

The Intermission of Grace

Our Relationship with Christ

Our relationship to Christ today is based on a different set of circumstances than those of the Christians at the time of Christ early in the first century. Then the relationship was based on actually seeing Christ and hearing Him teach personally and through the Twelve Apostles. From the passage in Acts 2:17-20 we know that if the Jewish nation had responded to the gospel of the kingdom that the day of the Lord would have occurred and would have paved the way for the actual "Kingdom of Heaven" to be brought to the earth from heaven by Christ Himself where He would reign from the throne of David and the Twelve Apostles would sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of the nation Israel. The first phase of this eternal kingdom we now know is 1,000 years.

17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams:

18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy:

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19 And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke:

20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: (Acts 2:17-20)

In Peter's next address/sermon the actual offer of the kingdom is recorded if the nation Israel would repent and be converted.

19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you:

21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:19-21)

When the majority of the nation Israel didn't respond to the gospel of the kingdom, (i. e. bear fruit) the extra year was granted from the parable in Luke 13.

6 He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.

7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?

8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it:

9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.

(Luke 13:6-9)

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During the extra year not only was insufficient fruit produced, but also the persecution of the few Christians began to ramp up.

We know from the first census of Israel at the time of Moses, in about 1,490 B.C., that the population of Israel was 603,550 for males age 20 and above, not including the tribe of Levi. An estimate for the population of Israel at the time of Christ is 3,000,000. The book of Acts records 3,000 plus 5,000 men saved on the day of Pentecost and shortly thereafter.

41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. (Acts 2:41)

4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand. (Acts 4:4)

The relationship these Christians had with Christ was based on them knowing Him first hand and through His Apostles who had been with Him during His 3½ year earthly ministry.

If the nation Israel would have responded to the kingdom gospel, the 70th week of Daniel would have occurred and that seven years of tribulation would have resulted in the battle of Armageddon followed by the establishment of the 1,000 year reign of Christ.

The relationship of these saints would also have been based on seeing Christ Himself and hearing Him as He reigned from David's throne.

When Israel didn't respond and the extra year expired, God, in matchless grace, struck down the chief persecutor of the Christians. Then He saved him (Saul of Tarsus, also known as Paul), commissioned him an apostle and sent him forth with a new gospel of the grace of God. The difference in this gospel is that you are saved by Christ's blood and His blood alone by believing that He died for your sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day.

This whole program is called the Mystery and is outlined in Paul's thirteen epistles that he penned, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, as he was receiving direct heavenly revelations from Christ Himself over about a thirty year period of time.

Our relationship with Christ today during this time of the outpouring of God's grace is based not on knowing Him in a physical presence, but through the Holy Spirit and the inspired Word that was written through the Apostle Paul. At the moment we believe we are baptized into (or identified with) the body of Christ by the Holy Spirit. This has nothing to do with the water ceremony (known as baptism) that would have prepared the nation Israel to become that "kingdom of priests" had they not rejected the kingdom gospel as recorded so clearly in the first 8 chapters of the book of Acts.

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13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. (I Corinthians 12:13)

Sometimes our preachers today try to get us to think about having the kind of relationship with Christ that the kingdom saints had during the early Acts period. This can make sense to them because they unwittingly mix some of the interrupted kingdom gospel into today's message of reconciliation through the gospel of the grace of God. In order to understand what God has so clearly communicated to us today we have to "rightly divide" the Word of truth so that we don't get a confusing mixture. This has always been true down through the ages as God has changed His dealing with mankind numerous times, due to sin, rebellion, rejection, and unbelief.

Not understanding our proper relationship with Christ today can cause many to question whether they are even saved because they don't seem to have the same emotional relationship that others profess to have with Christ. Paul was inspired to write in II Corinthians 5:16:

16 Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

Today we know Christ and have a relationship with Him through the Holy Spirit as we study the Words of Christ as they are recorded in Paul's epistles.

3 Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you. (II Corinthians 13:3)

Our program is extremely good news to a lost and dying world and the best thing about it is that it is, by far, God's best and simplest program to date. For that reason it is the enemy's (Satan's) worst nightmare. He will try anything to stop it through confusion and misunderstanding. Down through the ages he has used primarily other Christians in this effort. It started with the Judaizers who tried to mix in the Law of Moses with the Grace Gospel Paul had shared with the Gentiles in Antioch (see the book of Galatians). By the time Paul was finishing his ministry, all in Asia had turned away from him and his inspired message.

