

Grace Notes



Grace Church Congregational
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Pittsfield, MA 01201

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*"Fair are the meadows, fair are the woodlands, robed in the blooming garb of
spring:*

Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer, who makes the woeful heart to sing."

For submission or suggestions for the next newsletter send to secretary@gracecongregational.org



From the Pastor's Desk

So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ (Galatians 3:24)

It is reported that D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones once said to preachers, "If you are never accused of antinomianism at least once, then you are probably not preaching grace strongly enough." In case you were wondering what antinomianism means, etymologically it comes from the Greek words "nomos", which means "law", and "anti", which means "against" or "in place of". An antinomian, in that sense, is someone who takes God's law lightly.

As many of you know, I've been preaching through Paul's Epistle to the Romans. (After several months, we are finishing chapter 3, so we will be at it for a while.) Paul makes far more reference to the Law than any other New Testament writer, and in most cases, is making the point that salvation does not come through our obedience to the Law, but through faith in Christ. In that respect, many of his references to the Law seem quite negative. We might wonder how a former Pharisee who had been such a meticulous student of the Law might speak so negatively of that which he had invested so much of his life in studying.

Jesus, on the other hand, early on in his ministry said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets....until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, nor a dot [the smallest parts of the Hebrew alphabet] will pass away until all is accomplished" (Mt. 5:17-18) Does that mean there is some disparity between how Jesus and Paul interpreted the value of the Law for us as Christians?

I have come to the conclusion that many Christian (not to mention many non-Christians) have a rather wooden understanding of the Law. Many look at it as a list of somewhat valuable do's and don'ts. "Thou shalt not kill" – but of course! "Sabbath" – well.... "Coveting" – gracious, let's not get too carried away. Jesus' whole Sermon on the Mount was his interpretation and application of the Law, meaning, it has much more meaning and demand than we ever thought possible. Murder and adultery, for example are more than just the simple acts, but, in reality, heart issues first and foremost. That's why he said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and the Pharisees...." (Mt. 5:20) And that, I believe, is the starting point for Paul, the former Pharisee.

But what then is the value of the Law for us as Christians today?

There are many Christians who say that the Law belongs to the Old Testament. Jews were supposed to keep it but failed. Now we are under a dispensation of grace, so it has no real application today. But Jesus said, I have not come to abolish it. Some Christians see its primary value in scaring us into heaven; that is, when we understand the Law as Jesus indicated in his Sermon on the Mount, we realize that we have indeed fallen short, so we'd better get right with the Lord by accepting Jesus. That is true too, but I still think we have missed an important point. That it is God's covenant of grace that accompanied his giving of the Law in the first place.

What did the Israelites know about God when he first gave them the Law at Sinai? They didn't have the Bible. They had been in captivity in Egypt for over 400 years. They knew about the Egyptian gods. And they had some awareness of their history of God's dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But who was this God that brought them out of Egypt? God began the giving of the Law with the words, "I am the LORD, your God, who brought you out..." Was not the Law and it's very giving, then, as much a self-disclosure about God's identity as it was just God's expectations for them? In that respect, God's giving of the Law was motivated by God's covenant of grace toward us.

Yes, life will go much better for us individually and as a society if we seek to follow his Law (Psalm 1). But if we are honest with ourselves, we all know it's beyond our reach to really keep it. But it's not beyond Jesus' reach. Wow! He kept it perfectly in life, and he also kept it by becoming "obedient unto death" for us. (Phil. 2:8). Is this not how the Law leads us to Christ?



Pastor Tom Bridgman

Missions Corner

Schmidt News—March 2018



*"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
2 Corinthians 5:17*

As we near the end of February, and the snow piles keep growing to above our heads, our thoughts turn to Spring, knowing that when the snow is gone, flowers will bloom...And in this Lenten season, we know with confidence that Easter represents new life in Jesus because of His resurrection from the dead. With that hope and truth in our hearts, we joyously carry on.

