

GROW IN GRACE NEWSLETTER

Volume 39, No.47, November 19, 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."

QUOTE: "WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD!"

In the sports world, we elevate those who win— especially those who are the elite! They are the ones who put their whole heart into the game. They understood and paid the price of serious preparation for the next battle (game), etc. They played with focused intensity. They played hurt. They refused to quit. Other players model after them... etc. **IN THIS ARTICLE we have the account of some who received a GREAT DISTINCTION of honor in their field!** Surely, those who battle in the same arena will want to read about them, learn from them, take lessons from them, model after them as to level of commitment, etc...!? **Honestly? Many will not!** Nevertheless, we will give some basic headlines of 'TOP PRIZE' winners of many years back. This will be followed by the OATH of present and/or recent ones revealing their commitment in the same battlefield. **What path shall I, shall we follow?**

Twelve Early Martyrs in ancient Carthage, 180 AD (Edited from Andy and Berit Kjos)

What was their crime? They were Christians who refused to compromise or recant. They would rather die than deny their faith and betray the Lord they loved! The seven men and five women were brought before the Roman proconsul Saturninus in Carthage, North Africa (Tunisia) on July 17, 180AD. **He gave them an opportunity to recant:** "You can win the indulgence of our lord the Emperor, if you **return to a sound mind.**" **Speratus**, the apparent leader of the small group of faithful disciples, answered, "We have never done ill, we have not lent ourselves to wrong, we have never spoken ill, **but when ill-treated we have GIVEN THANKS...**"

"We too are religious," answered the proconsul, "and our religion is simple, and we swear by the genius of our lord the Emperor, and pray for his welfare, as you also ought to do."
"The empire of this world I know not," explained Speratus, "but rather I serve that God, whom no man has seen, nor with these eyes can see. I have committed no theft; but if I have bought anything, I pay the tax; because I know my Lord, the King of kings and Emperor of all nations."

"Be not partakers of this folly," said the proconsul. Cittinus, one of the faithful, said, "We have none other to fear, save only our Lord God, who is in heaven..."
 "Do you persist in being a Christian?" asked the proconsul. "I am a Christian," he answered. All the others agreed...

The proconsul Saturninus then read the decree [their sentence] from a tablet: "Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Donata, Vestia, Secunda and the rest having confessed that they live according to the Christian rite, since after opportunity offered them of **returning to the custom of the Romans they have obstinately persisted**, it is determined that they be put to the sword."

"We give THANKS to God," said Speratus. *"Today we are martyrs in heaven; THANKS be to God,"* added Nartzalus.

The proconsul then gave the order that their sentence be publicly announced by the herald: "Speratus, Nartzalus, Cittinus, Veturius, Felix, Aquilinus, Lætantius, Januaria, Generosa, Vestia, Donata and Secunda, I have ordered to be executed." They all said: **"THANKS be to God."** "And so they all together were crowned with martyrdom; and they reign with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, forever and ever. Amen."

[These were HEROES! They were offering up the sacrifices of THANKSGIVING. They were THANKFUL for the honor of serving and being called upon to lay down their lives for the gospel— **DEMONSTRATING A BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN FAITH WHICH RECOGNIZES THAT JESUS IS WORTH DYING FOR** and thus, He is WORTHY that we be faithful!

BEWARE! MANY MODERN EVANGELICAL CHURCH LEADERS who are super successful in the eyes of the masses are in OVER-DRIVE seeking to guide today's churches down paths of COMPROMISE so as to be relevant, accepted, and cool in the eyes of a God-hating world.]

The intensity of persecution in the Roman Empire **rose and fell** with the temperaments and circumstances of the various emperors. Of course, that's not unique in the historical record. **Through the centuries of time**, everything keeps changing -- including churches and values -- except God and His eternal Kingdom.

In the last few decades, we have seen growing numbers of so-called Christians ready and willing to compromise Truth and conform to an increasingly corrupt world. Like in Old Testament days, it no longer seems wrong to "love evil more than good." (Psalm 52:3) Almost "anything goes" except "intolerance" toward popular evil.

