

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
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Pittsfield, MA 01201

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"In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. *I John 4:10-11*





From the Pastor's Desk

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? (Romans 8:31a-32)

I recently finished reading a book titled *The Whole Christ*, by Sinclair Ferguson. The book is about a debate known as the “Marrow Controversy” that took place in the Scottish Presbyterian church three centuries ago. At its root is the seemingly ongoing tension between legalism and antinomianism, and the subsequent impact this has on a Christian’s sense of assurance of salvation. The “Marrow men” were concerned that many in the Scottish church were, for all intents and purposes, slowly sliding into a form of works righteousness that was a reversal of the principles of Reformation. The “Marrow men” were in turn accused of minimizing the value of the Law, thus espousing a form of easy-believism.

It would be easy to see a three centuries old conflict in the church of Scotland as largely irrelevant for us today, except that, as Ferguson points out, the issues raised are perennial. They were raised in the earliest days of the church, and again during the days of the Reformation. And they are present today. At stake in the debate is the very nature of God and, in that respect, the heart of the gospel itself.

Ferguson discerns that legalism and antinomianism are really “non-identical twins from the same womb”. Both fail to recognize the subtleness of Satan’s lie in the garden, “that we cannot trust the goodness of God or his commitment to our happiness, and therefore if we obey God fully, we’ll miss out and be miserable.” (p. 13)

Tim Keller in his forward to the book spells out that legalism and antinomianism are *each a web of attitudes of the heart, practices, and ways of reading Scripture.... The legal spirit is marked by jealousy, oversensitivity to slights, ‘metallic’ harshness toward mistakes, and an ungenerous default mode in decision making.... At the same time, practical antinomianism can take the form of a secular gospel of self-acceptance masquerading as Christianity.*

The cure for both legalism and antinomianism is the gospel itself. Nowhere is this portrayed more effectively than in Jesus’ parable of the prodigal son. The younger son was firmly convinced that true happiness was to be found in setting his own rules, only to find that that his rules in the end had robbed him of the satisfaction he so fervently sought. By contrast, the older son saw his father as harsh and demanding, which is, in reality, the same way his younger brother saw him too. Neither failed to recognize the extent of his father’s graciousness.

Jesus’ parable was directed to the Pharisees, but it is also directed toward us today. We might be the nominal Roman Catholic, who drops the half-hearted quip about needing to invest in an asbestos suit. Or we might reflect the same attitude as Job’s so called friends who insist that Job needs to get right with the Lord in order to alleviate his suffering. Or we might be the young person who sees any form of Christian discipline as a hindrance to self-expression. None of the above appreciates the gracious character of God, nor sees a response to God’s Law as motivated solely by gratitude for his grace or by love for our Heavenly Father.

One of the things that caught my attention about Ferguson’s book when I first picked it up from the book table was the number of endorsements by names I recognize- Tim Keller, Michael Horton, Alistair Begg, David Wells, Joel Beeke, Bryan Chapell to name just a few. To a man, the testimony was the same; Sinclair Ferguson was addressing one of the central issues of any age. That is because it is about the gospel,



Pastor Tom Bridgman

Missions Corner



News from the Schmidts-February 2017

BACK IN JAPAN

“Deetaaa!” shouted our five year old Madagascar “surrogate grandson” Lova, as he came charging toward me, jumping into my arms and not letting go of me during the whole lunch hour on our first Sunday back at the Sapporo International Church! Not quite so dramatic, but just as endearing and warm, was our welcome back with the rest of the church members and our missionary colleagues, and also with our neighbors.

Twenty-seven hours after our friends, the Weemes, dropped us off at the LA airport on January 11, we arrived in Sapporo, tired but thankful for a safe journey. The temperature registered 5° F! What a difference from the 70° F weather we had enjoyed the Sunday before at the beach in LA! But what a great feeling to finally be back home and to sleep in our own bed again!

Thank you for upholding us in prayer during our Home Assignment and praying us back onto the field! We are excited to have new prayer partners and supporters joining us this new term. Our desire is to let God lead us forth according to His purposes. It is easy for us to fall back into set rou-

Family

How thankful we are now for the 3 1/2 months in Switzerland, especially for having significant time with my parents. As most of you know, they both passed on to glory, my mom, Anna on Sept. 29, and my dad shortly after Christmas on Dec. 28. Going back to Switzerland will never be the same for us from now on. **We appreciate the numerous messages of condo-**

OMF Sapporo Guest Home

At the Guest Home we are presently full, with a couple from Australia with an 18 month old in the apartment below us, and three missionary ladies in the rooms on the ground floor. There is a steady stream of reservations coming in for the coming months! **A nice surprise happened when Shelley brought some baked goods to our newly retired neighbor** in return for the “welcome back” gift of apples we had received. He mentioned that he wants to come to church with us one of these days! **Pray for Mr. O**

Praise for:

- A safe journey back to Sapporo
- A warm welcome back at church, with coworkers, and with neighbors
- New prayer and financial partners
- A problem-free pregnancy for Rebekah

Pray for:

- Health and energy in these winter months
 - Feb. 26: English Worship Service; Dieter preaching
 - Feb. 20-2: Dieter at first Finance Committee meeting in Tokyo
 - Safe delivery of our first grandchild, at end of February
 - Neighbor to attend our church and get to know and accept Christ
 - Our field director undergoing chemotherapy treatment against aggressive lymphoma
- Feel free to let us know how

This and That

Pray for Dieter’s new involvement on the OMF Finance, Property, and Administration Committee.