March's big event during Holy Week is the OMF Japan Field Conference, with the theme "Passion of Christ, Passion for Christ". It will take place at a hotel an hour away from Sapporo from March 26-29. Including helpers, a total of 170 adults will gather and a huge group of 80 children, who will have their own program! Conference is a special time when missionaries can get away and focus on learning, sharing and fellowship. It is a time to get renewed in spirit. Pastor Makino will be our speaker. He and his wife were missionaries in Thailand and Singapore, and they led our orientation course when we first went out in 1989). Pray for Pastor Makino as he prepares the Bible messages and for our hearts to be open to what the Lord will say to us as individuals and as OMF Japan.

Sapporo Guest Home: March will be busy with many comings and goings because of the conference. Before the conference the Guest Home and Hokkaido Center will be bustling with the 20 short-term workers arriving from three different countries to lead the children's program. After the conference, some of the missionaries from down south will be staying for a few extra days. OMF's international prayer focus in February was on Japan. Please join with many around the world to pray the 5x5x5 Prayer for Japan: Five minutes, Five days, Five strategic areas. Here is the link: <http://omf.org/japan-prayer-resources/>

Sapporo International Church : Our new pastor wants to emphasize unity (there are four different language groups). So this year so the first Sunday of the month we will have a combined service. We have the joy of starting this on Easter Sunday with a baptism, celebrating the new life of one of the Chinese women.

Every April the church staff goes on a retreat after the annual meeting. It should be relaxing and bring more unity as we represent people from 5 countries.

English Speakers' Fellowship The Parenting course that started in January is going well, with 8 families represented. We are praying for growth in their marriages and family life. We are encouraged that some of the moms are getting together, independently of us, to pray for their families!

Praise for: -Good cooperation in the English Speakers' Fellowship as we cooked for the church one Sunday
- A week in Tokyo with productive finance meetings (Dieter) and a spiritual retreat (Shelley) and together great visits with friends.

Pray for: - All the preparations for the Field Conference, and for safe travel for participants
-Our Sapporo International Church staff retreat April 2-4.
-Healing for our coworker Michelle now undergoing chemotherapy
-Continued good health and safety during the remainder of the winter

To God be the glory,

Dieter & Shelley

Deep and Wide

Ian Bridgman

“Seems strange to see a sign like that here,” mused the driver of our truck as we crisscrossed the backroads of the southern Berkshires. We had just rolled through the center of one of the tiny towns that speckle the landscape here and seen the banner hanging from one of the old church buildings. It was clear from some other banners hanging outside that this was a church in name only, having jettisoned any commitment to the Bible long ago. This banner, though, was a nice banner, proclaiming a welcome message for immigrants and refugees. I would certainly hope for that to be the case here; I wish it were true everywhere. He was right though, there was something strange about that sign, in that town, on that building. I wondered if any in that church had any first-hand experience working with immigrants and refugees, or if there were any structures in place to make them feel welcome, should any actually arrive in this town. We both knew the chances of that happening were slim to none. Based on raw demographics and economics alone, any minorities that showed up in this all-white enclave of affluence were far more likely to be second home owners from New York than refugees from Syria or immigrants from Honduras. I couldn’t help but feel that the banner, as nice as it was, came off as a bit shallow.

A short while later, during the buildup to this year’s Women’s March on Washington, I noticed a flurry articles coming out of the black feminist community, voicing their dissent with some aspects of the upcoming gathering. The authors of these articles had all marched in the inaugural event the previous year, and I knew they probably hadn’t all jumped ship and gone conservative, so I was curious to find out what the issue was. To be honest, much of the material was easy bait for the detractors waiting to pounce in the comments section, most of whom appeared to be salivating over the thought of one group of radicals devouring another. But these women clearly had something to say. One issue they raised was their understandable frustration at yet another mass movement that seemed to mostly overlook the particularly intense struggles faced by women in minority communities. The other was their realization that civil rights movement 2.0 or 3.0 this was not. Unlike the students at the Woolworth’s counter, or the Freedom Riders, or those who crossed the bridge out of Selma, most of the others marching this time around were not courageously challenging an evil empire at great risk to themselves or their loved ones, as they seemed to want to imagine. No, the vast majority of marchers were simply riding a wave of public opinion and free publicity and enjoying the emotional rush thereof. It was “performative activism,” one writer called it, done only from “within their level of comfort.” It was shallow, just like the banner hanging outside the church.

