

**BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST**

*Scripture Reading: Romans 6:3, 4*

It is truly sad that one of the most precious truths of Scripture is also one of the least understood. The truth we are referring to is the believer's identification with Christ.

In today's text (Romans 6:3, 4), we read of our baptism into Christ. Unfortunately, most commentators, and therefore most Christians, do not understand the true meaning of "baptism." To these, baptism always means "water," but the original word actually means "identification." This can be demonstrated from I Corinthians 10:2, "And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." The children of Israel were not made wet in the sea, but they were identified with Moses' leadership through the Red Sea experience.

Likewise, when we trust in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit baptizes (identifies) us into the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:13). This is why Romans 6:3 says we "were baptized (identified) into his death." This means Christ's death for our sins is made affective in our life. Next, we are identified with His burial ("buried with him by baptism into death" Romans 6:4a). When Christ's human body, laden with the sins of the world, was put away in that tomb, it is as though we were there too. Finally, we are identified with His resurrection "that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:4b).

How tragic that many Christians miss these blessed truths and substitute a man-made water ceremony for true, spiritual baptism.

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**UNSEARCHABLE RICHES**

*Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:8*

As the Apostle Paul traveled on his missionary journeys, his procedure was to go first into the synagogue of the Jews and reason with them out of the Scriptures, "Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ" (Acts 17:3). When the noble Bereans heard Paul's preaching, they "searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). Of course, these were the Old Testament Scriptures, for the New Testament was not yet written at that time.

However, God was in the process of giving further revelation to Paul, and these new truths could *not* be traced back to the Old Testament. This is why Paul calls them "the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). The word "unsearchable" is a hunting term meaning, "unable to be tracked or traced." This describes the nature of the great mystery revealed to Paul for the Gentiles. It was hidden from ages and generations (Colossians 1:26; Ephesians 3:5), but now has been made known for all to see in the epistles of Paul.

What are these unsearchable riches? They are too numerous to mention in this short article, but they include the catching away (rapture) of the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 15:51), the joining of Jew and Gentile in one body (Ephesians 3:6), the unique Gentile program of God during the time of Israel's blindness (Romans 11:25) and many more blessed truths. These things were simply not revealed in the Hebrew Scriptures. Search and see; but thank God they are now made known to the saints!

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## SAVED WITHOUT WORKS

*Scripture Reading: Romans 4:4, 5*

God has always offered salvation to mankind. Even before man fell into sin, God planned to provide for salvation through “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8). Furthermore, God has always offered salvation on the basis of faith, for “without faith it is impossible to please him” (Hebrews 11:6).

However, throughout the ages, God has required various methods of exercising faith in Him. Under the law, man was required to obey the commandments in faith. To obey the law out of mere tradition without exercising faith did not result in righteousness. (See Romans 9:31, 32.) Likewise, to say you had faith, but then did not obey the Law was also futile. (See James 2:8-26.) So under the Law, men were saved by faith, which in turn was demonstrated by a faithful obedience to the Law.

But in this dispensation of grace, salvation is offered by faith alone without any required outward response. In fact, Paul is careful to separate works from faith entirely when it comes to being saved. As he says in our text, “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that *worketh not* but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness” (Romans 4:4, 5). We must likewise be careful to present the gospel of grace in a way that our hearers do not confuse works with faith. Many preach that in order to be saved, we must “repent of our sins” or “pray this prayer” or “make Christ Lord of your life.” These may be good things to do but should come as a result of believing the gospel, not as a method of salvation.

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## ALL FOR US

*Scripture Reading: Romans 15:4*

The Grace Movement and dispensationalists in general have often been accused of rejecting parts of the Bible. While we cannot speak for all who “rightly divide the word of truth,” his writer has never rejected any part of the Bible, nor have we ever heard of a “Grace Dispensationalist” who does. Indeed we who claim to follow Paul as he followed Christ (I Corinthians 11:1) affirm that “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable...” (II Timothy 3:16). “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our edification, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Romans 15:4). Notice that our text says the Scriptures (Old Testament) were written “for our edification,” not “for our obedience.” There is a big difference between the two.

We can learn much from the failures of Israel in the wilderness, as Paul points out in I Corinthians chapter 10. We certainly are not bound to bring the legal sacrifices and observe the rituals of the Law as they were bound to do. Yet Paul draws practical applications for us from their experiences: “Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them... Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed... Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted...” (I Corinthians 10:7-9).

We believe the whole Bible is God’s inspired Word and is to be read and studied from cover to cover. Learn from the moral principles of the Law; find inspiration in the Psalms; be instructed by the practical wisdom of the Proverbs, but remember that our *personal* instructions are in the epistles of Paul.

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## NOT ALL TO US

Scripture Reading: *James 1:1*

We can be thankful that postal employees are more faithful than some Bible interpreters. If they were not, we might never get our mail! You see, postal employees must be careful to read the address on the envelope to make sure the right people get the right messages.

