

Grace Notes

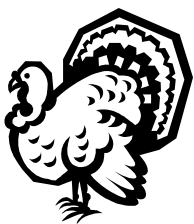


Grace Church Congregational
1055 Williams Street
Pittsfield, MA 01201

Volume XI, Issue 11

November 2012

Happy Thanksgiving!



Give thanks to the Lord for He is good. His love endures forever. Psalm 136

Welcome to the November edition *Grace Notes*. Please send any suggestions or submissions for next month's newsletter to secretary.gracecc1@verizon.net.



From the Pastor's Desk

But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" (Genesis 3:9-11)

Most Americans think of guilt in psychological terms. It is the feeling of discomfort when we assume that we have done something wrong. But biblically thinking, guilt has very little to do with our emotions. Guilt is a forensic term. It is not psychological but legal in nature, and typically this is the way the biblical writers use the term, especially the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans. It has to do with God's legal pronouncement on us with regard to our sin.

The idea we typically associate with "guilt" is not really guilt, but "shame". Shame is an existential term, and is precisely the experience of Adam and Even when God first showed up in the garden after they had eaten the fruit. It was the feeling of discomfort they experienced knowing that they had disobeyed God.

There is a fascinating dynamic reflected in the Bible. If guilt is a legal term having to do with our standing before God as in a courtroom context, then what is its opposite? It is the word "justified". Interestingly enough, the English words "justification" and "righteousness" are two translations of the same Greek word. They both have to do with God's judgment with regard to our standing before him, i.e. are we guilty or are we innocent in God's courtroom? Of course, we are all guilty of sin. Only God can change the verdict from guilty to acquitted based upon our faith in the righteousness of Christ.

But what about "shame"; what is its opposite? Dick Keyes, in his book, *Beyond Identity, Finding Ourselves in the Character and Image of God*, indicates that the opposite of "shame" is "glory". I think he is right.

Just think, as men and women, we have been created in the image of God. Of all of God's creation we are meant to reflect by our very being God's glory. Yet sin has disrupted all that. While we are still, even in our sinful conditions, image bearers of God, the image has been greatly despoiled, as John Calvin put it. It is the contrast between what we were meant to be and what we are that generates in us that existential dissonance we call shame.

Now as sinners we have become quite adept at dealing with that dissonance. We repeat over and over to ourselves that we are OK, that we haven't done anything seriously wrong, certainly anything that God should be offended at. Yes, we tell ourselves that God is someone other than who he claims to be in the Bible, or even that God is only a figment of our unenlightened imaginations. We suppress the truth, as Paul writes in Romans 1, and we harden our hearts. Nevertheless, there is still something within our consciences that still gives rise to the dissonance. (Could it be the image of God?)

But as Christians we have a new reality. God has declared us acquitted of our sin ("justified") because of Christ. But what about our shame? This is where our comprehension of the cross is so important. God knows us, but he has declared us guiltless. From a legal standpoint we are free from the weight of guilt, but there is still that dissonance between who we are in Christ and the shame of our sinful behavior every time we sin. God allows that dissonance to remind us of the contrast between who we are in Christ and our behavior.

Paul writes in Romans 8, *And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* A few verses earlier he wrote, *For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.*

The time is coming when we will shed our sinful natures with these bodies and stand before God psychologically naked. And we will feel no shame!

AMEN

Pastor Tom Bridgman



Missions Corner



News from Jews for Jesus

from the November 2012 Jews for Jesus newsletter

London Summer Outreach

This summer our London team had a great witnessing campaign in conjunction with the Olympics. They handed out 96,925 broadside tracts, received contact information from Jewish). They also prayed with 5 Jewish people and 48 Gentiles to receive Christ. Here are some highlights from the campaign:

Barry Barnett: “Anne Lowe and I met a Jewish mother and daughter who were both seeking. We talked the gospel through and the daughter was especially open, but they both gave their contact information. “We got to interact with another Jewish mother and daughter. Maisie, the mother, asked about our T-shirts, so I got to witness to her. She gave her contact information and mentioned that her daughter had gone to school with Helen Shapiro (a well known Jewish believer/musician in UK). We invited them to our *Havurah* fellowship as Helen Shapiro had agreed to do a worship set with her new group.” [P.S. The Havurah went very well and about twenty Jewish seekers attended, many of whom we hadn’t seen at any of our events before. Thanks be to God!]

