

FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, SEPT. 19, 2014



UPCOMING EVENTS:

Sept. 21, 9 a.m.

Sunday School in the Pastor's Study: Exodus 26-27, "The Priestly Garments"

Sept. 21, 10 a.m.

Morning Worship: Gal. 1:6-10, "Paul: Dogmatic for the Gospel"

Sept. 21, 4:00 pm

Sunday Night Study: Psalm 2 @ FPCW

Sept. 25, 5:15 pm

Midweek Bible Study, "Christ the Mediator (Part III)"

From the Pastor's Pen...

2014 is a remarkable milestone for this congregation of God's people here in Winona. On Jan. 11, 1914 the present church building was completed and the first services were held in it on that Lord's Day. This year marks a century of worship in this building.

In remembrance of that and to mark this milestone, we will have a special service of worship and thanksgiving on Nov. 2 followed by a lunch hosted by the WIC. God has been faithful to this congregation since her organization in 1838 and the centennial of our current building provides us with the opportunity to reflect on and give thanks for God's kindness to His people.

As we go through life, it's easy for us to get caught up in the moment. Even here in the South, where history is more

sensible to and present with us than elsewhere, we can often forget to reflect on the past and learn from God's dealings with our forefathers.

At various times, God told our Hebrew forefathers to erect stone pillars as monuments to serve as a reminder of what has done for his people in particular times of grace, so that they would not forget his works. We looked at one such instance in Sunday School at Exod. 24. Whenever an Israelite family would pass by those pillars, the children would have opportunity to ask their parents what those pillars meant. The parents would then tell the next generation of God's grace to the family of God's people of old.

As we reflect on 100 years in this building, let us not neglect to give God thanks and praise for all his kindness this past century.



Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

For the most part, the Catechism explains each of the Ten Commandments in terms of what is required and what is forbidden. Last week we looked at what the First Commandment requires and this week what it forbids:

Q47. What is forbidden in the first commandment?

A47. The first commandment forbiddeth the denying, or not worshiping and glorifying, the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to him alone.

The First Commandment, like all the others, encompasses a broad sphere of each person's life. The First Command establishes at the very outset that God *alone* is to be worshiped.

This command also means that we *must* worship God. Not infrequently you'll hear people claim to be a Christian but who do not attend the corporate, gathered worship of God's people. Such a position is entirely unbiblical; you

cannot be a Christian and reject worshipping with God's people (now of course there always going to be those who are *providentially* hindered from worshipping due to health, etc. but that is by far not the norm).

The author of Hebrews writes " **let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near**" (Heb. 10:24-25).

Even in the days of the apostles there were people in the church who thought they did not have to meet together for worship: "Pillowtop Presbyterians."

The apostles rebuked them for their sinful attitudes and focused them on the purpose of our worship: to glorify God and to strengthen each other as we await the return of the Saviour who has purchased our pardon and is preparing our eternal home for us even now.



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Looking for Growth?

This past Sunday evening we gathered to close the Lord's Day together and looked at the First Psalm. In Psalm One the Lord gives us two contrasting images: one of wickedness and destruction on the one hand and a second of righteousness and blessing on the other. The psalmist depicts the Christian, the one who is righteous by faith, as being preoccupied with the things of God. The psalmist conveys to us how the Christian lives, what he or she does and does not do.

The godly person does not keep company with, socialize with, or approve of that which is sinful and contrary to God's ways. Instead, the godly person is busy pursuing a particular pleasure: God's word: "...his delight is in the Law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night" (Psa. 1:2).

The Christian person does not simply refrain from sin out of fear of punishment or to avoid the social stigma associated with certain sins. Rather, the Christian is consumed with a love for God's word (and God Himself); he or she enjoys, delights, takes pleasure in knowing, studying, reading God's word.

The psalm goes on to describe the fruit of a life that is centered upon the word of God. The godly person is like a great tree "planted by streams of water" that endures great affliction and still bears good fruit. Likewise, such a person endures and perseveres in all circumstances because he or she is sustained by God's word that he or she has known and treasured through life.

Sermon Snapshot: "Obedient from the Heart"

As the summer is winding down, so is our summer sermon series. This week we again were in the book of Romans, 6:15-23. In that portion of Paul's epistle Paul is elaborating on how God has dealt with in Christ the guilt each of us has for our failure to obey God's Law. Paul has said that God saves by grace not because of works of the Law.

Such a great salvation, however, leads people to wonder, "does it matter how I live, since my living is not the basis of my standing before God." That is a superb question; it shows that a person has grasped the "first thing" of the gospel: it is entirely of grace through faith in Christ.

The second part of the question is vital to understanding the Christian life. If a person has truly been saved by grace, that person's life is transformed. The Bible speaks of a sinner being "born again" or the "new birth" (the theological term for this is *regeneration*) which enables (and compels) a person to *turn from sin* and *embrace righteous living* (the theological term for this is *repentance*). If you have been *born again*, you will live a life of increasing holiness.

It occurred to me that in the First Psalm we have a picture and a pattern of the kind of saints that we need to train and equip here at FPC. If this congregation is to endure for another century, we must—each of us—be committed to knowing and loving God's word. One of the reasons Israel, the Old Testament church, was carried off into exile and cut off from God was because the people did not love God's word; they did not take it seriously or treasure it. **Israel's history and God's dealings with them serve as a type, examples and a warnings, for us in the New Testament church not to follow in the ways of ways of wickedness, but the way of righteousness** (cf. I Cor. 10).

If we desire to see any growth here, we must be people of God's word, serious about it, and devoted to it in our daily living. This is no easy task; we must be praying that the Lord Christ will conform us to His own image and send His Spirit upon us to make us love and treasure His word. It is the Lord Jesus Christ who, after all, is the man who perfectly exemplifies love for God's word. He is the one who delighted Himself fully in the Word of God and by his faithfulness brings blessing to us.

When we study God's word, we are learning more of the Saviour about whom it speaks, and the more we know about Christ, the more reason we have to love Him. Pray with me that we will become more and more like the Man of Psalm One, that we will love God's word so much that nothing else satisfies except Him.

As with all the other inspired authors of the Scriptures, Paul explains that if a person is truly a Christian, he or she will be *characterized* by a genuine turning from sin and living in new obedience, holiness, and righteousness. This does not mean, however, that once a person becomes a Christian he or she will never sin again or slide back into a sin. Rather, the Christian will always be brought anew to repentance and obedience.



What is the gospel?
& why does it matter?

Join us!
Starting June 1
Sundays @ 10:00 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church
302 Summit Street | Winona, Miss.

Paul uses a remarkable little phrase to describe the Christian's response to God's grace in vs. 17: "*obedient from the heart.*" Christian obedience is not the fruit of someone "making" you do something, but rather the result of the Spirit of Christ working in and on the heart of one to whom God has shown His grace.

The truth, the reality of a person's faith is seen clearly in a person's life. The one who has come to know God's mercy in Christ will live a life that is centered on God's word in obedience, faithful in worshiping God with His people, earnestly seeking God's grace in the gospel every day. Where those things are missing it is a sign that such person knows neither God nor His grace to sinners.