

GROW IN GRACE NEWSLETTER

Volume 39, No.46, November 12, 2013 / Southside Baptist Church & Christian School / P.O. Box 1594 / 1028 South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 / **The Grow in Grace Newsletter**— a weekly Bible Study, plus news notes— designed first and foremost for members and those attending services at Southside Church... sent forth to aid one and all, (including friends far and wide who receive the Newsletter), in the experience of 2 Peter 3:18. "But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen."

A GOOD CHURCH— NOT IN STEP with the World!

[What follows are VERY IMPORTANT updated and added statements of some basic BIBLICAL foundations for a local Christ-honoring, Bible believing church.]

The times and trends, as set forth in *Pastors At Risk*, by H.B. London and Neil B. Wiseman, are, sadly, on target: "Today's long-held assumptions about doctrinal devotion... no longer apply. **Fewer and fewer people choose a church or continue to attend because of Biblical teaching**... they may even feel uncomfortable with the Biblical language of sin and salvation... Biblical absolutes have deteriorated into mere opinions... [and people]... **place more value on success and show than on spiritual reality and wholehearted repentance and authentic holy living**... faith issues are far down the average person's priority list after the ... latest video release, Little League [and/or other sports] games, or weekend diversions... [and multitudes of church folk are in migration to churches that] emphasize the worshiper **rather than God [or] theology**... their public worship includes lots of contemporary [rock-styled] music, usually without a hymnal; [they love] drama... [and usually have very little] Scripture." (Quotes drawn from pages 29-42)

In *Escape from Christendom*, Robert Burnell is on target: "Never has it been more clear to me that two revivals are in progress on the earth. **One is the revival of the Spirit of God** by which dead men and women are freed from their sins by the blood of the Lamb and raised to a life which is the life of the sons of God, a life which bears God's nature, manifests God's mercy. **The other revival is the revival of religious flesh**, a revival which is so appealing and gathers such multitudes and wields power in this world because it offers all the comfort of religion while allowing you to keep your ego and all rights to yourself."

"Surely each of us has to decide which revival he is going to be part of. Am I going to invest my life in some enterprise of booming Christian City? Or am I going to lose my life in the pursuit of God's will of mercy? Am I going to concentrate on building something that will cause the citizens of Christian City to sit up and take notice? Or am I going to spend my life bringing the poor and the maimed and the halt and the blind to the Master's table?"

WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO 'lose your life' in the high calling of WALKING IN THE STEPS of Jesus! WE ENCOURAGE YOU to pray about teaming up with us [OR walk in these paths in the midst of the congregation where God has you planted!] in coming to THE MASTER'S TABLE and bringing others with you! **THE WAY OF THE CROSS still leads home!**

SEEKING A CHURCH FAMILY with whom to team up is no small matter. Sadly, the process often takes place in the dark! What do I mean by that? Well, think about this: (1) When couples are considering the possibility of getting married; (2) When churches call a new pastor; (3) And/or when families or individuals are praying about attending a different congregation— in all three of these most critical areas, far too many folk will ultimately make decisions only to wake up a few days or a few months later totally surprised! They find out, a little late, that they have entered into a covenant relationship with STRANGERS! Conflict and divorce are all too often in the wind!

A common root problem is the process! Too often these critical decisions are made without truly walking in the light with one another. I choose to believe that, normally, no one is intentionally lying! Folks just don't bother to tell the whole truth about who they/we really are, where they/we have been and/or what scars in our lives are still fresh, etc.

AS TO FOLK who are VISITING CHURCHES— in the real world:

- 1) **Many who** are visiting churches are still hurting from conflict in previous churches.
- 2) **While others are new comers** into the area and are simply seeking a new church home.
- 3) **Others** simply have release by the Holy Spirit to seek a fresh place of ministry.
- 4) **Still others** have found that their current Church has moved away from core essentials of the 'faith and practice' of their former days; and so they seek a loving fellowship that is grounded in the Word of God.

REGARDLESS: Those who are visiting a church and the church family being visited **MUST WALK IN THE LIGHT—** must be totally **HONEST** about who you are!

AS TO SOUTHSIDE: God may or may not lead you to visit with us or to explore fellowship with the saints at Southside! **Nevertheless, here are several important characteristics which we believe should characterize a Bible believing church!** It is our prayer that you will

find something in these pages that will be of help to you in your journey of faith— EITHER IN THE CONGREGATION where God already has you planted; OR in the one where you will be planted! **A GOOD CHURCH should set forth,**

