

I'm All In!

A baptism Sunday is **NEVER** a bad Sunday! There is an air of excitement and a sense of anticipation. The church family gathers, because its members are about to *see* a dramatic representation of Jesus' saving work and to *hear* the stories of lives gloriously rescued. By going into the water, being submerged, and subsequently emerging from it, new brothers and sisters illustrate Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, as well as their personal identification with Christ's saving work. Baptism functions as a public acknowledgement of a new life, new allegiance, and a new relationship that they enter into with Jesus and His Church. **For those baptized and those who are joyously witnessing this noble symbol, it is also a reminder of the amazing centrality of being saved by grace.** As clergyman and poet, John Newton, so famously penned in his hymn, "Amazing Grace":

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound,
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.

Thro' many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace hath bro't me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

In the closing passage of Luke 11, Jesus' exchange with the Pharisees and experts of the law is an invitation to **let the light of Christ shine in** (Lk 11:33-36) and to **reject the darkness of empty externalism** (Lk 11:37-52). The exchange is confrontational, condemning the religious elite for their hypocritical formalism. As a matter of fact, so direct and stinging are Jesus' words that one of the lawyers responds with, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us ..." (v. 45). Rabbi Jesus points out six shortcomings that are associated with the religious elite's externalism. Each is punctuated by the word *woe*, expressing grief and criticism. The Savior is angry at those who are self-servingly practicing their man-made rules (vv. 42, 43, 47), since they should know better! He is also heartbroken for those who are being led astray by this hypocrisy (vv. 44, 46, 52). The lamp and light of Jesus remains hidden and unseen (Lk 11:33-34).

The key to appreciating and applying the interaction between Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees is found in verse 41. Here Jesus makes a claim that is easily misunderstood, but transformational if understood correctly. Jesus says, "... give as

alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean in you.” To put it another way, holy and acceptable worship must come from a changed heart - from within. Then - when the inside is changed - the outside will follow. Looking holy and feeling holy doesn’t make a person holy. Instead, being holy leads to feeling holy and looking holy. But how does a person **become** holy and righteous on the **inside**?

The answer is grace.

No lost sinner has ever been rescued from their despairing condition by following religious traditions, stacking up good works, or exhibiting moral virtues. Sadly, there is no such thing as a good person. The Bible tells us, “... None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one” (Rom 3:10-12; see also Ps 14:1-3; 53:1-3). **What every person needs is to be made new.** However, based on humanity’s condition, this “newness” isn’t deserved, neither can it be earned. It is a gift! New life, new allegiance, and a new relationship are all received by grace through faith and lead to a new holy way of living (Eph 2:8-10).

This is what makes baptism testimonies - stories of lives rescued by grace - truly amazing! Regardless of an individual's age, gender, or past, every single Christian is a result of a miraculous act of deliverance. It is Jesus, the Righteous One, who took the place of unrighteous wretches, outcasts, and scoundrels. Through His death, burial, and resurrection He claimed victory over sin and death, and now offers it freely to all who will believe. By repentance and faith, His light enters in and darkness is expelled. The same God who caused light to shine out of darkness “has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). What amazing grace!

The only sensible response to grace is, “I’m all in!”

1 John 1:5-10 (ESV) - “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”