

GROW IN GRACE

NEWSLETTER

Volume 39, No.3, January 15, 2013 / Southside Baptist Church & Christian School / P.O. Box 1594 / 1028 South Water Avenue, Gallatin, TN 37066 (615) 452-5951 / **"But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our LORD and Saviour JESUS CHRIST. To Him be glory both now and forever. Amen."** (2 Peter 3:18)

The Wonder of Amazing Grace!

Meditating upon the verses in this article should leave every Christian astounded and amazed by the undeserved love, mercy, and grace of God. Let us begin with **Biblical revelation as to the fundamental nature of every fallen human on earth today!**

I. The Biography of Every Human!

Have you ever been struck by the radical difference between a **fallen man and a redeemed man**? The Bible shows that fallen humans are enslaved to satan and are dead in sin. **Redeemed humans** are free from satan and sin's rule! **Have you** ever been astounded at the depth of spiritual lostness? **REALITY:** Until or unless I am left CRUSHED at the depth and power of LOSTNESS, it is doubtful that I will EVER be amazed at the grace of God! In Ephesians, chapter two, the Holy Spirit moves the pen of Paul to remind Christians of our former lostness! **Why? Understanding our former lostness** is the necessary backdrop in order to appreciate the astounding wonder of 'being saved' by God's amazing grace! **Read prayerfully:**

"And you hath **He** quickened, [raised from death to life], **who were** dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein **in time past ye walked** according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: **Among whom also we all had** our conversation [our way of life] in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; **and were by nature** the children of wrath, even as others." (Ephesians 2:1-3) **These verses give us** the first chapter of the biography of every Christian before they were saved and the first chapter of every person who is still unsaved or lost— the lost are dead in sin; **dedicated** to the fashions of this world; **demonized; disobedient; dominated by** cravings of carnal passions; the **desires** of evil imaginations rule; and they are **DOOMED** under the just and holy wrath of God. **WOW! HOW CAN ANYONE escape such bondage?** But wait— there is more

revelation as to the nature and condition of FALLEN HUMANS— **(1) They hate God-** (Rom. 8:7); **(2) They love darkness-** (John 3:19); **(3) They will not come to Christ-** (John 5:40) **(4) They cannot come to Jesus unless— John 6:44; John 6:65!** [This is stunning. This is **not** divine prohibition. These are revelations DIRECTLY FROM JESUS SHOWING human inability and the necessity of God’s mercy and grace.] **(5) They are dead in sin-** (Eph. 2:1; Col. 3:13); and, **(6) They will not seek God-** (Rom. 3:10-12) — **AGAIN, HOW IS IT POSSIBLE FOR SUCH SINNERS** to ever escape all of that and become sons and daughters of God? **HOW? Continue reading in Ephesians, chapter two, verse four! GOD quickens the dead!**

“But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, **Even when we were dead in sins, hath QUICKENED us** [given us life!] **together with Christ,** (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. **For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.** For we are **His workmanship,** created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:4-10)

YES, BUT HOW? The great Triune God accomplishes His saving grace in human hearts by means of the proclaimed GOSPEL which is “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; ...” (Rom 1:16) **Thus,** “...as many as received him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: **which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.**” (John 1:12-13) **“Being BORN AGAIN, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the WORD OF GOD, which liveth and abideth forever.”** (1 Peter 1:23)

When the GOSPEL is proclaimed the humanly impossible is commanded! For just as it was humanly impossible for dead and ‘stinking’ Lazarus to come out of the tomb— **the Gospel messenger proclaims the GOSPEL to the spiritually dead and cries out,** “**Repent,** ye therefore, and **be converted** that your sins may be blotted out...” (Acts 3:19) ... **OR:** “...**WHOSOEVER** believeth on Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)... **OR:** “For **whosoever shall call** upon the name of the LORD shall be saved.” (Rom. 10:13)

But WHO is powerful enough to bring a DEAD IN SIN and satan enslaved sinner to repent, to believe, to call upon Jesus? **GOD!** **“BUT GOD,** who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, **even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened** us [given us life!] **together with Christ,** (by grace ye are saved;) And **hath raised us up** together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus!