Contrast this with the One who came 2,000 years before to challenge every empire, ever, at immense cost to his family and loved ones, and at infinite cost to himself. Jesus did challenge the authorities of his day, all while obeying perfectly the greatest authority, his Heavenly Father. He knew the crowds that followed him as he performed miracles and fed thousands would evaporate, that those who cheered his entry into Jerusalem would vanish. Even his disciples would flee when the going got tough. Jesus knew that he alone would face the full weight of God’s justice for the sins of the entire world. And then he went to the cross anyways.

Jesus didn’t just come and die, of course. He rose again. He’s coming back. And when he does, he will level God’s justice once and for all. This justice will be not an abstract ideal, or one group of people getting even with another. It will be final and perfect. It will be justice for Middle Eastern families

Continued on next page

running for their lives, and for sons beheaded and daughters sold into slavery. It will be for war lords and terrorists and drug cartels. It will be for fathers in Central America determined to house their families in something more than tarps and scrap metal. It will be for oppressive patriarchies that fail to honor women as God's image bearers, and for women who, in turn, fail to honor their unborn children in the same way. God's justice will be for those who fail to understand who really is our neighbor, and then fail to love that neighbor as ourselves. It will be for those, all too often found in red states, or even in our churches, who come up with every excuse under the sun to keep the needy out in order to protect "our own". God's justice will be for everybody.

In the meantime, he calls us, his disciples, to take up our crosses and follow him. He has called us to "proclaim good news to the poor [and] freedom for the prisoners, [and] to set the oppressed free." Luke (4:18). What is this good news? It is that one day God will make an end to injustice and evil once and for all, and that He sent His Son to the cross, to bear his wrath in our place, and to take the punishment that we deserve.

I'm thankful for the many churches that have stepped up to the plate, with outreach and care ministries already in action, and for others that eagerly pray for the privilege of opening their doors to newly settled families. I'm thankful for churches that work for racial reconciliation, that understand that while we, as Christians, all worship the same God, we are not all the same.

Yes, refugees and immigrants will bring problems with them. Yes, there are risks involved, some of them serious and we fail to be honest when we pretend otherwise. Welcoming them in Jesus' name will require more than hanging a sign and feeling good about ourselves. But we also fail when we carefully count the cost, only to turn away from paying it.

God sent his own Son to face his justice because he loved the world. So much. If we are going to be serious about following him, then we need to love the world too, no matter the cost to ourselves. May we, as individuals, and as a body, be faithful to our calling when the time comes, to count the cost, take up our cross, and show that God's love is not shallow, but gloriously deep and wide.

Speaking the Truth in Love

Guy M. Richard

One of the Scriptural passages that is subject to great misunderstanding within the church is Ephesians 4:15. What exactly does it mean for us to speak the truth in love? Many, if not all, of us have been on the receiving end of hurtful remarks made by a brother or a sister under the guise of speaking the truth in love. Does Ephesians 4:15 give us the right to hurt others with the things that we say just because they are true? Does it mean that we should always make the truth known in every situation and never remain silent under any circumstance?

Quite simply, I think the key to answering these questions and, thus, to applying Ephesians 4:15 in our lives is the word *love*. Since we are to speak the truth *in love*, that means love—as biblically defined—must control our speaking. If love is defined as doing what is best for the loved one and not what is most convenient or even best for oneself, this will directly affect our truth-speaking in at least two significant ways: it will affect how we speak the truth, and it will affect what truth we decide to speak and what truth we decide to leave unspoken.

