



**GROW
IN
GRACE**
NEWSLETTER

Volume 40, No. 49, December 9 , 2014 / Southside Baptist Church & Christian School / P.O. Box 1594 / 1028 South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 / The Grow in Grace Newsletter is **a weekly Bible Study**, plus local church news notes— designed first and foremost for members and those attending services at Southside Church. It is sent forth with the desire to aid one and all, (including friends far and wide), 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."***

The BATTLE for Jesus Christ to have PREEMINENCE!

Colossians 1:18 Amplified Bible— *He [JESUS] also is the Head of [His] body, the church; seeing He is the Beginning, the Firstborn from among the dead, so that **He alone in everything and in every respect might occupy the chief place [stand first and be preeminent].***

It seems that there is always someone or something seeking to have FIRST PLACE in the hearts of Christians— someone/something other than the LORD JESUS CHRIST. Every November and December the annual Christmas season is revved up with cultural, work-related, school-related, family, and religious activities all demanding FIRST PLACE in our hearts and first place of our time and resources. **IN THE MIDST OF IT ALL, genuine Christians have a sincere desire to truly honor Jesus Christ! But it is no easy battle to win!**

Good News: We have a great tool to help us win this battle because we confess the Bible as our sole authority and guide for doctrine and practice. Doubtless we are among those who embrace Martin Luther's confession— made when he was asked to deny the Bible and to submit to the Roman Catholic Church and her pope. Luther proclaimed:

"Unless I am refuted and convicted by testimonies of the Scriptures or by clear arguments (since I believe neither the Pope nor

the Councils alone; it being evident that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), **I am conquered by the Holy Scriptures quoted by me, and my conscience is bound in the word of God: I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is unsafe and dangerous to do anything against the conscience. Here I stand! I cannot do otherwise. God help me! Amen.**" (*History of the Christian Church*, vol. VII, ch. 3, sec. 55)

MOREOVER, LUTHER FAMOUSLY STATED: "Feelings come and feelings go, and feelings are deceiving; my warrant is the Word of God— naught else is worth believing. Though all my heart should feel condemned for want of some sweet token, There is One greater than my heart Whose Word cannot be broken. **I'll trust in God's unchanging Word till soul and body severs, for, though all things shall pass away, HIS WORD SHALL STAND FOREVER!**"

That's a powerful, good, and wise CONFESSION! Even so, time and time again over the years of Church history, majority voices in visible churches have denied such confessions, persecuted, and even killed multitudes who kept on holding to simple and Biblical faith like Martin Luther's.

'WHERE DO I STAND?'

In reality, many of us are Double-Minded. We agree with, confess, and seek to apply such confessions while at the same time embracing the demands of modern culture and religion. **This is understandable for there is much in the world that is flesh appealing and EASY TO LOVE!** It does not have to be wicked stuff! It is often legitimate! As a result, there are many religious and/or cultural traditions upon which we place more value and heart than we do on the will of God as revealed in the Word of God.

When Jesus was on earth, the Jewish religious people were **doing some good things**, which Jesus said that they should not leave undone. Their deep rooted problem was that they were **missing the primary things!** (Matthew 23:23)

What about us? WHEN WE ARE CHALLENGED as to our plans and traditions, at times we protest, “What’s wrong with it? I don’t see anything wrong with it!”

Here is the deeper question: ‘HAVE THESE THINGS’ stolen my heart, moved me to misplace my affections, have led me to wrong priorities, and/or have caused me to miss JESUS CHRIST as the Preeminent One??!’

The cares of this life CHOKE!! – [Legitimate ‘cares’... not wicked sins!] (Matthew 13:22) **MOREOVER, I cannot serve two masters equally!** (Matthew 6:24) Thus, I need to ask, “In December— what, who is preeminent in my life?”

Here are examples of reality for far too many:

Example ONE: An Internet conversation. All those involved were professing, and likely sincere Christians. Below, each person is identified by a ‘number’ and the conversation is given without correction to wording, grammar, etc.:

1. “152 days until Christmas! Love the holidays... it's the days leading up to it with madness... and then its wintertime... sigh.”
2. “I can't even think about that right now. It seems that I have so many other things to get through first.”
3. “I always wonder why all kids programs are scheduled then?? Why music recitals etc. with everything else we have to do?”
4. “EXACTLY!!”
5. “I wish it was just a relaxing time when we could enjoy OURSELVES WITH OUR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS, and not just a time of negative financial impact and stress!”
6. “So, let's start now... I feel better already! FAMILY, FOOD, FUN... period.”