Last but not least, **pray for Rebekah, expecting our first grandchild at the end of February!** Shelley is planning to go back at some time to help out for a couple of weeks; the time frame is not yet determined.

Margaret Lee Barbour's Testimony

October 15, 2006



From Betty:

I found this testimony in a file while I was collecting addresses for mailing invitations to Mom's 95th Birthday Party. It was accompanied by this note:

Dear Elizabeth,

Here is the testimony you requested. It is not very long, but had to follow the plan advised by our book – tailored to fit their program. It is only the "bare bones" and a lot more could be said.

Love,

I grew up in my Grandparents' home, located on a beautiful farm in the western mountains of Virginia. We were all church-going, God-fearing, Bible-reading people. My understanding was that I should try to be good and not break any of the rules set forth in the Bible, (and added to by the adults around me). We also were watching to see if others were doing the same. I had many cousins to play with and we reminded each other often, after some infraction, that "you are going straight to hell."

In spite of this I was a happy carefree child, trying to be perfect, and failing often. Sometimes in my more serious spiritual moments I would think, this isn't working. There must be "something more" than this.

I think I must have been around 10 years old, visiting my Aunt Rose and her family in a little town in Virginia – her husband was a preacher – he was conducting a revival – and the message of need for repentance was presented. We, of course, went every night. One evening, after I went to bed, I couldn't sleep. I can still remember that night – there was a beautiful full moon. I realized I was a sinner and would not go to heaven if I died. My dear Aunt Rose realized I was restless and came to see if I was ill. I told her of my fears and my need for forgiveness. She said, "Honey, God is speaking to you. Let's answer Him and tell Him your need." She prayed a simple prayer and encouraged me to ask the Lord to forgive my sins, I prayed, and He forgave my sins because Christ had paid the penalty for them. He is faithful, and I experienced a feeling of peace, believing that now I belonged to Him.

After that, the moon shone even brighter, but soon I was asleep, knowing I had eternal life. The next line is, "and she lived happily ever after."

However: I began a program of what I have come to realize was self-reformation. I read the Bible each day, prayed, and tried to be very, very good. As time went by I became discouraged about failure and did not live an abundant life (Although I believe I was still God's child.)

I grew up, married a wonderful man, and we started a family. At the invitation of friends we attended a church where I first heard the word "grace."

With good Bible teaching, I began to understand the concept that heaven is a free gift, is not deserved, and cannot be earned. I thank the Lord for answering my prayer for the "something more" I had been seeking all my life.

A Journey through the Beatitudes"
Using as a guide the book "Studies in the Sermon on the Mount"
by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Continuing from last month:

We will continue to look at what a person becomes if they in truth have entered the kingdom of God.

Verse 9: *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God".*

Remember we said that the Beatitudes needed to be taken as a whole, that all the verses are connected together. The link between all of them is waiting upon God for that fullness which He alone can give. This shows us that the outworking of the Christian life is altogether and entirely different from everything that can be known by any person who is not a Christian. Our Lord is establishing an entirely new and different kingdom. We can begin to see why the Jews of Jesus' day had such difficulty with this idea of peacemakers. They were expecting the Messiah to come as a king and military leader to restore Israel to its former glory. They misunderstood that the Lord was bringing in a spiritual kingdom. Unfortunately, many parts of the Church today are still making the same mistake.

What then are peacemakers in the kingdom of God? In general terms we can say two main things. First, they are peaceable, for a quarrelsome person or troublemaker cannot be a peacemaker. Second, they actively seek to make peace. Having a pure heart and meekness makes for a peacemaker. It is what delivers a person from self-interest, self-concern, over-sensitiveness, touchiness, and self-defensiveness. Those self-traits always led to quarrels, misunderstandings and disputes. That is the theory of peacemakers, but what of the practice? Here again the answer is always the same, it is to be found in the rest of the "Sermon on the Mount" and the scriptures as a whole.

James tells us in Chapter 1:19-21 "Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls." Anyone who says that it is easy to do all of that does not understand how strong the natural man is in us, and our utter need of the total implanting of the Beatitudes into our hearts by the power of God. Oh, the wonder and blessing we have in the scriptures, which are another gift from God.