Well, then, since the salvation of the lost is so God focused, God initiated, and God empowered as is set forth in Ephesians 2:1-10— **what about man’s ‘free will?’**

II. What is the roll of the Lost Person’s Free Will?

A widely accepted belief, which I was taught, is that God looks down from heaven and He sees and knows, in advance, who will BELIEVE if they are given ‘a chance’ to hear the Gospel. God, therefore, chooses to give NEW BIRTH to those He knows will first, (by the power and choice of their free will), choose Him. **Well,**

IF THIS IS TRUE— then Ephesians 2:1-4 would have to read something like this: “And you **[who while spiritually dead, by the power of your own free will, first chose Christ]** hath He quickened, [raised from death to life], who were dead in trespasses and sins;...” In this belief system sinners exercise their free will, choose Christ, and then Christ stamps His approval.

VALID QUESTION: When God looks down from heaven into the hearts of fallen man— DOES THE BIBLE tell us what God sees? **(1) Does God see some who** by their own free will if given the gospel will believe? **(2) Does God see others who** by their own free will if given the gospel will not believe? Is salvation simply our FREE WILL choice and God agreeing to it? **Does the Bible deal with the matter of what God sees when He looks down from heaven into the hearts of lost humanity? YES, here is God’s answer, which He states twice:**

“The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. **They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.**” (Ps. 14:2-3; Ps. 53:2-3 repeats this)

So, when fallen man exercises his free will— God sees it! God’s Word reveals that God only sees ONE GROUP! **REALITY: (1) Adam and Eve, who had been in a state of Innocence,** exercised their FREE WILL and mankind was thrown into the death of sin. **(2) SINCE THAT TIME** as fallen man exercises his FREE WILL (just as Psalm 14:2-3/Psalm 53:2-3 state!) – GOD SAYS that they are gone aside, become filthy, do not do good, do not seek God... no not one!

A DIFFERENT QUESTION: Have you ever wondered how many sinners will be saved? When Paul preached the GOSPEL to the Gentiles at Antioch, Luke records— **“...and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”** (Acts 13:48) As Jesus was praying to His Father, He said: “As thou [GOD, the Father], hast given him [JESUS] power over all flesh, that **he [JESUS] should give eternal life to as many as thou [God, the Father], hast given him.**” (John 17:2) **AMAZING! Christian, you were given by the Father to the Son!**

Yes, the Gospel call goes out far and wide to dead-in-their-sin sinners: “Believe on the LORD JESUS CHRIST and thou shalt be saved.” Ultimately, a ‘numberless multitude’ from every tribe and people of all nations will be saved, (Rev. 7:9-17) They will all be with Jesus for eternity because in God’s amazing grace, **they were given by the Father to the Son! Saints of God, you were given by the Father to the Son!** (John 17:1-24)

IN CONTRAST, the Bible clearly teaches us: Those who are ultimately cast into hell will be there ONLY because of their sin! — (Rev. 14:7-11; 21:8; John 3:36) God DOES NOT predestinate sinners to hell. NO ONE will be in hell

because they were not chosen. **Sinners will only be in hell because of their sin: Romans 1:18-20; Rev. 21:8. BECAUSE OF SIN, the whole human race is already, (Eph. 2:3), under the wrath of God. The great wonder is not that there will be people in hell—** for all who enter this fallen world are dead in sin, dedicated to the fashions of this world, demonized, disobedient, dominated by carnal passions, desires prompted evil imaginations rule; and they are ALREADY under the wrath of Holy God. (Eph. 2:1-3) **The wrath of God is right now ABIDING** upon those who are not believing in Jesus. (John 3:36) Christian, they are as you once were— Ephesians 2:1-3!

As we have seen in the Word of God— EVERY HUMAN NATURALLY **loves sin, hates God** (Rom. 8:7), **loves darkness** (John 3:19), **will not come to the light** (John 3:20), **will not come to Christ** (John 5:40), **is dead in sin** (Eph. 2:1; Col. 3:13), **will not seek God** (Rom. 3:10-12), **loves the praise of man** (John 5:42-44; 12:43), **cannot receive the Spirit of truth** (John 14:17; 1 Cor. 2:14), **is satan controlled and under the just wrath of God** (Eph. 2:1-3).

