

The Pastor's Quarry

First Baptist Church of Granite Falls, MN
March, 2010

A Website Updated and Pondered

I am happy to announce that our new and improved website is up and running! Not only does it have a new look, it also has quite a bit of new content. New pages include "Our Beliefs," "How We Worship," "Christian Education," "Our History," "Growing in Your Relationship with God," and "Special Events." There is also a new page with a calendar of events at our church.¹

Another new page is called "Resources by Topic." This page lists dozens of different topics, including "The Text of the Bible," "God's Glory," "The Doctrines of Grace," "Moral Imagination," "Joy," "Parenting," "Worship," "Missions," and many more. If you visit this page, you can click on one of these topics to find relevant sermons, essays, and other publications unique to our church. This resource library will continue to grow as new sermons and publications are added in the days to come.

As I survey all that this website offers, it seems a good time to ponder a few questions. What are the benefits of such a website? Are there any dangers? Do the benefits outweigh the dangers? Are the benefits worth the time and money it takes to maintain our website?

What are the benefits of a website like this? Our website definitely offers several benefits. First, it allows people to easily find our church. Most people today have Internet access, and many (if not most) of them use the Internet instead of the phone book. In the last few months, two individuals and one family have visited us, and all of them found us in this way. Also, it helps visitors learn about us – not just people considering their first visit, but people who have begun attending regularly. The website also helps members in several ways. When making plans, they can easily refer to the most current version of our calendar. They can also use the website to review past sermons and publications, and can share links to these resources as they engage others in discussion. Furthermore, the "podcast" on our website allows members to listen to Sunday-morning sermons that they have missed due to travel or sickness. Other friends who live outside Minnesota also subscribe to this podcast, including one of our missionaries. Last but certainly not least, the website also presents the gospel to all who visit.

Are there any dangers in having a website like this? There is certainly a danger in how one part of it can be *used*, namely, the part that lets you listen to sermons. If somebody is able to attend the assembly but prefers to stay at home and just listen to sermons online, he is misusing the website terribly. However, this danger is not unique to our website. People have been misusing the Bible in the same way long before the invention of the Internet, forsaking the assembly because they prefer to read the Bible by themselves. Still, we ought to be aware of the danger of misusing the website in this way. Listening to sermons online is no substitute for attending the assembly. We must take heed that we are "not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some." (Heb 10:25b, ESV)

Do the benefits outweigh the dangers? I would answer this with a qualified, "Yes." Yes, that is, barring misuse. If it appears the availability of online sermons encourages members to forsake the assembly, we ought to seriously consider suspending that portion of the website while working with them. But as long as we understand that our website merely supports our time together, and does not supplant it, we can rejoice in the benefits it offers. To encourage this understanding, I have placed a link on the website to a podcast titled, "Is Listening to Sermons Online Enough?"

Are the benefits worth the time and money it takes to maintain our website? Currently, our website costs us \$97.40 per year. Considering this is how much we would pay for just a few small advertisements in the local paper, this seems economical. The time it takes to maintain the website is a bit more substantial; I estimate that I spend 3-5 days each year working on it. But in this we have cause to rejoice, for we are able to benefit from the skill I gained in my previous employment. Were we to hire a programmer to write a website like this, the cost would be prohibitive. As it is, the marginal cost to the church is nill. I think the website really is worth what we put into it, and more. May we use it for God's glory.

Mark Your Calendars

Good Friday, Apr. 2, 8:00 P.M.: Service of Tenebrae.

Easter Sunday, Apr. 4, breakfast at 9:00 A.M., followed by a short devotional message. Food provided. Aside from our regularly scheduled morning worship service at 10:30-11:45 A.M., there will be no other meal or worship service.

Fri., Apr. 9, 7:00 P.M.: Monthly music and book discussion at the house of Dale and Mary Streblow.

Sat., Apr. 17, 12:30 P.M.: Spring Picnic at the Parsonage! Bring something to grill or a covered dish, if you like. Beverages provided.

Sun., Apr. 18, 1:15 P.M.: First quarter business meeting.

Fri., Apr. 23, 7:00 P.M.: Monthly book discussion at the house of Dale and Mary Streblow, followed by choir practice.

