



**GROW
IN
GRACE**
NEWSLETTER

Volume 41, No. 20, May 19 , 2015 / 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."***

Promote/Proclaim Jesus and His Word— NOT Tags and Titles!

Arminian **or** Calvinist; Wesleyan **or** Reformed... **or** some combination thereof... **or** maybe different words... but regardless— **many folk love man-made TITLES and TAGS!** Some use such terms because they believe them to be helpful in communication. However, they are OFTEN used for the business of 'PIGEON-HOLING OTHERS or even for 'pigeon-holing' certain Scriptures.

EXAMPLE: Years back I had preached a message from John 17; and not once did I use any of the theological terms of men to set forth any doctrine. I simply quoted John 17:1-2, *"Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, **that He [JESUS] should give eternal life to as many as You [FATHER] have given Him."***

I then simply rejoiced: "O Christian, you are not an ACCIDENT— **you were GIVEN by the Father to the SON!**" Several verses in John 17 clearly state that wonderful truth. For making THAT STATEMENT, I was accused of 'preaching Calvinism!' What tragedy! The Biblical truth of John 17 did not fit their theology, so they 'pigion-holed' portions of John 17 as being 'Calvinistic.'

REALITY: NO Scripture is Calvinistic, Arminian, Reformed, Wesleyan, or whatever! **NOT ONE VERSE of the God-breathed Word of God should EVER be tainted or polluted with any man's name.** The Holy Word of God must NEVER be LOWERED DOWN to be equated with any mortal man! Yes, there are occasions where it is needful and profitable to have 'iron sharpening iron' discussions of Biblical doctrines; and other times when error needs to be confronted. HOWEVER, it does not help godly communication to assign non-Biblical tags or the names of men to any Scripture. RATHER, we should search out matters with our focus on comparing Scripture with Scripture, using Scripture or Scripture-based or Scripture-rooted words in the process.

TRAGEDY FROM HUMANISTIC TAGGING

1. SOME throw around 'TAGS' in an effort to discredit a teaching or teacher they do not like. **EXAMPLE:** A pastor friend was totally transparent, giving a FULL written statement of faith to a Pastor Search Committee. The committee met, prayed, and interviewed the pastor. They were unanimous in recommending this brother to be their next pastor. On a Sunday, the pastor preached before the congregation. Everyone was excited. However, that afternoon after the wonderful morning worship service— ONE person called the Committee with a rumor, **'That pastor is a Calvinist!'** The caller gave no evidence; yet just that one accusation destroyed unity, brought fears, and heartache.

2. Of the other hand, as I listened to a fine Bible teacher— he quoted a verse like those in John 17:1-12 and then triumphantly proclaimed: **"JESUS WAS A CALVINIST!"** Not a few are prone to claim, **"Calvinism is the gospel!"**

RESPONSE: NO, JESUS was NOT a CALVINIST! NO, Calvinism is NOT the gospel. IF John Calvin or anyone else has believed, taught, or preached the Biblical gospel— God bless them! THAT IS amazing grace! However, to EQUATE JESUS and/or the Gospel of God with the name of a mere man is totally without **BIBLICAL JUSTIFICATION and is one of the most man-centered, UTTERLY FALSE things that could ever be said** about JESUS or His glorious GOSPEL of free, sovereign, and amazing grace!

Let us beware of anything that takes us away from PURE FOCUS on JESUS CHRIST and the Word of God. The sad reality is that there are many who are closed to various Biblical doctrines and Scriptures because they

AUTOMATICALLY associate them with a man-made tag. **THERE ARE FAR BETTER WORDS** with Biblical foundations which we can use to define and/or defend and/or discuss various Biblical doctrines— rather than equating JESUS or a Biblical doctrine with a man... any man.]

FIVE BIBLICAL THEMES WHICH WERE CENTRAL TO What History calls ‘THE PROTESTANT Reformation’... and I hope these are CENTRAL to each of us!

1. *Sola Scriptura*: SCRIPTURE ALONE— The Scripture alone is the final authority for what we must believe and how we must live. For centuries the Roman Catholic Church had asserted and still asserts its authority over the Bible. The authority of the Pope, tradition, and councils are all regarded as authorities along with and/or over the Bible. Against that view, the Reformers asserted ***Sola Scriptura***: the Bible, and the Bible alone, is our only infallible source of authority for faith and practice. **Long before** it was the Reformed position; ***Sola Scriptura*** was and is the **BIBLICAL POSITION**.

2. *Sola Gratia*: GRACE ALONE— How can a sinful man become right with a holy God? This was the question that plagued Luther’s conscience before he was converted. Romanism had developed an elaborate works-based system in response to that question. Rome’s answer, while claiming to stand on grace, actually involved human works and merit- which a sinner must perform sufficiently well before God if he would receive the blessing of salvation.

But through the study of the Scriptures the Reformers rediscovered that salvation is the gracious gift of God— man contributes nothing to it. Salvation is only by the grace of God. The Reformers rediscovered Bible words like calling, *election*, and *predestination* which magnify the grace of God in salvation. These grand Biblical words/truths were rediscovered, having been largely forgotten or drained of their meaning by the medieval Catholic teachers. *Sola Gratia* is not merely the ‘Reformed’ position; **but long before** the reformers, ***Sola Gratia*** was and is the **BIBLICAL POSITION**.