The blessing that is declared for peacemakers is: "...*they shall be called sons of God*". The scriptural meaning for the word "called" is "owned"; "owned" as the children of God. Peacemakers are showing in their actions the image of God. War, quarrels, misunderstandings and disputes come from man, from sin and from Satan, but **"Peace"** comes from God through Jesus Christ. He gives us born again believers peace with God, peace within ourselves and peace with others and the enabling power to bring peace to those living in a fallen world. That is what the Lord is saying: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God".

Next month we will continue our "Journey Through the Beatitudes"

Have a Heart

My name is Sinaia Smith and I'm a new contributor to Grace Notes. I have wanted to get involved in the church for a while now, and recently I was given the opportunity to do just that through a ministry called "Heart for the Disabled." "Heart for the Disabled" is a Christian ministry for disabled children and their families. It works by sending out encouraging notes and valentines all year long.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: There is no set due date for the letters of encouragement to the families, but the first set of "encouragement" will be mailed out for Valentine's Day. There are five families who need our help right now. We would just need five people to volunteer to write some letters of encouragement. This includes our younger people because everyone can make a valentine! Some of these families are hearing about Christ for the first time.

Wondering how you can help? You can make valentines, encouraging notes, drawings, poems, gift cards, all in the name of God. There is a second way that you can get involved. This second ministry is international and many kids who live in this country or in other countries need wheelchairs, but can't afford to buy one. This ministry is called "Wheels for the World." I was thinking that we could start a fund for this ministry. If you feel inclined to do so would you please contribute and help start this fund? God calls us to go out and preach the Gospel. With this in mind, will you help me start this ministry in our church? For more information about this ministry, please contact sinaia.smith@gmail.com

Editor's note: Both "Heart for the Disabled" and "Wheels for the World" are ministries of Joni and Friends,



Beyond Valentine's Day Sentiment

Valentine's Day can serve to remind us of the love that surpasses all loves—the love of God that moved Him to provide a way of redemption for His sinful, fallen creatures, at great cost to Himself. As we consider God's great mercy to us, may we overflow in mercy to others, imitating and incarnating Christ as we obey the call to be am-reconciliation, His appeal
Cor. 5:20.

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul

bassadors of
"God making
through us." 2

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love

...but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8

But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:44

For the love of Christ controls us... 2Cor 5:14

Let love be genuine...Love one another with brotherly affection. Romans 12:9,10

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. I Peter 4:8



GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Men's Prayer Fellowship

Men of all ages are welcome at the Men's Prayer Fellowship. This month the men will meet **Saturday, February 18th**, from **7:00-8:30 a.m.**, at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Come for a time of looking into the Scriptures using *Walking as He Walked*, discussion, prayer, and fellowship. Refreshments will be served.

Women's Fellowship

The February Women's Fellowship will gather on **Saturday, February 18th**, from **9:30-11:00 a.m.** Women of all ages are welcome as we study and discuss *Habits of Grace* by David Mathis. The book and study guide can be bought on Amazon or read it online for free at the Desiring God web site. Breakfast goodies will be served.



Annual Business Meeting

Our Annual Business Meeting will be held on **Tuesday, February 14th**, beginning at **7:00 p.m.**, with an alternate date of Wednesday, February 15th. Packets of committee reports have been made available at the church for attendees to read before the meeting.



Prayer Gathering

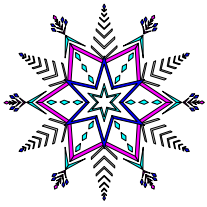
All are encouraged to take part in our monthly Prayer Gathering on **Sunday, February 26th**, from **5:00-6:00 p.m.** in the sanctuary. Join us as we come boldly and expectantly before our Father's throne to praise Him, seek His direction, pray for one another, and "find grace and mercy to help us in our time of need." *Hebrews 4:16*



LOOKING AHEAD

Spring Women's Retreats

- ◆ Reserve Friday and Saturday, **April 21-22**, for the annual OPC Women's Retreat at Lakeside Conference Center in Pittsfield. Details will follow.
- ◆ The annual Faithlift will be held at Lakeside Christian Camp this year, on Friday and Saturday, **May 5-6**. Denise Ridley will speak on "Joy - Diamonds in the Dust." The event is sponsored by the Evangelical Free Church of Pittsfield. More detailed information will be forthcoming as it becomes available.
- ◆ Many women find these retreats edifying and a blessed time of fellowship with fellow sisters in Christ. Consider attending one or both as you are able!



February 2017



SUN

MON

TUES

WED

THURS

FRI

SAT

			1	2	3	4
5 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	6 7:00 Addictions Victorious	7 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	8	9	10	11 9:30 a.m.
12 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	13 7:00 Addictions Victorious	14 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class 7:00 Annual Meeting	15	16	17	18 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship ----- 9:30-11:00 a.m. Women's Fellowship
19 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship	20 7:00 Addictions Victorious	21 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class	22	23	24	25
26 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship 5:00 Prayer	27 7:00 Addictions Victorious	28 1:15 Ladies' Bible Class				