

GROW IN GRACE

NEWSLETTER

Volume 39, No.39, September 24, 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."*

IF YOU FOUND or if You Are IN a Good Church— How would you know?

Have you ever sought from the Holy Word of God an understanding of BIBLICAL MARKS which should be found in any congregation over which Christ is the Head? **In such a SEARCH we cannot bypass this: The New Testament reveals that there are two radically different 'churches' in the world** and congregations in both commonly CLAIM to belong to Jesus Christ: **One does belong** to Christ— His Bride! **The other does not** belong to Christ— the HARLOT! And frankly, in a 'Bride congregation' there will likely be 'tares in the midst of the wheat'— have you considered that?

HERE IS MORE REALITY: There are people outwardly associated with a 'Harlot' church— who by the power of the Holy Spirit, upon receiving into their souls the Word of God, are BORN AGAIN; and they are translated into the Bride. The Holy Spirit has 'a habit' of giving grace and revelation to such ones in Christ about the need to totally break away from the 'Harlot!'

Since Jesus said, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul?'— OBVIOUSLY, we are dealing with the most serious subject anyone can raise! And yet, many people make 'church decisions' based upon their carnal likes and dislikes and are ignorant of the Word of God! **How is it with you?**

Jesus guides HIS church, His Bride, through the NARROW GATE and along the NARROW WAY into EVERLASTING LIFE! **False Prophets guide various groups and congregations of the Harlot** along the BROAD

WAY to the ultimate end of DESTRUCTION! Many desire EVERLASTING LIFE to be the result of being at home in and loving and living on the BROAD WAY— but according to Jesus, this is impossible! **Many desire 'salvation' from the wrath of God— just like Noah experienced but without looking as foolish and NARROW as did Noah!** Do you and I understand that the NARROW WAY is not optional?

WHAT FOLLOWS are statements concerning **BIBLICAL MARKS** of a **Bible believing congregation**— marks which belong to congregations of the LORD'S planting. These are marks toward which any Christian, any local Church should embrace and strive toward.

HERE IS DANGEROUS AND DEADLY REALITY: A pastor is often judged by culture and by many church members by how large a crowd he can attract. Likewise, a congregation is usually judged by others based on crowd size. An increase of the numbers EQUALS being a 'man of God' and automatically proves that 'God is really at work!' **HOWEVER, with Jesus Christ, the issue is not HOW LARGE or how small is the congregation!** RATHER, the question is, "Does the congregation bear a growing likeness to Jesus Christ and do they demonstrate faithfulness to His Word?"

MORE REALITY: A church family which is 'in step with' JESUS will LIKELY experience 'SEASONS'— times of reaching increasing numbers of true converts and other times when such are rare. **Such is the case all the way through Biblical history!** Numbers wise, Noah was not a success... nor was Jeremiah and a host of others. Jesus began His ministry attracting multitudes; but when the claims of discipleship were set forth, most of them scattered! There is a similar pattern with the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

Again, the critical questions are not things like (1) Do I like the music? (2) Do I feel comfortable; or are they in my social and economic bracket? (3) Does the church have lots of activities for children/youth? **Rather, the critical question is this: Is this congregation on the Narrow way or the Broad way?**

MORE REALITY: The Word of God is clear that God's plan for every Christian is to be a functioning member of a local body of believers. A church family is essential to growth and service. Corporate worship is intended to be a vibrant part of a Christian's life. Mutual ministry within the church body stimulates growth and the development of a servant's heart. God clearly states that a New Testament saint is to be careful... *"not forsaking our own assembling together as is the habit of*

some." (Hebrews 10:25) **THEREFORE: Here are several important characteristics for a local church which we find in the Word of God.** These characteristics are grounded in the Word of God. This is not presented as a COMPLETE list— but, certainly, a foundational list which should be prayerfully considered when a congregation sets forth a strategy for ministry; and/or when a family is seeking the will of God about a church home; and/or when local church members are seeking to personally focus on priorities.

I. A HIGH VIEW OF GOD: Jeremiah 9:23-24 states 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 as to the nature of the God and in the experience of KNOWING GOD. We must not 'cherry pick' the attributes of God. Yes, God is love. But God's love is a HOLY love for God is Holy. He is righteous. He is just. Yes, God is merciful and kind and compassionate; but He is also the God of holy vengeance and wrath. He is sovereign. He is LORD, etc.

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.*" True Christian Worship is God-centered, not man-centered. Praise Him! Worship and praise to God surely must be from the heart and therefore not emotionless, but rather EXPRESSIVE! God will lead His congregations into a REVIVAL of genuine Worship and Praise that is GOD-GLORIFYING and not man pleasing and that is neither DEAD nor a fleshly show of CARNALITY! **Moreover,** the worship of God includes FAR MORE than the singing of praise and giving thanks! **True Christian worship is all about SUBMISSION to the Word of God as it is read, taught, and /or preached!**

III. THE FAMILY: Our modern society has unleashed an unprecedented onslaught against the family. **To make the family a priority is** to model and teach husbands to love and lead their wives (Eph. 5:25); wives to submit to their husbands (Eph. 5:22), to love their husbands and children (Titus2:4); children to obey their parents (Eph. 6:1); and parents to train up their children in the ways of the LORD! (Eph. 6:4) God places CHILD TRAINING, nurture and discipleship squarely upon the shoulders of parents, especially upon Dads! In addition, God has ordained the local church to support parents in child training. **Moreover,** a church family is to be a haven for the widow and the single parent. A **Christ-centered local church becomes FAMILY** so that saints who have and those who

do not have good earthly family NOW HAVE a family! How wonderful is the Family of God!

