

# FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, SEPT. 26, 2014

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Sept. 28, 9 a.m.**

Sunday School in  
the Pastor's Study:  
Exodus 28, "The  
Consecration of  
Priests"

**Sept. 28, 10 a.m.**

Morning Worship:  
James 2:14-26,  
"What kind of faith?"

**Sept. 28, 4:00 pm**

Sunday Night Study:  
Psalm 3 @ FPCW

**Oct. 1, 5:15 pm**

Midweek Bible  
Study, *What do Pres-  
byterians Believe:*  
"Free Will"



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## From the Pastor's Pen . . .

This week marked the official end of summer with the Autumnal Equinox on Sept. 23, and the weather has sure been cooperating with what Autumn *should* be like!

With the close of Summer comes the end of our "Summer Sermon Series," and before we begin a new long term series we'll spend a few weeks looking together at the nature of church and church membership before we dive in to a new long term series.

This Sunday we'll look at James 2:14-26 in which the apostle provides some profound comments on the nature of saving faith, and this passage will also serve as a segue from our consideration of the fundamentals of the gospel to the fundamentals of the church and Christian life.

James is writing to Hebrew Christians during the very early years of the church when persecution by Jews was strong and the church was scattered out of Palestine to the surrounding

regions. This scattering of the Christians was ordered by God's providence to further the gospel message to new people, but there were nonetheless hardships and new temptations for those who were dislocated. James is writing to correct some of problematic situations that the Church encountered then (as well as now).

In Chapter 2, James writes about the *kind* of faith that true Christians have. Faith is very important in everyone's life. Every single person has faith; faith that the gas you put into your truck is not diluted with kerosene, that the liquid in the hydrogen peroxide bottle is actually H<sub>2</sub>O<sub>2</sub> and not HCl (hydrochloric acid), that your paycheck will not bounce, and so on.

Since all people have faith of one kind or another, **James illustrates what Christian, what saving faith looks like.** Saving faith is not seen in bare knowledge of God or Christ, but is seen in transformed lives characterized by holiness.

## Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

The Catechism includes a third question on the First Commandment to help us better understand how comprehensive the First Word is:

*Q48. What are we specially taught by these words "before me" in the first commandment?*

**A48. These words "before me" in the first commandment teach us, that God, who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God.**

This command confronts us all with the reality, the truth that God is present everywhere, He sees and knows all things. It might be easy for us to think that this command means that when we are at church (or in its original context, at the meeting place of God), we ought not worship other gods, but since God is everywhere, this command is a lot more comprehensive! We are always before God's presence.

This truth hits home, quite literally, for us because often we think we can do what we want

in the privacy of our own home or on our own time. But the Bible tells us that God will require all people to give an account of *everything* they have said, done, and thought.

It is sadly amusing how sometimes people will get to talking and then start swearing, then look and say, "Oh, I shouldn't swear in front of the preacher" or "I forgot not to swear in church" as if being in certain company or at church made a bit of difference at all.

The truth is, a person might be able to shape up his or her life for an hour once a week, but we are no less accountable for the other 167 hours than for an hour that a person might spend in worship.

God knows all the evil in our lives; we can hide no secrets from God, and He knows us better than we know ourselves. When we understand this aspect of the First Command, it shows all the more clearly our need for repentance and for God's grace offered in Christ.

# The Altar of God

In Sunday School we are spending several weeks looking at the worship of the Old Covenant Church. Under the Old Covenant, the people of God worshiped very differently from today. God gave very specific and detailed instructions for how the church was to come to Him. Old Covenant worship took place in the Tent of Meeting (called the *Tabernacle*) and later in the Temple. It consisted of priests, candles, a table with bread, basins for washing, incense, and altars. All of those things were to prepare the people for the coming of the Messiah; they were *types* for Christ or foreshadows of Him and His work on earth.

The Old Covenant worship centered around the priestly activities at the altar. The altars existed for one purpose and one purpose only: enabling the people to approach God, to be in fellowship with God. When a person entered the tabernacle compound, he was immediately confronted by the Bronze Altar.

The Bronze Altar was where the priests would offer sacrifices on behalf of the people. In order for people to be in fellowship, have a relationship with God, there must be sacrifice for sin. Hebrews 9:22 reminds us, commenting on the Old Testament worship, **“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”**

The whole of the Old Covenant worship was patterned after the heavenly worship. We’ve seen a number of times over the last month - as God gives Moses the designs for the Tabernacle, its furniture, worship, and priesthood - God tells Moses that what Israel is doing is simply a *copy* of the

Heavenly Temple and worship. The furniture and priesthood, even the Tabernacle itself, were simply duplicates and symbolic representations of the heavenly ones. Hebrews 9:24 says, **“Christ has entered not into the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.”**

All of the Old Covenant worship was a mere *copy* (to teach the people about God and His coming Messiah) of what went on in heaven when Christ made the one true and final sacrifice for sin on the Altar of Heaven: **“When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God...for by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified”** (Heb. 10:12-14). The whole Tabernacle/Temple system was to prepare the people for the coming of Christ and to teach them about His work for sinners.

Since Christ has come and offered His sacrifice of Himself, fulfilling the Old Covenant, there is no need to return to the Old Covenant ways of worship. As such, our church has no altar; an altar exists for sacrifices to be made to bring or restore people to God. Christ has offered that *one sacrifice*. Now, under the New Covenant, we do not need to come through a priest and complex rites designed to prepare the people for the Messiah, but instead we can go boldly in Christ to the very, the true Altar of God in Heaven where Christ made His sacrifice and there make our prayers to God in the Holy of Holies.

## Sermon Snapshot: “Spiritual Vigilance”

This past Lord’s Day we ended our Summer Sermon Series together with Galatians 1:6-10. This summer we’ve been considering the basic, fundamental truths and issues of *what the gospel is* as well as why those truths matter.

The Apostle Paul in Galatians is writing to a church that is on the verge of apostasy; they are embracing another ideology that closely resembled the gospel, but was *not* the gospel. This competing religion asserted that while the ministry of Christ in His death is important, in order to be a Christian one must *not only* put faith in Christ, but *also* obey and follow the ceremonies and rites associated with the Law of Moses. It was not salvation by grace alone through faith alone, but salvation by grace through faith *plus* works that we do, ceremonies in which we participate.

This theology was entirely the opposite of the true gospel, of Christianity because it is not centered on God’s grace to us in Christ, but rather focused upon what we do and how well we do it. Such religions are as common today as they were then and just are eternally deadly.

The Galatians made marvelous progress in the gospel when Paul first proclaimed it to them. They saw their need

of God’s grace and came to Christ in faith, but when Paul left they became lazy and complacent, they got “caught up” in some new teaching that threatened their faith in God and put them in eternal peril.

This history of the church at Galatia is a warning for us today. Paul wrote to them to remind them of the fundamental truths of the gospel and call them back to faith in Christ. .

Instead of being spiritually lazy like the Galatians, we at First Presbyterian Church must be zealous in our own study and examination of God’s word. We must be testing all ideas by what we find in God’s word. A church that does not prize the scripture, that not know the Bible will not be a growing church, but a dying church.

If we desire this congregation to minister here for another century, we must recommit ourselves to studying and submitting to God’s Word. We must know the doctrines of the faith, talk about them to each other and our friends and family, and be on guard against error. The Church is Christ’s Kingdom and means of proclaiming salvation to the world. When a congregation does not understand what it is to proclaim, she cannot grow and she begins to die.



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.