

The Mustard Seed

News, Thoughts & Teaching from
First Presbyterian Church, Opelika (EPC)

January 2010

Dear Church Family,

Happy New Year! Among the things that I am eagerly anticipating this year is the continuation of our study of Paul's letter to the Romans. In recent weeks we have turned a corner in the letter, and we find ourselves now in the midst of some of the most freeing, joy-producing, faithfulness-evoking words of the whole Bible. We'll be spending months in these chapters - dissecting, learning and trying to apply the truth of Christ's righteousness given to us through faith once and for all, or, justification.

Surely this will be of benefit to us. As we have said, we live in a culture of secular humanism, where the motto is *I can do whatever I want*. Whether we agree with that motto or not, it is an attitude that rubs off on us (have you looked at the opening lines to the Auburn creed lately?). So we do well to be pulled back to the freedom and the joy and the faithfulness that arise out of the doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

I don't know how much Curious George you read, but the good news is that if you have read one book, you have pretty much read them all. Here is the basic plot line: George gets curious and does something that he is not supposed to do. As a result, he causes a ruckus that gets someone mad at him. But then, George will do something so nice and helpful that the person who was mad at him is now thankful and appreciative for him. And all ends well.

David spoke this week about a *Santa Claus is Coming to Town* theology (he knows if you've been bad or good so be good for goodness sake). I would say that we often fall to a *Curious George* theology as well - life is about doing good things for God to make up for the mess we made.

In a culture of secular humanism, where Santa Claus and Curious George theology are passed as the norm, these chapters of Romans are counter-cultural - 2000 years ago and today they challenge the norms. As these doctrines get a hold of us, I pray that FPC would be counter-cultural as well. This will happen as we proclaim the gospel of God declaring sinners to be credited with Christ's righteousness, and as we live with the joy and freedom that flows from that glorious doctrine. May the Lord work through his Word to bring about that counter-cultural witness through his Church.

Scott



Bread for the Way

The 1st selection this month is from the blog of Thabite Anyabwile, who is a pastor and a regular contributor of the Gospel Coalition (www.thegospelcoalition.org). You're invited to think about how this understanding of motives fits in with the doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

Joel Beeke in [365 Days with Calvin](#) selects this comment from Calvin:

The opposite sin in rebuking one who has fallen is excessive harshness.

Hypocrites often use this kind of rebuke, for when they see a speck in their neighbor's eye, they cry out in alarm, yet they have a large beam in their own eye that they do nothing about, as our Lord Jesus says (Matt. 7:4). Since many people enlarge their consciences to swallow an entire camel yet strain at a gnat when it comes to the faults of others, we must guard against being too harsh or too severe when we reprove others. It seems to some that they are only correctly doing their duty if they loudly sound the trumpet when another person falls. (Pharisee.)

How many cautionary words today spring from righteous concern? If a person sees his neighbor doing evil, he should, if he has an opening and an opportunity, show him his fault, yet we see nothing of this! For if each one spies on his friends and listens as he keeps watch to see if he can find anything to reprove, then he will be severe in the extreme. (Pharisee)

However, those who are severely dealt with in this way certainly cannot complain. After all, why else has evil become so prevalent in today's society? Indeed, few people are admonished in private anymore to bring them back to God; rather, the sins that were hidden are slanderously published abroad.

Why? We cannot bear to hear the truth about ourselves. We want to cleave to our sins, as if no one has any authority or jurisdiction over us. True community cannot exist among us without such mutual correction, in which we all willingly submit to one another.

This morning, I'm headed to the Lord's true community, the church of saints called [FPC], to have the log removed from my own Pharisaical eyes by the preaching of the word and to then show some corrected-vision-concern for the brethren. To be restored and to restore. To be reprovved and to reprove. To be a genuine part of the community of the redeemed.

Why are you going to church this morning?

This 2nd selection is the *Year's End* prayer from *The Valley of Vision* (in the library).

O Love beyond compare, Thou art good when thou givest, when thou takest away, when the sun shines upon me, when night gathers over me. Thou hast loved me before the foundation of the world, and in love didst redeem my soul. Thou dost love me still, in spite of my hard heart, ingratitude, distrust.