Warren Marks: “On Bond Street I asked an Islamic woman, “M” who Jesus is. She said that a few months ago she had a dream about Jesus hugging her and then she had the same dream a few weeks ago. She had been through a very hard time. I told her I thought the dream was a sign that God wanted her in His arms. I explained the gospel and asked if she wanted to pray to receive Jesus into her heart. She prayed to receive the Lord!”

Debbie: “Tony, Olivier and I were eating lunch at Piccadilly Circus. We’d had a somewhat discouraging morning, but that changed when a young Israeli man came over to ask what our T-shirts were about. I invited him to our Shabbat service and we prayed he would come, but my mouth actually dropped open when he turned up with his girlfriend. They loved the warmth of the people they met as well as the discussion. Since they live in Israel, we have been able to put them in touch with our Tel Aviv branch.”

Jeni: “People were taking my broadsides when out of the blue a woman approached me to ask, ‘How can you be Jewish and believe in Jesus?’ She was drawn to Jesus but worried that if she believed in Him she would no longer be Jewish. I told her that I became complete and fulfilled as a Jew when I accepted Jesus. This really spoke to her. We then read from Isaiah 53. The woman responded that this passage was speaking of Jesus. She was open then and there to pray and receive him. After we prayed, I told her to start reading the opening chapters of John. When I contacted her the next day, she was already half way through the Gospel of John!”



*Editor’s note:
Pray for the ministry of
Tuvia and Ellen Zaretsky
who work with Jews for
Jesus out of Los Angeles.*

*Copyright Jews for Jesus.
Used by permission.*



Website: <http://www.jewsforjesus.org>

The Successful Church

Mark E. Ross

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BE A SUCCESSFUL CHURCH? IS THERE A MINIMUM NUMBER THAT MUST BE ACHIEVED IN ATTENDANCE OR MEMBERSHIP? IS THERE A CERTAIN QUALITY THAT MUST BE FOUND IN OUR WORSHIP AND OUR PREACHING? IS IT THE SIZE OF OUR MISSIONS BUDGET OR THE PERCENTAGE OF OUR TOTAL RECEIPTS THAT IS GIVEN TO MISSIONS?

Questions like these press upon us as we examine our corporate life as the church. We recognize the ever-present temptation to evaluate our congregations by worldly standards. We must, however, use biblical standards. Only as our churches conform to the Lord's plan and purpose for the church can we expect His word of commendation: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Succeeding as a church should be central to our concerns, for it is central to God's concerns. The Bible ends with a vision of the church clothed with the glory of God (Rev. 21:11,23). Where the Bible ends should tell us a great deal concerning what it is all about. The great ascription of praise in Ephesians 3:20-21 gives us perhaps the Bible's most concise statement of the purpose of God, and it highlights for us the great purpose of the church: "Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen."

Glory in the church—that is what makes a church successful. Only "in Christ Jesus" is this possible. What are the elements that make for His glory in the church? They are the same as those that make for the glory of God. These are the holy attributes of God. Moses begged for a revelation of God's glory (Ex. 33:18). God granted this request, making all His goodness to pass before Moses as the name of the Lord was proclaimed (v. 19). IN this revelation, God enumerated His attributes:

The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation. (Exod. 34:6-7)

God's glory is the sum total of His attributes.