3. *Sola Fide*: FAITH ALONE— The Reformers taught that the means whereby a sinner is graciously justified before God is faith - **not faith**

plus merit or faith plus works - but faith alone. Luther discovered that the Bible teaches that the sinner must place his trust in Jesus Christ in order to gain a right standing before God. Through faith alone the righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed [GIVEN] to the one who believes. **Long before** the Reformers, **Sola Fide was and is the BIBLICAL POSITION.**

4. Solo Christo: CHRIST ALONE— The Reformation rejected Rome's requirement that common church members put their faith implicitly in the church's teachings. Instead, they argued, Jesus Christ alone is the proper object of faith. JESUS CHRIST alone is to be trusted for salvation- not priests, popes, councils, or traditions. The believing sinner does not need popes, priests, Mary, councils, traditions, etc... in order to REACH JESUS. **Long before** the Reformers, **Solo Christo was and is the BIBLICAL POSITION.**

5. Soli Deo Gloria: The GLORY of GOD ALONE— In the best sense the Reformation can be seen as a rediscovery of God- a reawakening to the greatness and glory of the God of the Bible. It is God, not man, who belongs at the center of our thoughts and view of the world. And it is God's glory alone that is to occupy first place in our motivations and desires as His children. He created us and the world for Himself, and He redeemed us for Himself. Our purpose is to glorify Him. **Again, long before** the Reformation, the WORD OF GOD has always focused on the GLORY OF GOD. **Soli Deo Gloria was and is the BIBLICAL POSITION.**

LET'S PROMOTE A BIBLICAL FAITH: I for one do not think in terms of 'What is the Reformed faith or the Reformed position— but, rather, what is the BIBLICAL position; what is the BIBLICAL FAITH? It is obvious that the Reformers did not invent these teachings. By the grace of God they rediscovered them in the Bible and brought them out into the light for all of God's people to experience.

BOTTOM LINE: I for one want to strive toward being a Biblical Christian in faith, in practice, and in communication of Biblical truth.

The GOSPEL: The Sovereignty of God and the Responsibility of Man!

1. While believing that God provides salvation, **there are those who** believe that it is UP TO HUMANS to choose salvation... and a good number of these folk also believe that one can lose his/her salvation. Such ones are usually very keen on proclaiming and exalting man's free will. THEY HAVE A CERTAIN SET of Scriptures to which they run and another set of which they are afraid... or at least they neglect them. Rare, I suppose, is the Southern Baptist who believes one can lose their salvation; but many have a strong focus on 'free will.'

2. **There are others**, with focus on other Scriptures, who conclude that God not only provides salvation; but that He also gives life to those dead in their sins, empowering them to repent and believe. These folk are quick to run to certain Scriptures that promote the GOD-SIDE of salvation; but they may not be so fond of other verses which point to human responsibility and/or which call for "WHOSOEVER!" to come to Christ. For the last 40 years, it has been my experience at Southside that we have had and today have dear brothers and sisters in Christ at different persuasions or places of emphasis on these matters. AS FOR ME— I **do not have** perfect understanding nor perfect balance of these matters. **Nevertheless, I am committed to RUN TO ALL of the verses!**

To the lost sinner, I do not hesitate to proclaim to one and all and/or to any— "JESUS DIED FOR SINNERS. God so loved the world that He gave... O Sinner, REPENT, BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST and THOU SHALT BE SAVED!" (John 3:14-21; 3:36; 5:24; Acts 8:35-39; Romans 10:9-13)

To the saint, I rejoice **in the verses that tell believers** that we were chosen in Christ, even before the foundation of the world, (Ephesians 1:3-13); that we are specifically GIVEN by the Father to the Son (John 17:1-6), that we love Him **because He first** loved us (1 John 4:19), that we were foreknown and predestined (Romans 8:28-39)!

GOD WORD PROCLAIMS ALL OF THESE TRUTHS. **I must not water them down or add to them. I must believe and confess what God plainly says. All of these verses are true.** They are all needed and none of them needs to be explained away. THUS, I must AVOID using proof-texts ON ONE SIDE of these matters in an attempt to CANCEL OUT the other side! **I do not pretend to understand the mind of God as to how all**

of the above verses to sinners and to saints are simultaneously true. I have a simple faith: God said it; that settles it; I believe Him!

MOREOVER, I do not use the manmade theological terms, tags, and titles of men when teaching/preaching on the Biblical doctrines relating to salvation. **I MUST NOT BELITTLE the Holy Word of God by referring to certain of those verses as being** ‘Arminian; or to others as being Calvinistic.’ The question is not ‘What is the Reformed/Calvinistic or Armenian view— but to pray and study for the Holy Spirit to reveal the Biblical view; and to always be loving and humble!

FROM THOSE WHO INSIST ON human tags, I have experienced this: If the true blue Calvinist is listening to me— he will likely call me a compromiser or even an Arminian! On the other hand, if the Arminian or Arminian-leaning person is listening to me— he often accuses me of being a Calvinist! In reality, I simply preach the Word of God.

