

SINNERS IN NEED OF A SAVIOR

When I was growing up, it seemed like everyone went to church. That was what “nice” people did. Folks did want people to think well of them. Going to church was considered righteous, a component of general good behavior. Their friends and social life revolved around the church. People joined a church to further their business contacts. They wanted their children to go to Sunday School. In fact, people who didn’t go to church – well, that just wasn’t good. They probably weren’t “nice.”

Flash forward to 2013. And of course we find that there are folks who still go to church for the very reasons I just listed. But here’s the truth of the matter. When we walk through the doors of a church, we’re not really telling the world how good we are. No, we’re admitting that we’re nothing but sinners, righteous only through Jesus Christ, and in desperate need of a Savior. Not a country club, or a social group, or the chance to look good to others. We need a Savior, and we need help.

Let’s look for a moment at the amazing apostle, Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament and whose letters to the churches still guide and inspire us today. In 1 Timothy, he calls himself “chief among sinners.” Or, as one translation puts it, “I am the worst sinner of all.” In Romans, we can hear the pain in Paul’s heart as he confesses that the good things he wants to do, he doesn’t do; the sinful things he doesn’t want to do are the things he ends up doing. “Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?”

For all his accomplishments and his faithfulness and his passion for the gospel, there wasn’t a self-righteous bone in Paul’s body. Paul knew exactly what he was: a sinner, in need of a Savior, saved by grace alone.

Without grace, our faith is dry as dust. Without grace, we are nothing but judgmental, law-driven, self-righteous people who think that looking “nice” on the outside is all it takes in this life – and in the next, I imagine. Without grace, we’re not forgiven for our sins. We can’t forgive ourselves. And we can’t forgive others.

But with grace? Oh, what a relief! The answer to Paul’s question, “Who will rescue me from this body of death?” is, “Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” In 1 Timothy, as Paul describes his past and present sinfulness, his gratitude to God overflows and he says, “To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.” With grace, we’re set free from sin, and we’re free to be ourselves, because God knows us deeply and loves us anyway. We’re free to love God and love each other. With grace, God transforms us from the inside out, so that what matters most is not being “nice” on the outside, but being filled with God’s love on the inside. With grace, we, like Paul, can live lives overflowing with gratitude to God.

No one of us is any better than any other of us. We have this in common, no matter what: we’re all sinners, in need of a Savior. Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!