Quote of the Month

The true way to be strong, is to realize our weakness, and to feel that Christ must be all.

J. C. Ryle

Holiness

¹ You may visit our website at www.firstbaptistgranitefalls.org.

Two Sonnets

by

Christina Georgina Rossetti (1830-1894)

When Adam and when Eve left Paradise
Did they love on and cling together still,
Forgiving one another all that ill
The twain had wrought on such a different wise?
She propped upon his strength, and he in guise
Of lover and though of lord, girt to fulfil
Their time of life and die when God should will;
Lie down to sleep, and having slept arise.
Boast not against us, O our enemy!
Today we fall, but we shall rise again;
We grope today, tomorrow we shall see:
What is today that we should fear today?
A morrow cometh which shall sweep away
Thee and thy realm of change and death and pain.

* * *

We feel and see with different hearts and eyes: -
Ah Christ, if all our hearts could meet in Thee
How well it were for them and well for me,
Our hearts Thy dear accepted sacrifice.
Thou, only Life of hearts and Light of eyes,
Our life, our light, if once we turn to Thee,
So be it, O Lord, to them and so to me;
Be all alike Thine own dear sacrifice.
Thou Who by death hast ransomed us from death,
Thyself God's sole well-pleasing Sacrifice,
Thine only sacred Self I plead with Thee:
Make Thou it well for them and well for me
That Thou hast given us souls and wills and breath,
And hearts to love Thee, and to see Thine eyes.

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A Bit of History

“Anything is to be preferred or endured rather than marrying without affection.”² So wrote novelist Jane Austen in a letter to her niece in 1814, and so people seem to think today. Folks take it for granted that love is the most important reason to marry. Naturally, they shudder at the thought of an arranged marriage. After all, since only an individual can know his own heart, who can choose a mate for him? But it has not always been this way, Coontz reminds us:

Until the late eighteenth century, most societies . . . saw marriage as far too vital an economic and political institution to be left entirely to the free choice of the two individuals involved, especially if they were going to base their decision on something as unreasoning and transitory as love.³

Throughout history, marriages have been more like the very first marriage – that of Adam and Eve. Those two certainly did not exercise their free choice in the matter, and love (if there was love) came later.

Such was also the case with Isaac and Rebekah. Neither had even met before the marriage was planned. When they finally did meet, Rebekah veiled her face. Having only prayed for God to supply him with a wife and knowing nothing about her (not even what she looked like!) Isaac married her, “and she became his wife, and he loved her.” (Gen 24:67) First they got married, and then love came later.

This notion was so entrenched that even when the revolutionary “love match” began shifting mate selection to the individual, love did not precede the initial selection, but followed it:

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries even the most enthusiastic advocates of love matches had believed that love developed after one had selected a suitable prospective mate. People didn't *fall* in love. They *tiptoed* into it.⁴

It took another century before the modern system of dating took hold, in which men and women postpone mate selection until they suddenly and inexplicably “fall in love.”

Over that century, Victorian society developed an elaborate system of courtship. Individuals had more freedom than ever to choose a mate, but the process was closely supervised by the girl's family. In fact, it was initiated by her family; a fellow was allowed only to hint that he would welcome an invitation from her parents.

But by the 20th century, dating would sweep courtship away:

Young people had gained the right to select their own marriage partners more than a century before. Now they were starting to sample the merchandise before making their final selection. The youth culture burst upon the scene across Europe and North America during the 1920s . . . The word *date* was not used in its modern sense until the 1890s, and even then it was only used in working-class slang. By 1914, however, the respectable middle-class *Ladies' Home Journal* had begun to use the word, putting it in quotation marks to indicate its novelty.⁵

Dating was an escape from parental supervision; boys spirited away girls who were hopeful to “fall in love” and “live happily ever after” with one of them. With such sentimental expectations, is it any wonder so many eventually sought divorce?

²Jane Austen, letter LXXX to her niece Fanny Knight. n.p. [cited 30 Mar 2010] Online: <http://www.pemberley.com/janeinfo/brablt15.html#letter80>.

³Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: From Obedience to Intimacy or How Love Conquered Marriage* (New York: Viking, 2005), 5.

⁴*Ibid.*, 178.

⁵*Ibid.*, 199.