BE THAT AS IT MAY— **I DO NOT TRY to reconcile the sovereignty of God and the responsibility of man.** They are both in the Word of God, so by the grace of God I shall preach both. Moreover, I am at peace and in wonderful fellowship with brothers and sisters who are at different places on these matters! **It has been my experience that too many people go to their Bibles with** a pre-set system of beliefs which they seek to justify with proof texts; **RATHER, than simply going to the Bible and letting the Bible say what it says!**

This I know: ACCORDING TO the Word of God, we saints have the awesome responsibility to be laborers together with God: **We plant.** We water. GOD gives the increase. (1 Cor. 3:6-7) **We are commissioned** to take the Gospel to the whole world. (Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 1:8) **Ultimately,** a numberless multitude out of every kindred, tongue, tribe and people will be saved. (Rev. 7:1-17) Moreover, **so far as I can tell, God did not save us nor will he save any of the other masses WITHOUT using those who are already saved.**

ALSO: In salvation, as hell-deserving sinners— we get what we could have never deserved or earned— we get mercy and grace and thus, HEAVEN. Even now and surely one day in heaven, I cannot say, “LORD, **WE GOT ME SAVED!**” Rather, I confess with Paul: Ephesians 2:1-10; Titus

3:2-7. Sinners hear the gospel, are moved/empowered to repent of sin, believe, and receive JESUS CHRIST. ALL WHO get to heaven get there solely by the AMAZING GRACE OF GOD. **All who will one day spend eternity in hell** will do so ONLY because they were rebels who hated God and refused whatever light God gave them. They get holy justice. (Romans 1-3)

THUS, for example, I teach: 1. Simply All of Romans 8-11. In the midst of those chapters, Romans 8:28-39 (especially, verses 29, 30) presents predestination. The wonderful ‘Chain of Redemption’ in these verses is powerful encouragement to all saints. And while those verses focus on the Divine side of salvation— Keep in mind, the Bible only speaks about predestination to those who are ALREADY saved. **I AM DEEPLY CONVINCED that it is wrong to use the word ‘predestination’ in relation to the lost in any shape, form, or fashion. God’s Word does not, so neither will I!** At the same time, let us not DENY what the Bible plainly teaches as a huge comfort to saints, in the ‘golden chain’ of redemption! (Romans 8:28-30) **Moreover, in the midst of** strong God-focused verses in Romans 8-11, as to calling and election — AS THE BIBLE SO OFTEN DOES — in the same section of Scripture the Holy Spirit has Paul to pen verses that focus on MAN’S RESPONSIBILITY to believe: Romans 10: 9-13. I believe those verses just as strongly and often quote verse 13.

2. Ephesians 1:3-14, (verse 5 & 11) is the only other passage in the Bible that has the word ‘predestinate’... But again, this is precious truth to those who are already saved. I cannot add to it. I cannot deny it.

3. Sadly, there are those who focus on Bible verses that speak of God’s predestination, calling, and election; but they minimize or deny the verses that focus on man’s responsibility and the free offer of the gospel to whosoever will, repent, believe, and thou shalt be saved. **There are others,** (as I was taught) who focus on man’s side and deny or minimize the Divine side. My encouragement is that we accept, believe, set forth, and rejoice in all the verses... DEPENDING upon the Holy Spirit to make proper applications!

FINALLY, my encouragement is that we hold tight to our supreme witness: “By this shall all know that you are my disciples, IF you have love one for another!” (John 13:34-35) Without God’s love flowing among us— we are ALL zeros in God’s sight! (1 Cor. 13)

Abundant grace to one and all! James Bell
www.southsidegallatin.org

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; Come in side entrance, iron steps... meet in Ladies Sunday School Room ****

NOTE: Jody Allen is ministering to **Children**, during Prayer Service.

WEDNESDAY YOUTH MEETING, 6:30pm led by Chris and Rachel Beth Estep.

LADIES BIBLE STUDY— RESUMES, June 4, 11:00am, The Life of David! Cindy Bell, teaching. {Meet in Ladies Sunday School Room: Come in FRONT doors of the church auditorium or the SIDE door at the top of the IRON STEPS!}

*** EVERY SATURDAY MORNING @ 8am: Men’s Fellowship/Bible Study!** {Study in 1 Thessalonians}... Come to back of Church building... Come in under the drive-thru awning... walk forward... till you smell the coffee!

SUNDAY SERVICES IN MAY:

THIS Sunday, May 24—

9:30am- Sunday School;

10:45am- Worship Service;

NOON- Fellowship, Covered-dish meal;

1:00pm- Early Afternoon Service

Sunday May 31—

9:30am- Sunday School;

10:45am- Worship Service; No Noon meal or afternoon service.

6:00pm- CHURCH-WIDE PRAISE/SINGING/TESTIMONY MEETING

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SUMMER CAMP ☐ JULY 6-10 // PRAY and PLAN!

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SOUTHSIDE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL! Call— 616-452-5951

PLEASE PRAY FOR THIS VITAL MINISTRY!