DID YOU NOTICE? It’s not like any of them were planning to commit some horrible sin. They were talking about common ‘stuff’ of our culture. However, in their comments there was not even one word about JESUS! Then, one more person joined the conversation:

7. “Amazing: The New Testament Christians did not have, did not celebrate Christmas as we know it. THEY DID rejoice in and celebrate the glorious reality that GOD HAD COME IN THE FLESH! Their rejoicing was not on a set 'day'... but in their LIFESTYLE: Paul has been teaching about Elders and Deacons in First Timothy 3:1-15... And then he JUST EXPLODES with spontaneous worship: *"And without controversy GREAT is the mystery of godliness: GOD WAS MANIFEST in the flesh.... etc.!!"* OR... as in 2 Corinthians 9:1-14, PAUL has been speaking much about generous giving.... but suddenly, he BURSTS FORTH: *"THANKS BE TO GOD for His UNSPEAKABLE GIFT!"*

SO... #7 did not attack any of their comments, just brought JESUS CHRIST to the forefront of this discussion among Christians. WHY NOT? For these six Christians would have no doubt led the ‘choir’ in proclaiming, **‘JESUS is the reason for the season!’** **Three of them responded to #7’s** having brought the Word of God and the example of New Testament Christians into the discussion. **Their responses:**

- 1. “Oh no let’s not talk about that!!!!”**
- 2. “Dislike.”**
- 3. “Ugh!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!”** (That’s an ‘ugh’ with 14 exclamation points!)

And then, there was silence... total stunning silence.

APPLICATION for each of us, any time of the year: Are there places, situations, people, loves, traditions, etc... where JESUS IS OFF LIMITS in my life... where I am not primarily interested in His good pleasure?

Example TWO: A 2010 Southern Baptist LifeWay Research survey, by Brooklyn Lowery, edited:

1. LifeWay Research reveals that nine in 10 Americans (91 percent) personally celebrate Christmas... A majority of agnostics or those claiming no preference (89 percent), individuals claiming other religions (62 percent), and even atheists (55 percent) celebrate Christmas along with 97 percent of Christians.

2. 81 percent of all Americans put family first at Christmas, agreeing, strongly or somewhat, with the statement, "*Family traditions are the most important part of Christmas to me.*" Americans celebrate the Christmas holiday... but for most, **family is the reason for the season.**

At Christmas, giving gifts to family members is the most common activity at **89 percent**. Additionally, more than three out of four households report they gather with family or friends for a Christmas meal (86 percent), put up a Christmas tree (80 percent), listen to Christmas music (79 percent), and decorate their homes (77 percent).

Christians are actually among the most likely to enjoy elements of the Christmas season not related to Jesus' birth, with 66 percent saying they watch fictional Christmas movies, as compared to half of agnostics or those with no preference, and less than half of atheists and Americans of other religions...

Overall, a little more than one-third of all households (38 percent) encourage belief in Santa, compared to **42 percent of Christian households**. Again, overall, 38 percent of Americans encourage belief in Santa Claus; **only 28 percent** read or tell the Biblical account of the birth of Jesus.

CONCLUSION OF THE SURVEY:

"Americans give Jesus a head nod at Christmas but spend most of the season pleasing their eyes, ears, and taste buds with decorations, music, and meals," "Many celebrate Christmas the way most have celebrated Halloween -- the fun traditions without sharing the religious significance."

APPLICATION for us: I believe that the survey is just one more demonstration that Matthew 6:24 is actually true! **No one can serve two masters!** There is a war going on— who, what shall have the PREEMINENCE in my life?

Example three: A revealing testimony from a church member:

"...This year was especially momentous because of some special guests from the world of theatrical productions. **Some cast and crew members from the touring company of the Broadway production *The Lion King* watched the Monday evening performance of the *Singing Christmas Tree*.** Many repeat guests declared the performance "the best ever!" and first-time guests gave glowing praises, but some of the most meaningful comments came from the Broadway professionals themselves.