Thy goodness has been with me during another year, leading me through a twisting wilderness, in retreat helping me to advance, when beaten back making sure headway. Thy goodness will be with me in the year ahead; I hoist sail and draw up anchor, with thee as the blessed pilot of my future as of my past. I bless thee that thou hast veiled my eyes to the waters ahead. If thou hast appointed storms of tribulation, thou wilt be with me in them. If I have to pass through tempests of persecution and temptation, I shall not drown. If I am to die, I shall see thy face sooner; If a painful end is to be my lot, grant me the grace that my faith fail not; If I am to be cast aside from the service I love, I can make no stipulation; Only glorify thyself in me whether in comfort or trial, as a chosen vessel meet me always for thy use.

2 Adult Discipleship Studies begin in January

Let the Book Speak begins January 3rd

Honoring the authority of Scripture means not only that we read the Bible, but that we read the Bible on God's terms, not our own. Part *How to Study the Bible* and part *Bible Study*, this 10 week class will survey a variety of steps to aid in your personal study of the Bible. Each week we'll look at 1 step by applying that step to a particular passage of the Bible.

Studies run from 9:30-10:15
Snacks/fellowship from 10:15-10:45

The Flower That Changed the World

For college/grad students;
begins Sunday, Jan. 17

TULIP is an acronym used to describe the 5 points of Calvinism. We'll spend 8 weeks looking together at these tenets of Reformed theology such as unconditional election, limited atonement and perseverance of the saints. The dual emphasis will be on understanding the doctrines & their application in all areas of life.

Tea with Jacky



Ladies, mark your calendars!

Women in Ministry will be hosting a winter tea party **Saturday, February 6th**. Our guest speaker will be Jacky Gatliff, director of the national EPC Women In Ministry.

Look for sign-up and details soon!

God's Story → Your Story → Practice

Theology

Connect

Church

People → People → Community

Wednesdays

Phase 1: Theology to Practice
God is The Evangelist. What does that mean for you? For your relationships? For your life in your neighborhood or workplace or classroom?
Phase 1 of our **Connect** 'project' will be to get us thinking intentionally about these issues.
Begins January 13th.

Officers Training: Sunday, January 10th, 5:00 PM
Westminster exceptions due at this time

Officers Meetings: Sunday, January 17th,
4:00 (deacons) & 6:00 (elders)

Ordination & Installation of Officers:
Sunday, January 17th during worship



Home Groups will
return in February.



A Good Read — A space to be turned on to instructive, edifying books for your own growth...all of which can be found in your church library.

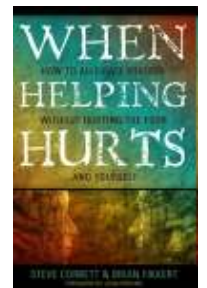
Small Things, Big Things by Michael Milton

Who says that theology is dull and too other worldly? They must not be referring to this book. Mike Milton tells you about himself, God, and what life is all about. Whether it is Aunt Eve's mincemeat pies or her bacon biscuits, or actress Irene Dunn or grandma's apron or cataract surgery or sitting up all night with his dying dog or the great donut fraud, each pithy vignette in the most down to earth manner teaches deep theology that will bless your heart. What a good source of practically applied theology as he writes about grief, trials, joys, and all other aspects of life and reality. Amidst your smiles, memories of home, and bygone days, you will see the truth in each reading.



When Helping Hurts by Steve Corbett & Brian Fikkert

Churches and individual Christians typically have faulty assumptions about the causes of poverty, resulting in the use of strategies that do considerable harm to poor people and themselves. When Helping Hurts provides foundational concepts, clearly articulated general principles and relevant applications. The result is an effective and holistic ministry to the poor, not a truncated gospel.



Recommended Web Sites & Blogs

www.ligonier.org

The website of the ministry of R.C. Sproul offers resources of various kinds, from books to a monthly magazine to a radio broadcast.

www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung

DeYoung is the author of several books in the library, including *Why We Love the Church* and *Why We're Not Emergent*. He is always winsome and entertaining in his presentation, and his blog is no exception.

Big Thoughts for Little Thinkers by Joey Allen

The *Big Thoughts for Little Thinkers* series introduces children ages four to eight to the fundamental teachings about God based on the Bible. The most foundational teachings of the Christian faith are presented in this four-book set at a level preschool and elementary children can understand. Colorful illustrations compliment every page of orthodox Christian doctrine, creating an enjoyable learning experience for the child. In contrast to self-centered theology and watered-down Bible storybooks, the *Big Thoughts for Little Thinkers* series promotes God-centered theology with simple and precise teaching. *The library has* The Gospel and The Trinity. Recommended for ages 4-8.

