



# FIRST PRESS

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FRIDAY, FEB. 13, 2015

## UPCOMING EVENTS:

**Feb. 15, 9 a.m.**

Sunday School:  
Num. 20, "And you  
thought you had a  
bad week!"

**Feb. 15, 10 a.m.**

Morning Worship:  
Mark 1.40-45, "The  
King's Compassion"

**Feb. 15, 4:00 p.m.**

Sunday Night Study,  
Psalm 14, "From Fool  
to Fortress"

**Feb. 18, 5:15 p.m.**

Wednesday Night  
Bible Study,  
"Marriage & Divorce"

## From the Pastor's Pen...

On Wednesday nights for about a year now, we have been slowly working our way through the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF).

The WCF was adopted by the Presbyterian Church in Scotland in 1647, though it was written by English Episcopalians, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians. Ever since then the WCF has been the primary summary of how Presbyterians understand the Bible's teachings.

The WCF not only summarizes the Bible's teaching on who God is and how to be saved, but also how to daily live as God's people. Sometimes we are tempted to think that the Bible teaches us how to "get saved" and how to worship God, but doesn't offer much guidance for daily living and so we're free to figure all that out by ourselves.

Far from being a book only concerned with spiritual and heavenly matters, the Bible presents a comprehensive world and life view. God - through His prophets - fleshes out and de-

clares the implications of His gospel and reign for our daily living. We are not free to have opinions or ideas that are not compatible with or drawn from the Word of God.

In fact, to be a faithful Christian, you have a moral duty to check all of your ideas and opinions to see if they are compatible with the teaching of Scripture. The Westminster Confession provides a helpful summary of Scripture's teaching on such areas as marriage, family life, government, and other areas.

I hope you will consider making our Wednesday Bible Study a priority as we all learn better what it means to be Presbyterian. ***If we ever want people to join with us in worship, you must know what we believe.*** How else will you be able to convince someone to worship with us? Presbyterianism has always had a very distinctive spirituality. Could you faithfully articulate it to a friend with questions? That is essential to our continuing as a congregation.

## Westminster Shorter Catechism Meditation

We are now considering the third commandment, which concerns our use of God's Holy Name. Since God's Names reveal His character and nature, the third command is much broader in scope than we might otherwise think.

Q55. *What is forbidden in the 3rd Command?*

**A55. The third commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing of anything whereby God maketh himself known.**

When we think of *profane* today, we tend to think of foul language and things like that. But the word has a wider meaning than just that. To profane is simply to make something common, or treat it as ordinary. This command expressly forbids us from treating God - or anything that reveals God - as common or ordinary.

God, after all, is perfectly holy, entirely set apart and *other* or *different* from His Creatures. Because of who and what God is, it is common sense that we treat Him as Holy and special; honoring Him and how He reveals himself.

Our culture and our sinful nature tend to make little and make light of God, to refer to Him as "the Man upstairs" or "the Big Guy," which shows brazen disrespect toward the Creator and Governor of All.

Instead, we should remember that when we speak of God, He is always present; when we speak to God, we come to our Father *and* our King; when we consider the Bible, we consider not human opinions or private interpretations, but the Word and Revealed Will of God.

When we pause and reflect on the holiness of God, how entirely *other* and *independent* He is, the incarnation of Christ becomes all the more mind-blowing and remarkable. In the incarnation, God took to Himself a created body and flesh and became man so that He could dwell among His creatures. God didn't need to take a body to dwell among us, but He did need to do so in order to save us from our sins and redeem us to live lives that honor and serve Him.

# On the Government

Benjamin Franklin, Mark Twain, and others are often quoted as saying “nothing is certain except for death and taxes.” The humorist Roy Rogers said, “The only difference between death and taxes is that death doesn’t get worse every time Congress meets.” Support for the government in this country is at all-time lows. In fact, at a recent presidential debate, there seemed to be a spitting contest over who planned to eliminate the most Federal Departments.

As Southerners, when we think of Government, we are innately suspicious and almost instinctively cringe at the thought. That no doubt says something about our shared history and experience with government.

Far too often, we as Christians fail to consider Government is an institution created by God for the good of mankind. At the Creation of the World, God ordained a number of institutions: marriage, the family, work, the Sabbath, and the church. After humanity’s fall into sin, God instituted government to be a check on the wickedness of man.

Whatever our own personal feelings about a government or the policies of the government in this country, we must remember that God has instituted every government and given the government its authority. Jesus through Paul, writing of the wicked and pagan Imperial Roman government, commands Christians: **“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment”** (Rom. 13.1-2).

The Bible clearly teaches that Christians are to submit to secular (even pagan) authorities because God is sovereign even over them. When we turn on the cable news-fear-monger-for-profit-networks, our disposition can quickly turn to disrespect and contempt for the government. The government may indeed be in rebellion against God and enact statutes that violate God’s natural law, but that doesn’t give Christians the right to shirk government authority. Remember that Paul wrote those words about a government that waged war for the purpose of conquest and subjugation, endorsed prostitution and other immorality, and actively persecuted religious minorities.

Not only does God command that we are to submit to the government because its authority, but Christians are to honor and give respect the *person* of the ruler *for the sake of his office*: **“Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed”** (Rom. 13.7).

This does not mean that Christians are to yield blind obedience to the government at all. When the government compels or forces you *personally* to sin, it is your duty to refuse and resist, knowing that you may be punished. The Apostles in Acts 4 are commanded to stop speaking about Christ, but they refused saying they must obey God rather than men. Though persecuted, God blessed the church there for her faithfulness. The fact that many Christians don’t like the government is nothing new, but gives us the opportunity to be a faithful witness to an unfaithful nation.

## Sermon Snapshot: “The Mission of Jesus”

Mark’s first chapter is truly packed of full rich details that form the foundation for Christian piety and spirituality. We’ve already considered Mark’s concise and succinct summary of Jesus’ teaching and preaching at 1.15: **“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”** With that we learn of the centrality of repentance and faith to the gospel and the Kingdom.

This past Lord’s Day we witnessed Jesus declare to Peter and the disciples with him his exact mission and purpose in the years leading up to the crucifixion in 1.38: **Jesus’ ministry was primarily concerned with preaching and teaching.** All that Jesus did was aimed at supporting, verifying, or validating the message that He preached.

In order to understand Jesus rightly, you have to understand His mission (preaching) and His message (repent and believe). When we look around us in the 21st Century, we see so many religious communities that have abandoned the mission and/or message of Jesus for something they view as better, more attractive, or easier to stomach.

Many religious people emphasize the healings and feedings that Jesus miraculously accomplished and argue that the church provide social and medical services. But the healings and feedings of Jesus were not His primary concern. That is why instead of starting hospitals, the PCA focuses on planting churches and preaching the gospel.

Jesus came to confront sinful people with God’s message of salvation. God is righteous and He will punish sinners, He will restore perfection to His creation, and in Christ He has made a way for sinners to come back to Him, to be reconciled to Him, and to know the joy and love of God.

Christ’s preaching wasn’t popular; it got Him killed! Moreover, Christ expresses His frustration that many of those who are following Him do so only because He gave them a good meal (Jn. 6). Yet the message of repentance and faith in the good news of God is the only way a person can come to God with hope of eternal blessing. Have you embraced Jesus as He is offered in the gospel or are you only interested in what Jesus or the church can do for you?

*The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel*



First Presbyterian Church | Starting Jan. 4 | Sundays 10 a.m.