IN ADDITION: As the HUMAN RACE nears the end of time, God will begin to intervene with ‘controlled judgment and wrath’... — however, masses of mankind WILL STILL NOT repent: Rev. 9:20-21; Rev. 16:8-11. THEREFORE, the time will come when the full wrath of God will be poured out upon the unrepentant, in the presence of the LAMB OF GOD, forever and ever! (Rev. 14:8-11) **Moreover, the angels of God will worship God for giving out true and righteous JUSTICE! Passing out justice is no mark against the holy character of God!** (Rev. 16:5-7) **Justice is what the entire** fallen human race deserves, even as was done for the fallen angels. And for such justice, God is worthy of worship: Rev. 16:5-7; Rev. 19:1-4.

BUT WONDER of WONDER, instead of justice — Undeserved MERCY and GRACE is given and is coming to a numberless multitude of humans. These multitudes are no less sinners and no less justice deserving than anyone else! In God’s ‘good pleasure’ (Eph. 1:4-11), they are given, by the Father (John 17:2), to the Son! That is **AMAZING, undeserved MERCY and GRACE!** We should be in utter awe at the love, mercy and grace of God!

Free Will vs Free Grace: The lost man’s free will leaves him a slave to sin and satan. Free Grace saves a numberless multitude! **AND:** God’s free grace EMPOWERS prayers, gospel preaching, and missionary work. **As laborers together with God for the souls of men, Christians ‘plant and water’ and GOD gives the increase!** (1 Cor. 3:6-7) We are commissioned and commanded to take the gospel to the whole world. Such labors are fruitful because of the GIVING of the Father to the Son: John 17

III. FREE WILL— Proper Distinctions must be Made!

It will help us to be MORE ready to PRAISE GOD for His mercy, love and grace if we MAKE PROPER DISTINCTIONS between, (1) Man in innocence; (2) Fallen Man; (3) Redeemed Man; and (4) Glorified Man. We will look at each of these in relation to their Free Will, Sin, God, and the Holy Spirit. MAN in four stages: Innocence, Fallen, Redeemed, Glorified!

- **1. MAN IN INNOCENCE:**

FREE WILL— A look in Genesis clearly reveals that Adam and Eve began **totally free**, willing and able to choose, to reason, to plan, to rule and to have dominion with a spirit of wisdom, and in a state of innocence. **They were ALIVE to God.** The Tree of Life was a gracious provision to sustain and empower; and revealed their need for dependence upon and fellowship with God. There was no hindrance to their Free Will.

SIN— Adam and Eve were **free and able to sin**; but in the beginning they had not done so. The LORD GOD had placed them in the Garden with clear instructions and gracious provisions. To disobey would be sin. **IF they freely chose to sin, they would immediately DIE spiritually and in time, die physically. (Tragically, this happened!)** But in the beginning they had perfect fellowship with God and there was no sin found in them.

GOD— Again, Adam and Eve were **spiritually ALIVE** to God and enjoyed perfect communion with God. They were free and able to choose fellowship with God, free and able to worship and to know God intimately; and for a time they did just that!

THE HOLY SPIRIT— Genesis does not give us any specific verses connecting Adam and Eve with the Holy Spirit. It is possible that for them to partake of the Tree of Life would have been for them to experience DIVINE INFLOW of the Holy Spirit in some way. **But regardless of just how it all worked out**, they were in perfect harmony and in LIVING fellowship with the great TRIUNE GOD— **Father, Son and Holy Spirit! That's FREEDOM!**