Remember, the new set of global values, based on a blend of earth-centered beliefs, socialist ideology, and globalist goals, rule out Biblical boundaries and absolutes. Genuine Christianity simply won't fit.

Our political, legal and education systems have been infiltrated by leaders who have betrayed America for a hollow vision of a global village. Hollywood has taught our children to delight in evil, while schools immerse them in pagan rituals to other gods. **More and more church leaders are ashamed to mention sin and the cross,** and multitudes of "Christians" are drifting with the trends, too distracted to know or care.

We shouldn't be surprised. Again and again, the Old Testament shows **our natural inclination to drift toward apathy, compromise, rebellion, and paganism -- anything but God Himself.** It's happening in America, and 1 Corinthians 10:1-11 tells us that we are not immune to consequences like those that destroyed ancient Israel. Did we forget?

Listen to this warning which God gave ancient Israel and see how it fits our times:

"When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land He has given you. Be careful that you do not forget... Otherwise... your heart will become proud... You may say to yourself, 'My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.' ... If you ever forget the Lord your God and follow other gods... you will surely be destroyed." Deuteronomy 8:10-20

Having left their Father's protection, God's beloved Israel faced famine, war, slavery, and oppression. When they cried out to God, He restored them, but their peace and prosperity didn't last long. Soon the cycle of apathy, compromise, rebellion and oppression began once again. **IMPORTANT NOTE: God may withdraw His protection from a nation that turns to other gods, but He never fails to guard and guide those who remain faithful to Him.** He doesn't promise to save us from pain and persecution, but in the midst of suffering we can count on His strength and loving presence.

Remember, "the whole world is under the control of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Satan's subjects will always despise our King, twist His truth, and hate His people. Why should we not expect opposition? **Jesus described the normal Christian life: "If they persecute Me, they will also persecute you," He told His disciples, "for they do not know Him who sent me."** John 15:20-21

We need to take His warning to heart, count the cost of discipleship, and pray to be prepared for inevitable battles. **Prayerfully consider these steps -- as a family or as an individual believer... AND as a church family:**

1. Pray for [His guidance](#).
2. Learn from those who suffered persecution because of their faith.
3. Memorize His Word, the "[Sword of the Spirit](#)" in every battle we face.
4. [Memorize hymns](#) and songs that enable you to keep praising Him and affirming His victory. {Have a good Hymn book handy, next to your Bible!}
5. Silently practice singing to Him in the midst of all kinds of distractions.
6. Practice [giving thanks](#) in all situations. {This IS the will of God: 1 Thess. 5:18}
7. By His wonderful grace, "love your enemies, bless those who curse you; do good to those who hate you; and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." ... and do not be overcome of evil; but overcome evil with GOOD: [Matthew 5:44-45](#); [Romans 12:14-21](#).



"...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged." Hebrew 12:1-3

Those who choose uncompromising discipleship will find an unspeakable joy in His nearness. Stephen did!! (See Acts 7) Remember how his face shone as his persecutors hurled the stones that crushed his body. **Like him, may we demonstrate** to a needy world the overcoming power of the majestic, heavenly King who reached down to earth to love us like a Father.

When I was little, I loved our Norwegian king. Like him, I wanted to be brave enough to die rather than surrender. Years later I learned that this wonderful leader was nothing compared to my heavenly King. Yet my earthly king and the years of war, danger, and deprivation gave me a vision of genuine Christianity that I continue to treasure. **I saw that we, His bride and Church, are like a nation of loyal subjects -**

- **Who** love and obey their King
- **Who** discover in their common devotion and warfare a fellowship that can rarely be found apart from persecution
- **Who** refuse to compromise, and
- **Who** persevere until death -- or until the war is won.

To sustain us through the battles ahead, our King [JESUS!] gave us many precious promises. Few bring me more delight than the following words from our Master. May they fill you with joy at the unspeakable privilege of serving our sovereign King, following in His footsteps, and sharing His resurrection life for all eternity.

"Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man's sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven." Luke 6:22-23

AGAIN: Genuine, uncompromising Christians will be despised by tomorrow's leaders and global managers. We don't fit their vision of unity, solidarity and upside-down tolerance. Like the ancient rulers who demanded conformity with "the custom of the Romans," a new breed of rulers -- like those in ancient Rome -- are beginning to trumpet the "profound danger" of Christian resistance to their rising global empire. (Matthew 24:9-13)

The times ahead will surely bring a time of purification to the Church— a separation of what the Bible calls wheat and tares: a division between those who truly belong to God and those who prefer to identify with today's adaptable, emerging church.

*"If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.... **If they persecuted Me they will persecute you... for they do not know the One who sent Me.**" John 15:19-21*

Long ago, one of God's faithful servants saw the crossroad ahead and showed us the only safe pathway through an immoral world: **Joshua encouraged God's people to follow truth, avoid compromise, and shun their neighbors' earth-centered spirituality.** His words clash with today's demand for unity, consensus and global values. But they fit our times. "... *choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.*" Joshua 24:15

The crossroad -- the way of the cross -- may be rocky and narrow, and it will never merge with the crowded superhighway nudging the masses toward a global village. But no other way leads to genuine love, peace, and lasting security. The destination is well worth the struggle: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." 1 Corinthians 2:9

AGAIN: WE ARE INCREASINGLY MOVING INTO A WORLD that will show less and less tolerance for genuine, Biblical Christian faith. **NEVERTHELESS**, when we trust and follow JESUS, He will lead us in His triumph -- no matter what challenges we face. (2 Corinthians 2:14) **Remember what God told Joshua:** *"Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."* Joshua 1:9

(The above is edited from Andy and Berit Kjos; <http://www.crossroad.to/Persecution/persecute.html>)

THE MARTYR'S OATH— used in the 20th and 21st Century!

Such oaths are common in the lands where Christians face death on a regular basis. In the past few years, versions of it have appeared in Persian and Arab countries, usually scrawled in hurried handwriting. It is not uncommon to hear of Christians even incorporating it in their wedding vows, as they begin their lives together as evangelists and church planters in lands where conversion to Jesus as Lord is a capital offense.

Some years ago at the Bible Institute started by M. A. Thomas, in Kota, India, students would publically take the following vow during the commencement. **No oath? No diploma!** At the climax of the ceremony, these graduates would rise to their feet, raise their hand, and repeat words similar to these:

TODAY, I stand as a dead man. I declare that in Jesus Christ, I am saved by His blood, and thus I am dead to sin, and no longer dead in my sin. TODAY, I stand and declare that I surrender my will and my life, to His will and His life.

I shall go where He sends me, without asking questions. I shall go to whomever He sends me, without seeking fame. I shall preach to everyone, even if they hate me. I am an Ambassador of the Cross, and must deliver the Message. I shall pour my life out to reach my family, my friends, my neighbors, and my city. I embrace the shame of the Cross, and I fear nothing but God. I welcome suffering, shame, persecution, beatings, imprisonment and death, but I will not be silenced. If I am killed, I pray that my blood should be a harvest for souls. This is my city. I dare not do less.

Following their being graduated, each student was given three items, and only three items. As they walked across the stage and received their diploma following their oath, **each graduate took into his possession: A new Bible, A new bicycle... And a one-way train ticket to their field of service.** They had no "Plan B." (Note: So far as I know... this practice continues)

["We give THANKS to God," "THANKS be to God,"— shall we not settle it in our hearts: "LORD JESUS you are worthy! Help me to be faithful to you TODAY, as the chief preparation for whatever you may call me to on tomorrow!"

What About me— Am I a soldier of the Cross?

Am I a soldier of the cross, A follower of the Lamb, and shall I fear to own His cause, Or blush to speak His Name?

Must I be carried to the skies on flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize, and sailed through bloody seas?

Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood? Is this vile world a friend to grace to help me on to God?

Sure I must fight if I would reign; Increase my courage, Lord. I'll bear the toil, endure the pain, supported by Thy Word.

Thy saints in all this glorious war shall conquer, though they die; they see the triumph from afar, by faith's discerning eye.

When that illustrious day shall rise, and all Thy armies shine in robes of victory through the skies, the glory shall be Thine. (Hymn by Isaac Watts)

Let all saints in Christ encourage one another to be found FAITHFUL!

Grace to you! James Bell www.southsidegallatin.org