I. A HIGH VIEW OF GOD: Jeremiah 9:23-24 reveals that the greatest quest in life worth boasting about is the quest of knowing God. A good church will help you grow in Biblical knowledge of and fellowship with the True and Living God. **PROBLEM:** Multitudes will be arriving at church services on Sunday, looking for a 'feel good feeling'... looking for 'what we like'... looking for 'something for the children and youth'... and/or they arrive simply enticed by the flesh-feeding promise of, 'Worship with us WE will meet your needs!'— RATHER THAN ARRIVING looking to worship God in praise, thanksgiving, awe, and in loving SUBMISSION to His will. **REALITY: The Bible is a GOD BOOK and not a ME BOOK.** The KEY to life is KNOWING GOD! If you know Him; you will love Him; and when you love Him, you will obey Him; and when you obey Him it demonstrates that you love Him and HE WILL BE STRONG on your behalf— He searches throughout the whole earth for those whose hearts are PERFECT [WHOLEHEARTED] toward Him— to those He shows Himself strong. Those who KNOW THEIR GOD do exploits! (2 Chronicles 16:9; Daniel 11:32) **TRAGEDY: Many churches today build based on meeting FELT NEEDS; and the great IDOLS OF SELF love it!**

GOD'S WAY IS RADICALLY DIFFERENT: Seek first the KINGDOM, the rule of God... seek first to KNOW GOD, to love, and to obey Him— then, needs are met as HE sees fit and as overflow of intimacy with God! (Matthew 6:33; John 14:21-24)

II. WORSHIP and PRAISE: The congregation's highest priority and privilege is worship. Psalm 2:11 declares, *"...Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling."* **The modern trend** today finds churches seeking to please congregations in whatever style of music they like. The world loves rock, rap, hip-hop, country, etc. Thus, many modern church services are more and more filled with 'Christianized' versions of people's secular loves and tastes. Again, this well pleases the great IDOL OF SELF.

However, true Christian Worship is God-centered, not man-centered. God is worthy that we should Praise Him! Worship is for God and not for our carnal pleasure. Christian music should not be a mimic of the world. **At Southside, we love the great hymns of the faith because they are so God-focused and God-glorifying!** We also appreciate modern Christian songs, praise music, Scripture songs, etc., so long as the words are God-honoring and the accompanying music matches those words instead of sounding like the world.

III. THE FAMILY: Our modern society has unleashed an unprecedented onslaught against the family. **To make the family a priority** is to teach husbands to love and lead their wives (Eph. 5:25); wives to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22), and children to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1), and parents to train their children in the ways of the LORD (Eph. 6:4). **We seek** to build up families! **We seek** to provide a haven for single parents by surrounding them with

godly families. **We seek** to provide help for hurting and broken families. We **seek** to empower and supplement parents through **Sunday School classes, Children's Church, Southside Christian School, Summer Camp, Music opportunities, etc.** We also have age integrated family settings for some meetings.

IV. DISCIPLESHIP: The church must be equipping men and women for ministry. The mission of the church is clear, "*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...*" (Matt. 28:19) **The call is not to merely 'count nickels and noses' so as to get the praise of men for having a crowd present.**

Moreover, discipleship in a body of believers is not the exclusive responsibility of pastors. Indeed, the primary privilege of this process lies with the assembly of saints: (Meditate upon **Ephesians 4:11-16; I Corinthians 12:13-26**) Christian Fellowship and Discipleship takes place in Sunday School Classes, Ladies Bible Studies, Saturday Men's meetings, in our homes, and etc. There is NO fellowship so encouraging, exciting and powerful as FELLOWSHIP in Gospel ministry: Philippians 1:1-30.

V. EVANGELISM: A church obedient to Christ will have a solid emphasis upon sharing the Gospel, beginning in its own community and extending to the uttermost parts of the earth. Our Lord Jesus charged His disciples just prior to His ascension with these words, "*....and you shall be my witnesses, both in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth.*" (Acts 1:11)

Two of the greatest hindrances to evangelism today are unholy living and conflict in the churches. At Southside, God continues to call us to holiness and love so as not to cancel the Gospel message we proclaim!

VI. A SERVANT'S ATMOSPHERE: Where the Word of God is taught and saints are growing there will be people serving. A good church emphasizes everyone's responsibility for involvement and mutual ministry. "*For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many.*" (Mark 10:45). "*For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh; but through love serve one another.*" (Gal. 5:13) We seek to be a congregation of servants for Christ.

VII. PREACHING & TEACHING: Biblical preaching is not to be geared toward amusing the audience; nor geared toward any other fad that comes down the pike in our entertainment oriented age. Biblical preaching will **TEACH** the faith; **CORRECT** error; **RESET** the direction of our lives; and **TRAIN** us in righteous living. (2 Timothy 3:15-17) **Preaching and teaching that is true to God's Word will equip us for every good work and supply genuine needs!** (2 Tim. 3:16-17) Paul charged Pastor Timothy, "*Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.***" (I Timothy 4:2)

