TODAY'S ORDER OF WORSHIP

Welcome by: Daniel Balch / Opening Prayer by: Don Taylor
Morning Assembly Song Leader: Danny Balch

#535 The Glory-Land Way
#508 A Wonderful Savior

Scripture Reading by: Rock Cary
#381 Years I Spent in Vanity

Communion Devotional by: Jerry Mallernee
Lord's Supper and Contribution

#538 My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less
Sermon: "Hospitality and Fellowship"
1 Peter 4:8-11

#902 Nothing But the Blood
#634 We'll Work Till Jesus Comes
Closing Prayer by: David Smith

All small groups will meet tonight at 5:00 p.m. in the fellowship room.

Other Opportunities For Spiritual Growth

Sunday: 9:00am — Bible Study Classes, 10:00am — Worship, 5:00pm — Worship
Wednesday: 6:30pm — Bible Study Classes

Sept. 1, 2024

"Stand Firm in…Liberty"

Galatians 5:1

Fear-Based Discipleship in the Churches of Christ

I have written and preached on this topic more than once since I have been here. But this article by Jack Wilkie, published this week, was so on point I wanted you to read it too. It's length barely allows it to fit here, but it is worth your attention. As always, I encourage you to check out his substack, "Church Reset." BP

"I just hope I've done enough to get in to heaven."

Every time I hear an older Christian in failing health say that, my heart hurts to think about how badly misled they've been. To be fair, I don't think anyone explicitly teaches that there's a certain amount you have to do to get into heaven. But you can forgive these misguided but sincere-hearted Christians for making that their takeaway from the graceless, works-based teaching they've heard their entire lives.

The churches of Christ have a long-running problem of fear-based discipleship. This is not unique to us in the churches of Christ, but it is at least as common among us as it is in any other group. So many Christians are walking on eggshells, worried that every sin takes them out of salvation until they pray for forgiveness again—like reaching a save point on a video game.

Others grow exasperated by realizing they'll never be good enough and end up walking away from the faith. Still others see the flaws in a grace-free system and swing all the way to the other end of the spectrum, believing in an "anything goes" Christianity.

I can't blame anyone for wearing out under the burden of trying to save themselves. But Jesus' yoke is easy (**Matt 11:28-30).** If the burden Christians feel Christ places on them is too much to bear, we must have misunderstood something.

It's a misunderstanding of faith and works. Every human is a legalist at heart. That's why every man-made religion comes with a list of meritorious works that must be done to earn good standing. Because it's so natural to us, we are constantly pulled to incorporate the same approach into our Christianity.

But Christianity doesn't work this way. Yes, there are good works to be done (**Eph 2:10**) but they come after *you have been saved by grace through faith, and not of yourselves* (**2:8-9**). In other words, every other religion puts the cart before the horse, but Christianity sets things right. We do good because God loves us, not so that He will love us.

In our legalistic hearts we misunderstand this, and so we go looking for "the list." "The list" consists of all the dos and don'ts one must follow to be saved. We approach God with the same mindset the rich young ruler brought: "What do I have to do?" Naturally, we then think our salvation depends on our ability to 1) know the list and 2) keep it with perfect precision. So, you end up with church members who think they are going to be saved because they believe in "water baptism" and don't use "mechanical instruments of worship" and have all their other doctrinal i's dotted and t's crossed.

Family News & Notes

WHAT'S HAPPENING WITH YOUR CHURCH FAMILY

Our Sick

Rickey Lucas is having pain throughout his body. The Dr. will be trying some form of blocker to reduce/control his pain.

Linda Frank was San Jacinto Methodist Hospital.

Leah Smith had back surgery last week.

Continued Prayers
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Steve Ward, Caitlin Smith, Virginia Cole, Ken Coleman, Joe Edd Stifflemire, Donna Wilson, Jo Ella McKewen, Oscar Cantu, Jennifer Stelly, Dr. Hugo Thomas, Veronica Valant, Steve Ward, Geri Cryer, Gloria McKelroy, Yalonda Jackson, Cassandra

Shut Ins
(Need cards, phone calls & visits)

Jim Smith, Winona Angelle, Catherine Parker, Peggy McIntosh, Lois Watts, Willo Dean Ellis

Our Missionaries

Aaron & Marisa Bailey in Montepuez, Mozambique , Rod Kyle in the South Pacific, Mani Pagidopali in India

Upcoming Activities

No Elders, Minister meeting this week.