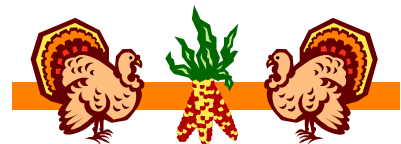
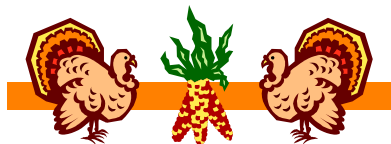
Here, then, is the measuring rod of the successful church. Is there to be found in our church a revelation of the glory of God? Do we manifest the character of our God in our worship, our service, our fellowship, our pastoral care, our outreach? Much as we are inclined to judge our success by empirically measurable goals, the important considerations have little to do with numbers. Indeed it is encouraging to know that it takes very few to qualify.

Matthew 18 records that once the disciples came to Jesus and asked Him about greatness in the kingdom. They were principally asking about individual greatness, but as our Lord responded, we see that individual greatness and church greatness are all the same in the kingdom. Jesus place a little child before the disciples and told them that they must humble themselves as this child in order to be great in the kingdom of heaven. He said they must receive the child "in My name." Going on, He warned against causing such little ones to stumble. Jesus told them that His church would be like a good shepherd going in search of lost sheep (vv. 12-14), because it is not the will of the Father that even one of His little ones should perish. Then he outlined just how the lost sheep are to be sought: first by individual appeal, then by one or two others, finally by the church itself (vv. 15-20). When lost sheep continue in their rebellion after many patient, persistent appeals, they are at last put out from the church, for the Lord's forgiveness is not endless toleration of sin. His glory is not everlasting indulgence. His character of mercy and steadfast love includes His justice, for He will by no means clear the guilty. Yet to those who do seek forgiveness, the Lord forgives seventy times seven, and so must we (vv. 21-35).

Notice how this chapter demonstrates the outworking of the character of God revealed to Moses in Exodus 34. There is mercy, steadfast love, and forgiveness of sin. Also, there is no clearance of the guilty, for those who persistently refuse the church's appeals are finally cutoff as a warning that the same will be true at the last day if repentance is not forthcoming. But for those who do repent, there is grace abounding to the chief of sinners, even seventy times seven. This is the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Even two or three gathered in His name and empowered by His presence can accomplish this. Such Christlikeness is what makes for a successful church.

Dr. Mark E. Ross is associate dean and associate professor of systematic theology at the Columbia campus of Erskine Theological Seminary in South Carolina. He is also director of the Institute for Reformed Worship.

Editor's note: This article is from the May 2012 issue of Tabletalk magazine. Website: www.ligonier.org/tabletalk



What are you thankful for?

In our culture, Thanksgiving is often nothing more than a day to eat lots of good food, and enjoy the company of family and friends. There is nothing wrong with that, of course, but as Christians perhaps we could be more intentional in our expression of thanks. Here's an idea for cultivating a spirit of thanksgiving that I came across the other day. Instead of waiting until Thanksgiving Day to express thanks, consider naming one thing you are thankful for each day of the month. Perhaps you could write it out on a piece of paper, and each day put the strips into a "Thanksgiving jar." Involve all the members of the family who are old enough to express themselves. Then, at some point in the day (dinnertime?) each member could retrieve a strip and read it aloud. How about turning our expressions of thanks into prayer to the ultimate Giver of gifts?

Another exercise that might be valuable would be to look up verses in the Scripture that have to do with thankfulness (and there is an abundance!) and meditate on those, or memorize some. The Psalms are replete with expressions of thanksgiving. As the founder of Jews for Jesus, Moishe Rosen, once said, "Acts of true thankfulness transform us...Thankfulness brings us face-to-face with grace."¹ May we be transformed as we contemplate the manifold gifts of God, and as we give expression to our thanks-not just at Thanksgiving, but each and every day of our lives.

¹ Jews for Jesus newsletter, November 2012

Submitted by Charleen Bridgman

*O give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His love
steadfast love endures forever! Psalm 107:1*

LEARNING AND ARRIVING: The Doctrines of Grace by Doug Rose

[W]ork out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life ...