15 This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. (II Timothy 1:15)

As we lost the importance of the distinctive apostleship of Paul, the Christian community was plunged into a period of confusion that is still prevalent today. During the 1500's the reformation began by recovering the truth of "faith alone in Christ alone." During the 1800's the truth of the Rapture was recovered along with the difference between Israel and the Church the Body of Christ. Finally, during the 1930's the truth of the distinctive message and ministry of the Apostle Paul began to be recovered. It's still Satan's worst nightmare today and is still under massive attacks from all sides.

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During the last few hundred years we have seen the establishment of most of the modern schools of thought pertaining to the understanding of Scripture. As a result, much of what we are being taught today is not based on God's clear message for us today from Scripture, but on an improper mixture of His previous programs that have become "**tradition of men**" and "**rudiments of the world.**"

8 Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.
(Colossians 2:8)

7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.
13 Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered: and many such like things do ye. (Mark 7:7,13)

Many Christians are in substantial bondage today because they haven't been exposed to the "simplicity that is in Christ" from the gospel of the grace of God and that His blood and His blood alone can save you if you simply believe that He died for your sins, was buried, and rose again the third day.

3 But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.
(II Corinthians 11:3)

I've interviewed numerous Protestant pastors over the last few years and have asked them just what exactly does one need to do to be saved today. The list I've compiled is a very long one. Among the things on the list are: repent, make Him Lord of your life, confess your sins, ask Him into your heart, have a personal relationship with Him, obey His commandments, go to church, be water baptized – and the list goes on.

You can boil the gospel of the grace of God down to one word... *believe*. The Greek word for *believe* in our New Testament is "*pistis*" and it also means faith. That is the only response that God requires for us to appropriate the salvation provided by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross. Anything we try to add on to this believing faith is unnecessary and unwanted by God. Naturally, your behavior and works will show evidence that you are saved, but you are not saved by good works, you have good works because you are saved.

Just try to solve the following seeming contradiction in Scripture if you don't rightly divide the Word of God into its separate programs:

24 Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.
(James 2:24)

28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. (Romans 3:28)

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5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. (Romans 4:5)

There was a time when God required works and deeds as evidence of faith. During the kingdom gospel water baptism was required for salvation:

16 He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. (Mark 16:16)

Another seeming contradiction in Scripture will demonstrate that God has changed His program for dealing with us with regard to forgiving.

14 For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you:

15 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive (present tense) your trespasses. (Mathew 6:14,15)

32 And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven (past tense) you. (Ephesians 4:32)

13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave (past tense) you, so also do ye. (Colossians 3:13)

Today we are forgiven all trespasses the moment we believe.

13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; (Colossians 2:13)

Today, thankfully, we are saved simply by believing and having faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross when He paid the price once for all the sins of mankind past, present, and future. Today you can know that you are eternally saved by believing the gospel that Christ died for your sins, was buried, and rose again the third day.

1 Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand;

2 By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

3 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

Couple the last verses with these next two passages and you will know all you need to know about how to be saved and what to tell others about how they can be saved.

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8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast.

10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:8-10)

Notice that it is grace that saves you that you appropriate through faith (believing). It is the gift of God and has nothing to do with works or deeds. A lot of people get tricked into thinking; “but we have to do our little part.” That’s true but if “our little part” is anything more than believing faith, it is contrary to Scripture.

5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

6 Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

7 That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

8 This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men. (Titus 3:5-8)

Although not required for salvation, works are “**ordained** (prepared) **that we *should walk in them***” and be “**careful to maintain**” because they are “**good and profitable.**” One clear teaching of Scripture is that because of sin our righteous acts aren’t worth much.

6 But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

When we feel we have to do something more than believe the gospel we are demonstrating that we don’t have faith that Christ’s blood shed on the cross was powerful enough to completely pay for all our sins and make it possible to be reconciled to God. Being that our salvation is a gift from a loving God, there is nothing that we could ever do that would be remotely good enough to be worth anything compared to God’s grace. Praise God!

How can you have the assurance that what you have just read is true base on the Word of God? The only way is to:

15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. (II Timothy 2:15)

By following the above you will be able to begin to be led by the Spirit and will start to display the fruit of the Spirit as listed for us in the book of Galatians:

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22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

23 Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22,23)

If you really study the Scriptures (especially Paul's letters) you will be taught by the Spirit all you need to know concerning having a right relationship with Christ. The first thing you will experience is gratitude for what He has done for you at the cross. It is understandable that then and only then will you feel confident to share this glorious message with others as the Spirit leads you. God knows that it isn't His harshness but His goodness that compels us to be repentant and render service to Him.

4 Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? (Romans 2:4)

The other thing we need to watch for is improper influence from even well-meaning friends, relatives, or preachers who would corrupt the "simplicity that is in Christ" and the message of salvation based on His finished work on the cross by adding anything on to grace and therefore making the cross of Christ of "none effect."

17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

(I Corinthians 1:17)

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