



# FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, JAN. 9, 2014

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Jan. 11, 9 a.m.**

Sunday School:  
Num. 11.31-12.16,  
"Quail, Plague, Big-  
otry, Envy, Disease"

**Jan. 11, 10 a.m.**

Morning Worship:  
Mark 1.9-13, "God  
with us: Immanuel"

**Jan. 11, 4 p.m.**

Sunday Night Study:  
Psalm 12, "Spin Doc-  
tors"

**Jan. 14, 5:15 p.m.**

Wednesday Night  
Bible Study, "The  
Law of God"



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## From the Pastor's Pen...

We are living in a godless time. That should not surprise us. The world has been in rebellion against God for 6,000 years. Perhaps it isn't always as overt a rebellion as we see today, but the rebellion is nothing new.

In recent weeks we have seen Western Societies scandalized by vigilante terrorists with police being murdered on the streets and Mohammedan extremists machine-gunning magazine employees over a cartoon! We live in a society in which decency, respect, and authority are fast being undermined and good is called evil and evil is called good. But this is nothing new at all.

The prophet Isaiah, writing more than six centuries before Christ, said in response to what was happening in his own time, "woe to those who call evil good and good evil..." (Isa. 5.20).

The Apostle Paul, writing nearly 2000 years ago, exhorted the church to stand firm "as lights in the world"... "in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation" (Phil 2.14).

It may seem that things are getting terribly bad now, but things are no worse now than they were 2000 years ago or 70 years ago. After all, 70 years ago, you could be sent to Auschwitz for believing the gospel!

In such times as ours, we must as a church and as individual Christians hold firm to the promises of God in His Word. If we are valuing anything of this world (possessions, stability, position, respectability) too much, it will be impossible for us to stand in the evil day.

Instead, what we as Christians must do is fix our eyes on heaven, we must prize our citizenship in the heavenly Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ will come again and *He alone* will set things right. We may not have life as easy here as some of our forbearers on this continent, but that makes it easier to long for heaven.

When we are at ease in this life, we often forget about God; but when trouble and affliction come, often the only thing we have is Christ.

## Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

After several weeks in the Second Commandment, we now come to the Third. The Second Commandment set out God's zeal and concern about His worship, here the Third Commandment makes known God's zeal and concern for His own Holy Name.

Q53. Which is the third commandment?

A53. The third commandment is, "**Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.**"

We can see that there is a logical flow to the commandments so far. The First Commandment tells us *whom* we are to worship; the Second Commandment tells us *how* we are to worship; the Third Commandment deals with our *attitude* toward the One whom we worship.

It is certainly possible, and likely is very common for people, groups of people, congregations of people to be worshiping the right God in a way that is in accordance with His word, and yet

have entirely the wrong attitude about God. Much of the Old Testament prophets' writings were concerned with this very issue.

In Amos 5, the prophet speaks to people who are worshiping properly, according to God's commands, yet God says: "**I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.**" Why did God say this about the people whom He created to worship and glorify Him? God declares this because they show they do not care about Him by their lives.

God is not like a copy machine that simply wants things properly calibrated and inserted into the right slot or it will explode. God not only wants us to worship and come to Him in His way, but He also wants our affections.

The copy machine in my study doesn't care how I feel about it, but as long as I put the right kind of paper in properly, it will work. God, by contrast wants us to love Him above all things and therefore live for His glory in obedience.

# Love constraining to obedience

In the 18th century, poet and friend of John Newton, William Cowper composed many of our favorite hymns, such as “Thee is a Fountain Filled with Blood” and “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.” He also wrote a poem known as “Love Constraining to Obedience:”

No strength of nature can suffice  
To serve the Lord aright;  
And what she has she misapplies,  
For want of clearer light.  
How long beneath the law I lay  
In bondage and distress;  
I toll'd the precept to obey,  
But toil'd without success.  
Then, to abstain from outward sin  
Was more than I could do;  
Now, if I feel its power within,  
I feel I hate it too.  
Then all my servile works were done  
A righteousness to raise;  
Now, freely chosen in the Son,  
I freely choose His ways.  
"What shall I do," was then the word,  
"That I may worthier grow?"  
"What shall I render to the Lord?"  
Is my inquiry now.  
To see the law by Christ fulfilled  
And hear His pardoning voice,  
Changes a slave into a child,  
And duty into choice.

In his poem, Cowper meditates on the truth that by nature, we cannot do what God commands, it's impossible. In fact, what knowledge we have of God by nature, we “misapply” as he writes; we twist it and make it simply a drudgery and bondage and come to hate it.

But, as Cowper elegantly describes in his poem, once a man or woman who is by nature, by birth a sinner is “freely chosen in the son” and made new by the transforming grace and Spirit of Christ his or her affections, desires, heart, and nature are radically changed.

The Christian is, because of God's Spirit at work within, enabled and enlightened so that he or she can now love God because the Christian sees the love of God displayed in Christ: **“To see the law by Christ fulfilled / And hear His pardoning voice, / changes a slave into a child / And duty into choice.”** That beautiful final stanza is a profound summary of what happens to us when God saves us: we have new affections, new desires, and new attitudes about everything, which leads to freely choosing holiness.

Whereas when we were unconverted, one may have looked at the things of God as simply a “duty,” and done because we “have to” to get to heaven, but once we have been saved come know God's pardoning grace and kindness, it becomes a free choice, something we *desire* to do.

As a Christian grows in holiness, he or she comes more and more to obey God not out of fear or duty, but out of love. That is the tremendous and mighty power of God's grace to us in Christ. It changes our whole being: mind, will, and affections so that we can truly live for Him.

## Sermon Snapshot: “The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son”

We began our new series in the Gospel of Mark this past Lord's Day. Mark's Gospel is the shortest and conveys a sense of continuous, rapid movement toward the cross. In spite of the Gospel's brevity, Mark spends the first eight verses not telling us what Jesus did and taught, but rather about the cousin of Jesus, John the Baptizer.

In Mark 1.1-8, which we looked at Sunday, the Baptist is proclaiming the end of the Old Covenant era and dawn of a new era in the history of mankind and in the relationship between God and Men.

John calls the people to prepare for this new era by repenting and coming to God for the forgiveness of sins. They were to acknowledge and show their repentance and need for cleansing by coming out for baptism by John.

Baptism was fairly common in the Old Testament. Israel is said to have been baptized into Moses at the Red Sea and at Mount Sinai. But in John's day, baptisms of Jews were very uncommon; Baptism was something that was done to furniture to make it ceremonial pure

or to Gentiles to purify them of their *goyim* ways. Jews had no need of baptism because they were racially pure.

The arrogant attitude of the Jews warns us on the one hand against any kind of attitude of racial superiority or the idea of any “racial purity” at all (after all, Jesus and King David came from a line which included inter-racial marriage). On the other hand, John's call to baptism shows that the people's sins defiled them and separated them from God.

Repentance will be a key theme in Mark over the coming weeks. Mark is pressing home to us in his opening few sentences that to receive the gospel, to receive Christ, we need a radical transformation of lifestyle and affections as well as purification from the defilement and salvation from the punishment of sin.

The first chapter presents Jesus as the Son of God who will stand in the midst of His people's defilement and make them clean, offering mercy to *all* who seek Him by faith. He does for man what man could not do, because He is not simply man, but also **God with us**.

