but must worship the true and living God alone.

If you're reading this, you're probably not tempted to go and bow the knee to the Mohammedan god or the Hindu gods, but worshipping and serving other gods is just as much a temptation for us as it was for the Hebrews.

Examine yourself; what or who do you love most of all? What are your chief aspirations? Are you asking yourself when you face decisions, "what does God's Word say about this?"

Your thoughts, desires, and aspirations will give you key insights into whether you are worshipping and serving God alone or serving other gods of your own making.

Is Your Faith Good Enough or Strong Enough?

One of the rallying cries of the Reformation is, as you know, “Salvation by faith alone!” We have seen that over and over again this summer as we’ve considered the what the gospel is and why it matters. Whether we’ve been in the Old Testament or the New Testament, in the Gospels or the Epistles, we have consistently witnessed David or Jesus or the Apostle Paul calling us to put our faith in God through Christ so that we may be saved from the penalty of sin.

While he was working as a monk in the Augustinian Order of the Roman Catholic Church, Martin Luther encountered the Scripture’s call to faith, but the call to faith, the demand of faith frustrated and drove him to despair more rather than provided comfort and assurance. Under the Roman religious system, Luther had understood that we must contribute something, namely good works, to our salvation and relationship with God. Being a realist, Luther soon recognized that neither his faith nor the good deeds that he did were good enough, and he became utterly despondent.

In God’s providence and out of His grace, God blessed Luther’s study of the Scripture and opened his mind to understand that he had missed the gospel entirely. The Bible’s call to faith in Christ is the exact opposite of good works. **God does not save people because their faith is good enough or their faith is strong enough. God saves sinners through faith in His**

Son. When Luther studied Romans 3:21-26, he began to understand how the gospel worked. The gospel is a display of God’s righteousness in that He is faithful to His promise to save those who look to Him by faith.

Christianity, the gospel is not contingent upon whether a person’s faith is strong enough or good enough to save him or her. **A person is not saved because he or she has faith; a person is saved through faith. It is not the quality of a person’s faith that brings salvation, instead it is the object of that faith, the One in whom a person has faith: Christ.**

Just as Luther in the gloomy of the days before the Reformation, so many people in our self-centered and individualistic age stumble at this point and miss the gospel entirely. People assume that Christianity is all about them: centered on “their faith” or what they have done for God. Instead, the Bible teaches that the Christianity is all about God; it is God making known *His* grace, what *He* has done for sinners, and promoting *His* glory.

Christianity, the gospel, is the heavenly alternative to the worldly rat-race with its focus on us and lifts our eyes to God and who He is and what He has done for mankind in Christ. Saving faith freely embraces Christ’s work for sinners. True faith, no matter how feeble, will always grow and become stronger, but always looks to God in Christ and never to one’s own efforts. This is the gospel, the display of God’s undeserved kindness to us.

Sermon Snapshot: “God’s Discipline”

Last Lord’s Day we considered Psalm 32 together as we continue to ponder the questions “What is the Gospel?” and “Why does it matter.” In Psalm 32, we grappled with a little-discussed aspect of the Christian life: God’s discipline of His saints, His people. People often conceive of the Christian life as an upward climb consisting of one spiritual ecstasy after another, but sadly that is not the case in this life. Often, Christians receive God’s chastisement because of their sins rather than spiritual ecstasies because of their holiness.

David had gone through a period of life in which he freely engaged in sin openly and without remorse. He had taken another man’s wife, knocked her up, and then hid his fornication by having her husband killed so he could take her himself. David had succeeded in hiding his deeds from his countrymen and went on being king, but God had seen all that David had done.

David thought he could get away with it, but God had David’s eternal good in mind. God brought various circumstances into David’s life (e.g. sickness, depression, prophetic rebuke) to bring him to repentance and turn from his sinful living (cf. II Samuel 12, Ps. 32:3-4).

The sorrowful circumstances that God sent into David’s life, while painful and difficult, were actually

blessings and tokens of God’s love. God disciplined David so that he would indeed come to forsake sin, grow in holiness, and ultimately persevere in grace. Moreover, his circumstances were not punishments; God does not punish His people for their sins because He has punished them in Christ. David was brought to repentance and calls us all to forsake sin to serve God in holiness and be spared from such severe discipline.

The Apostle in Hebrews 12 reflects on God’s discipline of his saints, **“It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline...then you are illegitimate children and not sons.”** God’s discipline, chastisement in the lives of His saints is a sign of His love for them and His fatherly care and concern for them.

Through that experience, David’s faith was strengthened and he learned more of God’s gracious commitment to His people. We also benefit from his testimony, learning how God cares for the souls of His people, even when we don’t give a care for them at all.

In the gospel, God has shown His care for sinners both to save them from sin and to ensure they persevere in the faith because of His grace and kindness.