

the *Kerygma*



NEWSLETTER OF REDEEMER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Catechism: It's not just for kids!

At Redeemer, we place a high priority on catechizing our young people. A catechism is an old educational technique which utilizes short questions and answers to instill in us the important truths of the Bible.

At Redeemer, our children utilize the Children's Catechism, but during our worship services we often read from the Westminster Larger and Shorter Catechisms. All of these are excellent tools which will help you understand the Christian faith better.

Today we live in a time when the "doctrines of our faith" are under attack. Even the idea of truth is seen in a negative light. Nevertheless, trying to escape truth is like trying to escape your skin; it is a part of us. We can't deny the reality of truth or we would have to deny ourselves. The question is not is there truth, but what is the truth? While not carrying the authority of the Scriptures, our catechisms do a masterful job of helping us learn the contours of our faith as it is revealed in the Scriptures.

So, the next time you hear that your child is learning the catechism, why not join him or her? You'll be surprised by how much you learn!

Practicing the Gospel

BY PASTOR GIBBS

An interesting biographical sketch occurs in Paul's epistle to the Galatians. There the apostle Paul tells of his encounter with his fellow-apostle, Peter, in the city of Antioch. Paul writes, *But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.* (2:11-12)

The idea that spiritual purity is something we gain through the performance of certain duties and avoidance of certain vices has been around forever. Here we see even the apostle Peter falling into that same trap of spiritual purity by "right" associations. Though Peter knew the *truth of the Gospel*, that there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile and that everyone is declared righteous before God only through faith in Jesus Christ, he failed to *practice the Gospel* when it demanded him to leave his comfort zone. Notice Paul's words, *But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the Gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"* (2:14)

We don't practice the Gospel because it makes us uncomfortable:

Instead of cowering before the "certain men" from James, Peter should have continued his custom of making no distinction in his associations. He should have treated everyone the same way—Jew and Gentile alike. If the Gospel means anything, it means that everyone has the same need before God and can receive the same grace before God. As a result, there should be no distinctions based on external require-

ments. In the case of Peter and Paul, those requirements regulated with whom one could eat. In our day, however, we have other ones. How many of us choose our associations, restrict our involvement with others and frankly shy away from Christians different from ourselves? When we do this we have chosen to deny the truth of the Gospel; we have refused to practice what we believe. Instead of acting like the Gospel removes every worldly barrier that I have to real fellowship with other Christians, we often act like the issues of race, outward religiosity, socio-economic status and our neighborhood matter even more.

There is no denying it. If we act on the Gospel's truth, it forces us to leave our comfort zone. Just like Peter was uncomfortable before those who were denying the Gospel, so will we be when we obey God rather than submit ourselves to the world's patterns of relationships based on external patterns of righteousness.

We don't practice the Gospel because we value a righteousness of our own making:

Peter's defection from the Gospel is not superficial. While his behavior makes clear a defection in practice, it goes deeper and reflects a defection of the truth. Notice what Paul says in verse 14 again. He questions Peter; how could Peter, though he was a Jew who had come to embrace the freedom of the Gospel that was for both Jews and Gentiles, force Gentiles to submit themselves again to Jewish customs? In so doing, Peter was continuing to value a righteousness "according to law-keeping" and not according to Christ. In other words, by reinstating these food laws governing table fellowship, Peter was

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REDEEMER CELEBRATES



Redeemer celebrated her One-Year Anniversary on February 1st following worship with a luncheon and program recalling the many blessings of God's grace upon her as well as looking toward the vision of being His Gospel-driven church.



Redeemer SA ladies join Redeemer Austin, All Saints, Christ the King, Cross Pointe, and Emmanuel ladies for a Legacy of Grace retreat led by author Susan Hunt in teaching us the meaning of authentic Biblical womanhood.



Redeemer rejoices in God's increase among us with our newest members: Phil and Lena Topper with Philip, Jean and Paul; Jeff and Julie Rutherford; Nate Murphy; Toby and Krisanne Stohlhandske with Annika, Kierstn, and Gunnar; Jim and Lori Dante with Jimmy and Juliana; and Anna Catherine Gibbs (became a Communing Member).

OUR SERVANTS SOUTH OF THE BORDER

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Is 52:7)

Some time ago the Lord had presented Redeemer with a wonderful opportunity to partner with a missionary family in Mexico to reach the city of Guadalajara for His glory. Paul and Dawn Fisher, along with their nine children, are a unique family having an endearing quality that invites strangers to fast friendships.

Their vision for Guadalajara is to serve the community through different ministry avenues. Some of these are through small group Bible studies and youth camps, but the main focus is through a music ministry. Paul's goal is to open Soli Deo Gloria Music Academy full-time in 2004, if the financial support allows. This Academy teaches students to lead worship services through music as well as receive training in evangelism and church planting skills. In the mean time, Paul conducts music workshops that include music theory, voice, violin and guitar.