COMPARED TO ONLY 53 involved in *The Lion King*, the cast [*The Lion King* cast] was amazed to learn that more than 1,200 volunteers participated on stage or behind the scenes in the... production of the *Singing Christmas Tree*, with as many as 350 performers on stage in some of the major scenes. **Impressed with the quality and professionalism of every part of the production, they said, "We've been in theatres all across the country and we've never seen anything like this!**

APPLICATION for us: In the above testimony, JESUS did not even get an honorable mention! The glory is all about PRIDE in performance and pride in receiving the PRAISE of the world. THIS IS A COMMON TRAP, tis' easy for any of us to fall into it. **For whose praise and honor am I living?**

HARD TO FACE REALITY: Every December Bible-believing churches, big and small, spend much time and money to produce performances relating to the birth of Messiah. **Multitudes** sit, listen, enjoy, and leave talking about how good the performance was— **unmoved and untouched as to why Jesus came!**

JESUS CHRIST, the Saviour from sin is too seldom the focus.

RARE are those who experience spontaneous and overflowing joy and rejoicing about JESUS, such as we find in the New Testament:

"And the Word (Jesus) became flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

"Thanks be to God for His unspeakable Gift." (2 Cor. 9:15)

“...Jesus Christ: Who being in the form of God,... took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men... He humbled Himself ... unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. 2:1-11)

“And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: GOD WAS MANIFEST IN THE FLESH.....” (1 Tim. 3:16)

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, **that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.**” (1 Timothy 1:15)

THIS DECEMBER— it is a wonderful time to OPENLY TESTIFY in words such as these:

“God came in the flesh to save undeserving rebels (That’s us!) from the just and eternal wrath of God in hell! **He came to** set rebels free from self, sin and satan. **He gives** us new hearts and makes us His own sons and daughters; and makes us His servants, His friends, His saints and His co-laborers!

JOY! WONDER! Giving Thanks! Praising and CELEBRATING Jesus Christ! TELLING THE GOOD NEWS to the whole world till He comes back— **these are Christ-honoring responses** from those who have been rescued from sin, self, satan, and a doomed society! — **“O Come, let US adore HIM!”**

BOTTOM LINE REALITY: To win the battle for Jesus to be FIRST, PREEMINENT in worship and in life — especially during the Decembers of my life —

I will have to BELIEVE the Word of God— I cannot serve two masters. **I will find** great POSITIVE help from following the examples of those who first welcomed the birth of Christ. And as painful as it may be, **I will have to be honest** about and alert to the dangers of and the presence of double mindedness.

AS AN OVERFLOW OF DELIGHTING in JESUS CHRIST our LORD—
 may it also be seen in the setting aside of **EXTRA LOVE OFFERINGS for**
the work and ministry of
MISSIONARIES AROUND THE WORLD!

Jesus left heaven and came to earth on the GREATEST, most costly missionary journey of all time— to save sinners! **In Christ we have the high calling of God in Christ Jesus to LIVE the gospel and TAKE the gospel to the world, from Gallatin/Sumner County to the ends of the earth.**

LET US PRAY and GIVE and LIVE for the furtherance of the Gospel!

HALLELUJAH! WHAT A SAVIOR! Grace to all! James Bell
SOUTHSIDE NEWS NOTES!

TUESDAYS: Come and sing every Tuesday night at Gallatin Health Care nursing home. Meet at the front door at 5:30PM. Questions call Bradley Pennington at 615-804-3054.

**** WEDNESDAYS:** PRAYER SERVICE at 7:00PM; **IN THE CHURCH AUDITORIUM!**

**** NOTE:** Jody Allen is ministering to **young Children**, up to about age 10 during Prayer Service. Older children, but not old enough for the Youth Group... will be with their parents in the Prayer Service. **YOUTH GROUP:** Wednesdays 6-8pm... led by Byron Smith

→ LADIES BIBLE STUDY— Resumes **January 8, 11:00am**, New Study: The Life of David! Cindy Bell, teaching

*** SATURDAY MORNINGS @ 8am: Men's Fellowship/Bible Study!**

UPCOMING December Sundays:

***** 12/14 — 9:30am: Sunday School; 10:45am: a**
SPECIAL WORSHIP SERVICE REJOICING IN CHRIST'S
BIRTH;

Followed with covered dish Lunch; extended fellowship

***** 12/21— Annual Fellowship BRUNCH @ 9:30am:** (Start arriving in the Fellowship Hall at 9:00am... have all 'breakfast/brunch-type foods' on the tables... SO THAT WE CAN START PROMPTLY at 9:30am)

Followed by 10:45am Morning Worship;

Concluding at the LORD'S SUPPER. [No lunch]

NOTE; [12/21 Evening Home Groups... The group at the ALLENS will meet!]

***** 12/28— Sunday School and Worship Service, only!**