If love is what is driving us to speak to others, we will, first of all, be concerned about how we speak. We will seek to watch the words that we use as well as the attitudes, motives, and tones of voices with which we speak them. We will strive not to give offense by the way we speak the truth. This is precisely what Solomon is talking about in Proverbs 15:1: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

Second, if love drives us to speak to others, we will also exercise restraint in the truth that we choose to speak. We will recognize that “speaking the truth in love” sometimes means saying nothing at all, as it seems to on at least two occasions in the life and ministry of Jesus. Both Matthew 5:38-40 and 27:11-14 teach us that there are times when it is better for us to remain silent than to speak the truth, either because the individual involved is not yet ready to hear the truth or because saying it would do more harm than good. Whatever the reason may be, the point is that love for others ought to cause us to think very carefully about what we say before we say it. We need to examine our intentions. Are we really chiefly concerned for the best interest of the other person? Or is it a selfish desire to clear the air or get things off our chest?

No doubt, there are times when the best interests of others will require us to speak the truth in ways that may sting. But we need to be very careful and very prayerful in those situations—and in every situation—to ensure, as much as we can, that we are motivated by love and not by selfish pride.

Dr. Guy M. Richard is senior minister of First Presbyterian Church in Gulfport, Miss., and author of *The Supremacy of God in the Theology of Samuel Rutherford*.

From Tabletalk February 2015
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GRACE CHURCH NEWS



Prayer Gathering

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



Daylight Savings Begins

Daylight savings time begins on **Sunday March 11th**, so be sure to turn your clocks one hour ahead on Saturday night, March 10th.

Thank You

Speaking of clocks, thank you to the Ladies' Bible Class for purchasing a new clock for one of our meeting rooms.

Fun and Fellowship Game Day

Pastor Tom and Charleen are hosting a game day on **Sunday, March 11th, after church.** They will provide a batch of chili and cornbread. Please bring a dish or side to share, along with your favorite game. A sign-up sheet for attendance and food will be at the



Men's Prayer Fellowship

All men are welcome at the Men's Prayer Fellowship, **Saturday, March 17th**, from **7:00-8:30 a.m.**, at the home of Doug Rose in Stockbridge. Come look into the Scriptures using *Infinite Grace* by Bryan Chapell. Breakfast will be served.



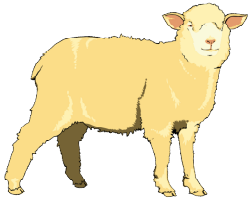
Maundy Thursday Dinner and Communion

Mark your calendars for our Maundy Thursday potluck and communion service on **Thursday, March 29th.** The potluck **dinner begins at 6:00 p.m.** followed by the **communion service at 7:00.** Details concerning the food will follow in the church bulletin.

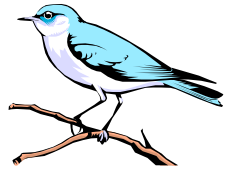


LOOKING AHEAD

- ◆ Our monthly **Grace Fellowship for Women**, for women of all ages will gather on **Saturday, April 7th, from 9:30-11:30 a.m.** at the church. Join us for a fruitful time of looking into I Peter.
- ◆ The annual **OPC Women's Retreat** at Lakeside Conference Center in Pittsfield will be **Friday and Saturday, April 13-14.** The theme is "**Flourish**" and the keynote speaker is Lydia Brownback. For more information and registration forms go to <http://pnynewomen.wordpress.com> or see Charleen Bridgman.
- ◆ The annual one-day FaithLift, sponsored by the Evangelical Free Church of Pittsfield, will be **Saturday, April 14th, at Hope Church in Lenox.** The theme is "**What Every Girl Needs: Refuge, Redemption, Restoration and a Few Good Recipes.**" For more information and registration forms go to pittsfieldefc.org/faithlift.html or see Charleen Bridgman.



March 2018



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| | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 9:30-11:30 am Grace Fellowship for Women |
| 4 9:30 Sunday school 10:45 Worship 5:00 Live Coals Prayer | 5 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 6 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 11 9:30 Sunday school 10:45 Worship | 12 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 13 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 7:00-8:30 am Men's Prayer Fellowship |
| 18 9:30 Sunday school 10:45 Worship Congregational Meeting | 19 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 20 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 |
| 25 Palm Sunday 9:30 Sunday School 10:45 Worship | 26 7:00 Addictions Victorious | 27 1:15 p.m. Ladies' Bible Class | 28 | 29 6:00 Maundy Thursday dinner and communion | 30 Good Friday | 31 |