

GRACE AND 9-11

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The anniversary of the events of Sept. 11, 2001, brings with it the images and memories of the extremity of pain, loss, suffering, vulnerability and fear. It also focuses our attention on the extremity of human evil and the extremity of human goodness and valor. With no further comment regarding the depravity of those who perpetrated the vicious atrocities of that day, consider how those tragic circumstances exposed the best of human nature.

As the two buildings burned, hundreds of firefighters began climbing the stairs of the doomed WTC towers, each carrying 60 pounds of equipment, their goal 70 stories above them. They did not know what it would be like or what they would do. But there were people in the building, and those rescue workers were compelled by valor and duty to climb, literally to their deaths, for the chance that they might save lives. When the buildings collapsed, more firefighters and police died instantly than the number of those who died as passengers on the four planes. When the passengers aboard United 93 realized what the hijackers planned to do, they attempted to retake the plane, realizing landing safely was not an option. They determined not to allow the doomed aircraft to be used to destroy other lives. One woman on the plane prayed for the souls of the people on board, including those hijackers. Another passenger, on the phone with her mother, expressed her concern for the grief and loneliness she knew her mother would experience. Most Americans, whether involved personally with the events of 9-11 or not, realized how those events remind us of our need to depend on God for our personal and national security.

In these events, we see residing within the human heart a capacity for greatness and goodness that we do not always see under normal circumstances. In the midst of tragedy, we see not only the meanness and evil of which humans are capable, but also the beauty and virtue of courage, compassion, sacrifice, kindness and love. As Christians, we see these through the context of the Gospel of Christ, and we also realize these two facts: No matter how wicked a person is, the grace of God in Christ is great enough to save and redeem. No matter how virtuous a person is, we each are sinners and still need that grace.