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) MULTITUDES in the modern Evangelical, Fundamental and Bible-believing churches of America have 'prayed a sinner's prayer' and have been 'pronounced saved' by pastors and/or others; but these multitudes have remained 'WORKERS OF INIQUITY' and SLAVES to sin, self, satan and society; and they never became DISCIPLES of Jesus! This is tragic and dangerous beyond words! (1 John 2:4, 15-17; Matthew 7:21-23)

Instead of WAITING UPON the Holy Spirit bring Holy Spirit conviction of sin and then waiting upon the Holy Spirit to later confirm true salvation and to give God-given assurance— pastors and others all over the nation take it upon themselves to play God and pronounce millions, (mostly impressionable children) as saved... only because they 'repeated' a prayer in obedience to the pastor, VBS worker, etc. **What happens to these man-made converts?**

Statistics reveal that from 75% to 90% of these dear ones, (often before and surely by the time they are out from parental authority), **run straight to the world and stay there.** It is even as the Bible warns: The pig returns to the mud and the dog returns to his vomit! (2 Peter 2:22) Why? Because there never was true conversion! **NOW:** If someone 'guided you' through a prayer, 'pronounced' you saved and you by the grace of God truly experienced new birth— praise the LORD! **However, you are the rare exception and not grounds to use such methods which are making multitudes falsely secure of heaven while they continue to travel on the broad road to destruction!**

V. EVANGELISM: A church obedient to Christ will have a solid emphasis upon LIVING THE GOSPEL and 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) Thus, Biblical evangelism is with **transformed lifestyles** and with **the words of the Gospel.** A good model for any local assembly is found in Acts 2:17-47.

The Stark Reality of the 21st Century: Two of the greatest hindrances to any local Bible-believing church and their Outreach efforts are the FALSE WITNESSES of unholy living and unresolved

conflict. Any church that is in tune with God will hear the Holy Spirit calling to holiness, purity and love so as not to dishonor Jesus Christ and cancel the Gospel message we proclaim! **When needed, such congregations will carry out loving Church Discipline in serious efforts to go forward in holiness, purity and love.**

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)

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— thus, equipping us to for every good work... meeting all 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) **IN THE PRESENCE of such Biblical preaching you and I will not necessarily be comfortable! Yet, such an atmosphere is glorious to the humble and hungry hearted!**

VIII. A CLEAR & CONCISE 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."*

MOREOVER, 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— just as every New Testament convert we know about demonstrated! EXCEPTION: True salvation will result in DISCIPLINE and/or CHASTENING for those who are truly saved but who insist on being ungodly and unrepentant! (1 Cor. 5:1-13; 11:29-31; Heb.12:4-14) BOTTOM LINE: a good church will constantly convey that salvation is— By GRACE

alone through FAITH alone because of CHRIST alone and UNTO good works for the GLORY of God alone!

IX. A COMMITMENT TO THE SUFFICIENCY OF THE SCRIPTURES: A high view of the Bible is demonstrated in a Biblical 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 Biblical church will not substitute heart issues with psychological jargon (please read Matt. 15:19), or label sin as disease. 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)

A GREAT and GROWING TRAGEDY OF OUR TIME: There are multitudes in the churches suffering from the works of the flesh as set forth in Galatians 5:19-21. Even as this and other passages teach, the problem with some of these dear ones is that they have never been born again! HOWEVER, from time to time all have fallen and many genuine Christians are snared by these works of the flesh. **HERE IS THE TRAGEDY:** Instead of 'walking in the light' and being HEALED (1 John 1:7-10; James 5:16)— they HIDE, and sink deeper, and then go to Christian or Secular Counselors who allow and encourage them to GIVE EVIL REPORTS about people not present and then prescribe drugs to help them cope.

X. 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:

"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 in the Christian home. 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. 4:32).

Based upon the fact that we have received the forgiveness of God in Christ, we are to extend forgiveness to others. A church who forgives will be able to maintain unity; and a couple who forgives each other will never divorce.

BY LOVING AND FORGIVING even as God loves us and even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven and goes on forgiving us— by walking in these steps we show LOVE TO THE WORLD, proving that we are disciples of Jesus, traveling on the NARROW WAY!

XI. 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!

Note: The above points are not exhaustive... but certainly foundational.

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. But with our eyes on Jesus, we will go forward!

If ever we put our eyes on man... any man... we will fragment.

Grace to you! / James Bell