We live in an intense spiritual war zone— and yet, there are many who seek churches where their 'ears will be tickled'. They have little or no interest in sound Biblical doctrine. They want to keep their sin and be promised heaven. They love fables and stories and religious entertainment. **TRAGICALLY, many 'Aarons' are in the pulpits** of the land **HELPING FOLKS** with their idols and constructing **AMAZING WORSHIP SERVICES UNTO THE LORD—** there is only one problem: God hates it. Judgment day is coming. (Exodus 32) **BY THE GRACE OF GOD, at Southside we seek to embrace and love the pure Word of God!**

Moreover, on a typical Sunday at Southside— the pastor may be preaching or men from the congregation [Mark, Cloyd, Andy, Adam, or a visiting Missionary] may be in the pulpit! We find it to be a positive experience for the congregation to receive the pure Word of God through various personalities who have various gifts. **Pastors also profit from sitting in the pews!** And besides, what a wonderful way for the Pastor/Teacher to equip the saints by giving the saints opportunity to have their faith stretched and gifts developed!

VIII. A CLEAR GOSPEL MESSAGE: The Gospel is the good news of Christ's death for sinners, His burial and resurrection, all according to the Scriptures. Please carefully read I Corinthians 15:1-4 where this Gospel is clearly presented. **A good church will** continually be refuting the idea that men and woman can obtain Heaven through human merit of any kind.

Ephesians 2:8-9 states, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."*

A good church will also be bold to proclaim Ephesians 2:10— FOR TRUE Salvation is **GOD'S WORKMANSHIP!** True salvation results in a changed life that overflows with good works! In other words, a good church will constantly convey that salvation is: By **GRACE** alone; through **FAITH** alone; because of **CHRIST** alone; and **UNTO** the fruit of good works!

IX. A COMMITMENT TO THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES: A high view of the Bible is demonstrated in a good church when preaching and teaching is done under the presupposition that God has given to us a Bible with answers for life's questions and problems. This truth is the intent of the Holy Spirit's statement in II Peter 1:3, where we are clearly told that God has *"Granted to us everything pertaining to life and Godliness."*

A good church will not substitute heart issues with psychological jargon (Matt. 15:19), or label sin as disease— nor will a good church turn to fables and stories in a carnal attempt to keep folks attention. **God's Word is SUPER attractive; and attentiveness** to the Word of God is a spiritual, heart decision and choice! (2 Timothy 4:1-5; Nehemiah 8 & 9)

The Attractiveness of Jesus and His Word comes by the blessed ministry of the Holy Spirit, not by an R-rated Hollywood movie clip in a sermon. The Psalmist declared the sufficiency of God's Wisdom when he said, *"The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple."* (Psalm 19:7)

X. Dependence upon the Holy Spirit is critical for a good, Bible-believing Church. Upon Spiritual birth, all Christians are baptized by the Holy Spirit into the body of Christ, (1 Cor. 12:13). We are commanded to be being continuously filled with the Holy Spirit, (Eph 5:18; Col. 3:16); and we are warned not to quench or grieve the Holy Spirit, (1 Thess. 5:19; Eph. 4:30). God has given various gifts of the Holy Spirit, as it pleases Him, (1 Cor. 12:1-33; Rom. 12:1-9; Eph. 4:11-16)

Note: Bible-believing Christians are at different places as to understanding the gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, there is nothing in the New Testament that equates any or even all of the gifts as being a sign of a high level of spirituality or power with God. **The Corinthian Church came behind in no gift, yet they were very carnal.** The great need is for Christians to be being filled with the Holy Spirit, overflowing with abundant evidence of the nine-fold fruit of the Holy Spirit! (Gal. 5:21-24)

XI. A WILLINGNESS TO IMPLEMENT CHURCH DISCIPLINE: The name of Christ will be honored and the purity of the church will be maintained only when the members of the church are willing to obey God in their commitment to lovingly and in humility of heart, confront one another when needed: *"And if your brother sins, Go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother."* (Matt. 18:15) *"Brethren, even if a man is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted."* (Gal. 6:1)

Forgiveness is both a great virtue and the key to genuine unity in the church... and/or in our homes! When we forgive each other, we tear down the barriers that are built up through sin. As Christians we are to *"Forgive each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you."* (Eph. 4:12). Based upon the fact that we have received the forgiveness of God in Christ, we are to offer forgiveness to others.

XII. A GOOD CHURCH MUST BE COMMITTED TO A LIFE OF PRAYER: Since only God can do the work of God, then we must pray. The Temple of Jesus is still to be a Temple of Prayer. Private, individual prayer and Church-wide prayer must be a priority!

At Southside Baptist, we are committed to be and to be becoming a good church! We will never arrive! We will always be in process. WITH OUR EYES ON JESUS, we will continue to go forward. If ever we put our eyes on man ... any man ... we will fragment.

Will a good church be free of problems? No! — Because people = potential problems! But a good church will face and deal with problems in a loving, solution-oriented, Christian manner. (The above points are not exhaustive... but certainly foundational!)

ABUNDANT GRACE TO YOU AND YOURS! James Bell / www.southsidegallatin.org