- **2. FALLEN MAN IN SIN:**

FREE WILL— Adam and Eve chose to sin and immediately **DIED** spiritually. Their ability to have communion and fellowship with God **DIED**. They still had a FREE WILL! **They and all humans since are still FREE**, willing and able to plan, to reason, to rule and to make choices. **Fallen man is FREE to do what he wants to do! But that is the problem! Fallen man is spiritually DEAD and does not want to please God!** He wants to continue to rebel and sin. He has dominion on earth and makes choices that are deeply stained by pride, selfishness and rebellion. He is DEAD in sin. **The lost man's FREE WILL is a slave to sin, self and satan. Note:** When we say that fallen man is FREE to do what he wants to do— that does not mean that fallen man is able to impose his will upon God. GOD alone has the ULTIMATE FREE WILL. God carries out His purposes, regardless of what man does. God rules supreme and at times over-rules man! **But so far as salvation is concerned: God prohibits NO ONE.** Jesus says, "Come to Me!" "And whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." (Rev. 22:17)

As to the FREE WILL of fallen men, we have to remember: All who enter this fallen world are dead in sin, dedicated to the fashions of this world, demonized,

disobedient, dominated by carnal passions, desires prompted evil imaginations rule and they are DOOMED under the wrath of Holy God. (Eph. 2:1-3) EVERY FALLEN HUMAN NATURALLY loves sin, hates God (Rom. 8:7), **loves darkness** (John 3:19), **will not come to the light** (John 3:20), **will not come to Christ** (John 5:40), **is dead in sin** (Eph. 2:1; Col. 3:13), **will not seek God** (Rom. 3:10-12), **loves the praise of man** (John 5:42-44; 12:43), **cannot receive the Spirit of truth** (John 14:17; 1 Cor. 2:14), **is satan controlled and under the just wrath of God** (Eph. 2:1-3). **ALL OF THESE VERSES SHOUT** THAT GOD REALLY MEANT IT WHEN HE WARNED THAT THE WAGES OF SIN WOULD BE DEATH! And they SHOUT that for such ones to be saved, they will need MORE THAN God merely providing salvation and then leaving salvation up to 'a mere chance' for man to exercise his free will. (Ephesians 2:1-10)

SIN— Fallen man is free and able to sin. Indeed, he loves sin and is a slave to sin. Even his 'good' deeds are tainted with sin. His heart is deceitful above all things. (Jer. 17:9) He is a sinner by nature and a sinner by choice. He is dead in sin. **His FREE WILL is a slave to sin.**

GOD— Fallen man is free to choose to worship, to submit to God. He is free to so choose. No one stops him. God places no fresh evil in his heart. **HE IS FREE, BUT HE WILL NOT.** He is free but wholly unwilling. Again, fallen man's FREE WILL is a SLAVE TO SIN. He will not seek God, although he may seek God's blessings. But in reality, just as the Bible clearly states, fallen man hates God, loves sin and darkness and will not come to the light. **(See earlier verses)**

HOLY SPIRIT— Obviously the fallen man is not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In fact, the New Testament clearly states that he **'cannot receive'** (John 14:17) the Holy Spirit; and has no natural ability to receive the things of the Spirit of God. (1 Cor. 2:12-14) He is in darkness. (Col 1:13) These verses reveal stunning reality as to the depth of man's lostness! **They, likewise, reveal the necessity of the sequence of Ephesians 2:1-10!! "...BUT GOD!!.."**

- **3. REDEEMED MAN:**

FREE WILL— Redeemed or saved man is free, willing and able to make choices, to reason, to plan, to have dominion and to rule; **and now** he is **EMPOWERED by new, indwelling divine life.** He/she is now BORN AGAIN and sees and has entered into the kingdom of God! (John 3:3, 5) The FREE WILL of the redeemed is now ALIVE SPIRITUALLY. We still have the capacity to choose to sin; but now we are LED by the Holy Spirit and our WILLS ARE NO LONGER dominated SLAVES to sin, self and satan. **Our FREE WILLS are now being MASTERED by the indwelling Christ!** (Romans 6-8)

SIN— Yes, the redeemed, saved man is still able to sin. He does sin. But he is no longer dominated by nor a slave to sin. He has a growing hatred of sin. He is progressing out of sin. He repents of sin. He will be chastened if he does not repent of sin. (Rom 6; 1 John; Heb 12:5-11)