The Bible is no different. God has been very careful to address His Word to the people He intended to instruct. When He was about to reveal the Law to His chosen nation, the Lord God carefully told Moses, "these are the words which thou shalt speak *unto the children of Israel*" (Exodus 19:6). Yet, some would try to impose Israel's religious rituals and ordinances to Gentiles in this dispensation of grace. When Peter preached his powerful sermon on the day of Pentecost, he was careful to address it, "*Ye men of Israel*" (Acts 2:22). Yet, some would try to apply his instructions to them just a few verses later—"Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins..." (Acts 2:38)—to Gentile believers today. James carefully addressed his epistle, "*James...to the twelve tribes*" (James 1:1). Yet, some try to apply his instruction to anoint the sick with oil (James 5:14) to Gentile believers in this present age.

As was pointed out in yesterday's lesson, all Scripture is profitable and contains valuable lessons for us to learn; but as seen in today's texts, not all Scripture is addressed to us as Gentiles living in this dispensation of the grace of God. Let us be faithful "postal workers" as we sort God's mail, the Word of God.

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## DISPENSATIONS

Scripture Reading: *Ephesians 3:1, 2*

"What is a dispensation?" If we were to ask this question of some average church members, we would probably get answers like this: "I don't know," "I don't like to talk about theology," or "I think it is a period of time." Of course, none of these answers tells us what a dispensation is, including the last one.

The Bible word, "dispensation," is a combination of the Greek words for "house" and "law." Therefore a dispensation is the "household law" at any given time. In Old Testament times, the "household law" was the Law of Moses. At that time, God dealt with man according to the precepts and principles set forth in this law, and by this law those people will be judged: "as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law" (Romans 2:12b).

Today, the "household law" is Grace. "For this cause I am the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward" (Ephesians 3:1, 2). According to this text, God's household law today is the grace message committed to the Apostle Paul. This is the principle by which God deals with men at this time, and it is by this message that we will be judged: "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Romans 2:16).

The dispensation of the grace of God, then, is not a period of time, but rather it is the method by which God deals with us during this present time. Praise God! It is by grace!

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**PRAYER PROMISES**

*Scripture Reading: Matthew 21:22; Philippians 4:6, 7*

It is popular these days to “claim” the great prayer promises of Scripture, regardless of to whom these promises were addressed. For example, we read in Matthew 21:22, “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.” This is certainly a remarkable promise, and countless thousands have attempted to claim it as their own. However many have experienced great disappointment when their prayers went unanswered. Some suffer great disillusionment and conclude that “the Bible just doesn’t work.” Others undergo spiritual depression as well meaning “friends” tell them that they “just didn’t have enough faith.” In a few cases, some have even turned against God, concluding that He went back on His promise.

The solution to all these problems, of course, is to “rightly divide the word of truth.” Christ’s promise to His disciples in Matthew’s gospel pertained specifically to them as participants in the kingdom program for Israel. God’s prayer promises to the body of Christ in this dispensation are found in Paul’s epistles; and in these, we never read that God will give us whatsoever we ask. Rather, God promises us that when we truly leave our requests with Him, then “the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7). Sometimes God’s withholding of what we ask is actually a blessing in disguise, “for we know not what we should pray for as we ought” (Romans 8:26). Who knows what trouble we would heap to ourselves if we got everything we asked for? But praise God, He gives peace to the trusting child!

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**PRAYER PROMISES (Continued)**

*Scripture Reading: Ephesians 3:20*

Yesterday we emphasized the fact that in this dispensation of grace, God does not always give us what we pray for, but He does promise peace when we leave our requests with Him (Philippians 4:6, 7). But just because God doesn’t always answer our prayers the way we want them answered doesn’t mean we should stop praying. Paul instructs us to “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Neither does it mean that God does not answer our prayers at all. Indeed, one of the greatest prayer promises in all the Bible is found in today’s text.

“Now to him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Ephesians 3:20). Meditate on these words for a moment. Our God is certainly able to give us what we pray for, but Paul does not stop there. God is able to go far beyond our shortsighted requests and give us what is truly needed in our lives. Imagine a billionaire telling you, “Ask whatever you want, and I will give it to you.” Now imagine this same billionaire being someone who knew you intimately and loved you with all his heart, saying, “Trust me and I can do far more for you than you could ask or even imagine.” Which of these would be a better promise? The wise man would choose the second.

This is exactly what God has done for His children today. He does not promise to give us whatever we ask, as He promised the twelve apostles of Israel. Instead, He tells us to leave our cares and requests with Him, then trust Him to do what is best. Do this by faith, and you will find true peace and blessing!

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**BY COVENANT OR BY GRACE?**

*Scripture Reading: Ephesians 2:11-13*

Israel was a nation blessed beyond measure. She was chosen being the fleshly seed of Abraham to be a light and a testimony to the rest of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3). In order to carry out this task, God established many promises or covenants with her, signifying the special relationship between Him and this nation. Israel was God's "Covenant People," a relationship which the Gentiles did not have. In fact, for a Gentile to come to God at that time, he had to join himself to the Jews. This is illustrated in the Old Testament Scriptures. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (Zechariah 8:23).

In today's text, Paul outlines the dilemma the Gentile was formerly in: "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). There was simply no way around it. Gentiles did not have access to the blessings of the covenants except through Israel; but Israel herself failed to enter into these blessings because of her unbelief. How would God now bring salvation to the Gentiles? The answer is, not by covenant, but by grace. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9). We Gentiles should thank God for His matchless wisdom and grace!

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