Dawn and the children homeschool and are involved in music and ballet. Just recently their twelve year old daughter, Wendy, had an opportunity to share the Gospel with her ballet teacher and another friend. Four of the girls with their dad make up the family string quintet which performed last fall at a local community center. The Gospel was presented with the music, and all were well received. They keep busy in the Lord and boldly go where no ballerina has ever dared!

As you can see, the Fishers incorporate the Gospel in all aspects of their lives and long to bring others into their fold to the glory of God. What does this mean for us in San Antonio? Redeemer supports the Fishers at \$2400.00 per year as well as lifting them up to the Lord in prayer for all their needs.

But there is still so much more to do. Though they are supported by Redeemer and other churches, they also receive financial gifts through individuals. If you are interested in personally receiving the Fisher's prayer letters or supporting them financially, pick up their card at the Missions Table at the Bright Shawl on Sundays.

PRACTICING THE GOSPEL CONT.

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acting like he was a better Christian, a more spiritual version of a follower of Christ.

The same tendency remains in churches today. It varies from church to church, fellowship to fellowship, but we all have our "badges" of spirituality or "hoops" of performance. Upon completion or attainment we move into the realm of the "spiritual" or "super-Christian." But instead of moving towards maturity, we have actually moved towards judgmentalism and sectarianism. What looks like maturity is really just old-fashioned pride and hypocrisy. In fact, that is exactly what Paul said of Peter's behavior, *And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with [Peter]...* (13). We have no reason to make distinctions or tiers of spirituality with those around us based on external, extra-Biblical religious codes.

What should we do at Redeemer?

The first thing we must do is value the Gospel before our "badges" of spirituality. To become a Christian, to understand the Gospel, means that I have let go of what was formally to my credit. Paul refuses to value his spiritual pedigree in his epistle to the Philippians (chapter 3) because he saw how he had viewed it as his own ladder into heaven. Instead he called what had been to his credit "rubbish". We must do the same thing with our own "spiritual achievements". Whether it be knowledge, deeds of holiness or deep experiences, they avail us nothing before a holy God. All of our Bible study

programs, prayer plans, missionary trips, evangelistic successes, perfect attendance records, seminary degrees, etc. avail us nothing in being righteous before a holy God.

Instead, we must see our righteousness as completely the fruit of Christ's work on our behalf. He has died the death I deserved and lived the life I could not live. *He is my righteousness and he is the righteousness of all those who believe.* What this means is that I cannot view other Christians as either "super-spiritual" or "sub-spiritual" based upon their performance. I must relate to everyone in view of the same grace we each have received.

The natural overflow of such an understanding will be to step outside of my comfort zone and build relationships with people different from myself. Let me describe what I envision by a typical scenario in our worship service. There we are surrounded by all kinds of people we have not yet met. But instead of meeting new people, we typically revert to our "old" values of association instead of the Gospel's values. Why not instead, choose to surround yourself with new people? Take them to the Welcome Station; make sure they have received our pamphlets; introduce them to other members, and invite them to your Community Group. And, even though you'll feel uncomfortable, you will be practicing the Gospel's truth. Who knows; maybe someone will come to believe in the Gospel because you practiced its truth!

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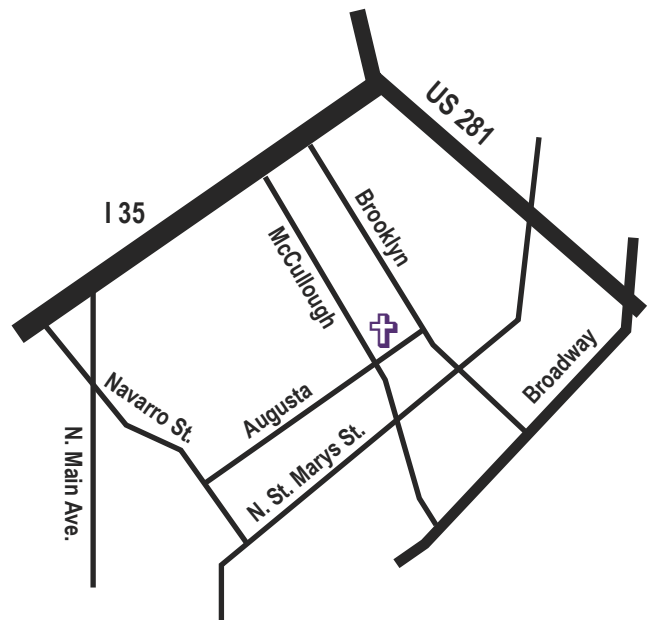
**Join us for
worship on
Sundays at
The Bright Shawl
(819 Augusta)
at 9:30 a.m.
(see map for directions)**

UPCOMING EVENTS

Please call the church office for more information about the following:

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| March 2 &
April 6 | Newcomer's Dessert |
| April 9 | Good Friday Service
at The Bright Shawl |
| April 11 | Easter Service
at The Bright Shawl |
| April 30 &
May 1 | Intro to Redeemer
Membership Class |

MAP



✚ Sunday Morning Worship at the Bright Shawl
819 Augusta, corner of McCullough and Augusta
(the Junior League Building, downtown San Antonio)