(Phil. 2:12b – 16a)

Paul exhorted the Christians of the first-century church in the Roman colony at Philippi to cautiously and fearfully endeavor to embrace God’s salvific grace. Paul further encouraged those Philippians to live blamelessly and innocently before God and to shine before their generation of unbelievers. Embedded in the short text of Philippians 2, however, we find Paul tracing the tenets of the “Five Points” of our Reformed theology, the doctrines of grace:

| Text | Point | Comment |
|---|----------------------------|--|
| <i>[W]ork out your own salvation with fear and trembling</i> | Total Depravity | Our depraved will, stuffed with corrupt feelings, hates nothing more than His righteousness. ¹ |
| <i>... for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.</i> | Unconditional Love | For the seed of God’s Word takes root and bears fruit only in those whom the LORD has by His eternal election predestined as children and heirs of the kingdom of heaven... ² |
| <i>... that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation ...</i> | Limited Atonement | [F]or all the rest, who were condemned by this same plan of God before the foundation of the world, the utterly clear preaching of truth can be nothing but the stench of death unto death. ³ |
| <i>... among whom you shine as lights in the world ...</i> | Irresistible Grace | Therefore, Christ is enjoyed only by believers, who receive Him sent to them, who do not reject Him given to them, who follow Him calling them. ⁴ |
| <i>... holding fast to the word of life ...</i> | Perseverance of the Saints | [S]ince this generation is never fulfilled so long as we sojourn in the prison of the mortal body, there must be an unflagging pursuit of repentance even unto death. ⁵ |

¹ Calvin’s Catechism of 1538, Art. iv.

² *Id.*, Art. xiii.

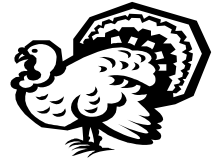
³ *Id.*

⁴ *d.*, Art. xii.⁵ *Id.*, Art. xviii.

⁵ *Id.*, Art. xviii.



November 2012



SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

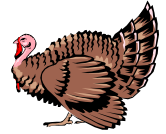
FRIDAY

SATURDAY

| | | | | | | |
|---|----|---------------------------------------|----|--|---|---|
| | | | | 1 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 2 | 3 |
| 4 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer Gathering | 5 | 6 Election Day | 7 | 8 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 9 | 10 |
| 11 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 7:00-8:30 a.m. Men's Prayer Fellowship  |
| Operation Christmas Child Collection Week November 12-19 | | | | | | |
| | | 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class | | 7:00 Addictions Victorious | | |
| 18 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship | 19 | 20 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class | 21 | 22 Happy Thanksgiving!  | 23 | 24 |
| 28 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship | 29 | 30 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class | | |  | |



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Prayer Gathering

Our monthly prayer vigil will be held in the sanctuary from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** on **Sunday, November 4th**. All are encouraged to come together in prayer before the Lord as we acknowledge our dependence on Him in all things, and seek His direction for our part in His kingdom work.

Operation Christmas Child

Thanks to all who are offering to take part as we serve as a Relay Center for Northern Berkshire County for the third time. We will be open to receive filled shoeboxes from the community during National Collection Week. We will be collecting from **Monday, November 12 to Monday, November 19** during the following hours:

Monday- Thursday 3-5 p.m., Friday 2-6 p.m., Saturday 12:30-5 p.m., Sunday 1-4 p.m., and Monday the 19th from 2-4 p.m.

Please consider being part of this ministry as a greeter, cookie baker, box carrier, recorder, packer, or loader. For more information call Charleen Bridgman, Relay Coordinator, at 499-3040.

Come on out and be a part of this wonderful ministry of Samaritan's Purse to deliver gifts and the message of the Gospel to children and their families all over the world!



Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are invited to be a part of the monthly Men's Prayer Fellowship **Saturday, November 17th, from 7:00-8:30 a.m.** Call 443-2575 for the location. Join us for a time of Bible discussion, prayer, fellowship, and light refreshments.

Sunday School News

The adult Sunday School class has been studying the book of Phillipians during the first quarter. The second quarter study, beginning in December, will be "Praying Through the Psalms", led by Elder Tom Lanoue. Plan to be a part of these wonderful opportunities to study the Word, that we "may be competent, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:17)