GOD— The redeemed man is ALIVE IN CHRIST. Christ is IN Him. He is spiritually alive to and in fellowship with the great Triune God. He KNOWS God and desires to know Him more. He is a son/daughter of God, **born not of the will of man or the flesh— but born of God.** He is a walking miracle of God’s mercy, love and grace. (Eph. 1:1-13; 2:1-10; John 1:13-14; Titus 3:6-7; John 6:37; Phil. 3:7-10)

HOLY SPIRIT— There is, in the ways of God, a point in time in which so many things are happening... and they seem to us to be in one set of sequence... and in some aspects some seem almost simultaneous— but God’s Word reveals this: **It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit** upon and through the Word of God and the Gospel of God to convict sinners of sin, righteousness and judgment. **AND, it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to QUICKEN THE DEAD, to give life to the spiritually dead—** a far greater miracle than that of Jesus raising Lazarus from physical death.

Thus, Jesus tells Nicodemus, “YOU MUST be born again.” BUT HOW? WHAT ARE THE STEPS? The answer of Jesus throws us upon God. **He does not give ‘steps’... He says: ‘THE WIND BLOWS!’** The wind of the Spirit gives new life. He gives life to the dead. (John 3:8) He indwells. He baptizes into the sphere, the life and communion with God. He FILLS and commands the believer, TO BE FILLED, etc. (John 3:5-8; 16:7-11; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13-14; Eph. 5:18) JESUS and JESUS ALONE is the **Author and the Finisher** of our faith! (Heb. 12:2)

• 4. GLORIFIED MAN

FREE WILL— The glorified man will be free in the fullest and best of all possible ways. He will rule and reign with Christ for all future time and eternity. There will be perfection of wisdom and freedom of will in the ultimate sense. **For there will not be ANY conflict of will—** for the will of glorified man will be symphonized with God’s holy and perfect will!

SIN— Redeemed man is saved from the penalty of sin; and he is being saved from the power of sin by the very life of God in his soul. **BUT THE GLORIFIED MAN is saved from even the presence and possibility of sin; and he will be free from all of sin’s consequences.** (Rev. 21:1-5; 27)

GOD— The glorified man will enjoy perfect fellowship with God. His WILL is perfectly FREE from even any inclination to sin. He will be a LIVING DISPLAY, an eternal TROPHY of God’s amazing grace! (Eph. 1:3-23; 2:6-7; Romans 8:28-39; Rev. 22:1-5)

HOLY SPIRIT— Again, the glorified man is in a relationship of absolute perfection with God. All that he is and all that he has is the result of the manifold operations of the Holy Spirit of God. For all eternity, the glorified saints of God in Christ will rule and reign with Christ and DISPLAY the outshining radiance of Christ-likeness in perfection. (Romans 8:29; Rev. 22:1-5)

BOTTOM LINE: We live in a time when very few Christians are AMAZED BY GRACE. It is my hope that meditation upon these Scriptures and thoughts will serve to call us— (1) To great WONDER AND AMAZEMENT at the mercy, love and grace of God; (2) **And therefore, move us** to fresh GRATITUDE and WORSHIP;

(3) A newly empowered FLEEING from sin which so easily besets! (Romans 12:1-2); **(4) And a BOLD CONFIDENCE in the power of the Gospel to save the lost! (Romans 1:14-16)**

Amazing Grace to you! James Bell

SOUTHSIDE NEWS NOTES!

1. Ladies Bible Study— 'LORD, HEAL MY HURTS!'— Tuesdays @ 10:30AM! Call the church to reserve your book— 615-452-5951

2. WEDNESDAYS: PRAYER SERVICE at 7:00PM! / YOUTH: Wednesdays, 6-8pm @ Adam and Bethany's home.

3. Thursdays @ 6:30pm: OUTREACH VISITATION

4. EVERY SATURDAY @ 8:00am: Men's Fellowship and Bible Study

Sunday Schedule for January 20, 2013

1. 9:30am- Sunday School

2. 10:45am- Morning Worship / Children's Church

3. Noon Fellowship 'Covered Dish' Meal

4. 1:00pm- Early Afternoon Service {LORD'S SUPPER SERVICE, 1:00PM}