We will have a Houston Food Bank truck on Tuesday, Sept. 3rd at 8:-00 a.m.

We will be having a blood drive on Monday, Sept. 9th from 4-8 p.m. in the fellowship room.

Small Groups

We will have a fish fry on Sunday evening, Sept. 1st. For more information, see Danny Balch

Our small group program will resume on Sunday, September 8. If you would like to join for the first time, a signup sheet is on the bulletin board.

Special Contribution

On August 2, 2024, our missionary in India, Mani Pagidipalli, notified us of a catastrophic natural disaster. A very active monsoon season brought flash flooding and mudslides. There was great loss of life, including within the congregation; hundreds more are missing. The elders sent $1500 on behalf of the church above and beyond our regular monthly support to his sponsoring congregation for disaster recovery, but we thought some of you might wish to help directly as well. This Sunday, we will have a second contribution for those who wish to do so. All funds will be sent to Mani Pagidipalli's supporting congregation for recovery efforts.

But what about if they're wrong about a doctrinal detail somewhere? If being right is why they're saved, what if, in their ignorance, they accidentally do something wrong? **Matthew 7:2** says that your standard of judgment will be what is used against you. If your standard gives no room for any misunderstandings, you had better not have any yourself.

Further, there is no room for subjectivity whatsoever. Christians can't agree to disagree on anything—every issue has to be categorized as "on the list" or "not on the list." If it's not on the list, we don't need to talk about it, no matter how much the Bible guides our thinking on the issue. But, if it's determined that it is on the list, anybody who disagrees is hell-bound, and if they disagree publicly they're a false teacher. It does not help that so much of "the list" is constructed by preachers stapling together 56 tangentially-related prooftexts to declare "it's obvious to anyone with an honest heart!" This makes the average member feel even more inadequate to attempt to read the Bible and know what God wants from them.

As always, works-based legalism pushes people in one of two directions. Some become filled with pride, because they have the definitive list and are keeping it perfectly. Others have the humility to realize they'll never keep a list perfectly, and thus are filled with fear and despair. But Jesus didn't come to fill us with pride in our goodness, or to make us hopeless in our helplessness.

Thus, it's also a misunderstanding of grace. Contrary to what some teach, grace is not a free pass to stop caring about doctrine. But an overcorrection to that results in grace covering essentially nothing. To those who are Christians (and the 7 one's in **Ephesians 4** give us a pretty good working definition), we are locked into a commitment to obey. But God knew that obedience wouldn't be perfect. **1 John 1:7-10** tells us we're going to sin, but our sins will also be forgiven. And if there is grace to cover our sins, how much more is there for genuine misunderstandings? Jesus did not leave heaven, take on human flesh, suffer through a difficult life, and be put through a torturous death for the Father to be a petty judge, looking to catch everybody on technicalities.

The misunderstanding of the Holy Spirit I discussed in my previous article, that the Spirit only works in us as we read and strive to obey the Word, adds to this graceless fear. It's as if God handed us life's handbook and wished us luck in trying to keep it well enough to pass the test at heaven's gate. But the Spirit within is our seal, an assurance that His grace remains with us even when we stumble. He didn't just buy us a ticket to eternal life. He's helping us get there, if we'll let Him (**Gal 6:7-8**).

We can be petrified to talk about being saved by faith, and emphasizing the importance of grace, lest anyone take it too far and not obey. Some might see an article about faith and grace such as this one and think I'm saying Jesus doesn't care about your obedience.

Nonsense. The point is, when rightly taught, faith and grace maximize our obedience. People operating by "the list" eliminate the need for the kind of discernment that comes with maturity (**Heb 5:11-6:3**). When you grow past seeing Christianity as a checklist, your obedience and pursuit of God can reach a whole new level. Now you can do things to serve God not merely because they are commands you have to keep or you'll go to hell, but because they are Biblical principles that you believe will draw you closer to Him.

Fear may start us out, but it's faith in God's goodness that sustains us in our pursuit of Him (**Heb 11:6**). And as grace gives us relief from the attempt to save ourselves (**Eph 2:8),** we can obey with greater peace, joy, and confidence. It's not all on my shoulders to perfectly keep "the list." Unless you turn your back on Him (**Heb 11:26ff**), your sins of commission, omission, and ignorance were all nailed to the cross of Christ and you bear them no more.

"And now that you don't have to be perfect, you can be good." - John Steinbeck