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"Preaching grace in the Dispensation of grace"

A Bible Study

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Complete In Christ Or COMPLETELY WITHOUT HIM BY RICHARD JORDAN

Sometime ago I asked a class of boys if any of them could tell me how to get to heaven. After a minute or so one of them raised his hand and said, "Be good."

"Have *you* been good?" I asked. "Yes," he said. "Have you ever told a lie or stolen anything?" At first he shook his head vehemently in denial, but as he sat facing me he reluctantly admitted that he had.

"Well," I persisted, "Do you suppose they take girls and boys into heaven who lie and steal?" "No," he admitted, adding: "Well, then, how do *you* expect to get to heaven?!"

This young man's question is our question too--and there are so many answers being given all about us that thousands of people are understandably bewildered by it.

How many have said, "Oh, what's the use! How can we know what to believe with all the different viewpoints about us? One says, 'I'm a Catholic,' another, 'I'm a Protestant,' another, 'I'm a Presbyterian,' another, 'I'm a Baptist,' others, 'I'm a Methodist, an Episcopalian, Reformed, Mennonite, Pentecostalist....'" and so you can go on down the list.

There are literally hundreds of sects and denominations, *all* calling themselves Christians. How can the average man differentiate between all these various shades of belief?

We cannot deny the confusion. We must acknowledge that not only Christendom, but Protestantism, and not only Protestantism, but Fundamentalism has become a Babel of confusion. Thank God that all true believers believe and preach salvation through Christ, but then many begin to add "ifs," ands,' and "buts" so that the Church has become confused and divided.

Because of this division and confusion some think that sincerity is all that is needed. They say, "We may not all agree, but if we are only sincere God will be satisfied." But this is not so. Sincerity alone will not save your soul any more than sincerity will save your life if you drink poison, sincerely believing it to be medicine. Remember it is possible to be sincerely *wrong*. The only safe way to decide this question is to examine God's Word and see what He requires for salvation.

Now the Scriptures say one thing very plainly: "*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God*" (Rom.3:23). And this declaration tallies with human experience. From where did your children get their sinful natures? *Why, from you!* And from where did you get yours? *Why, from your parents.* And from where did they get theirs? From their parents. And so you must go back, back, back, just where the Scriptures take you, to our first parents. Romans 5:12 says,

"...By ONE MAN sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

But there is another truth that the Bible teaches just as clearly. It is that sinners, under condemnation of death, may be reconciled to God through the death of His Son. He took our place and died that we might live. Romans 5:8 tells us:

"But GOD COMMENDETH HIS LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT, WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US."

Consider carefully what Paul wrote in Rom.5:10:

"...When we were ENEMIES, we were RECONCILED to God BY THE DEATH OF HIS SON...."

In Col. 1:21, 22 he wrote:

"And you, that were sometime ALIENATED AND ENEMIES in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He RECONCILED

"In the body of His flesh THROUGH DEATH, to present you HOLY AND UNBLAMEABLE AND UNREPROVEABLE in His sight."

Now God has committed to us this wonderful message of *reconciliation through the death of His Son*. By God's grace we are commissioned to tell condemned sinners that they may be forgiven, justified and made complete *in Christ*. As sons of Adam we all belong to the old ruined creation, but II Cor. 5:17 says, "*If any man be IN CHRIST, he is a NEW CREATURE.*" It's our business to help people out of Adam and into Christ; to see them saved from this fallen, ruined creation and made new creatures in Christ.

Isn't it wonderful that Christ, the holy Son of God, should have come into this world to take the sinner's place? He bore all the blame and shame for sins He never committed. He did it so that we might go free, and if you will trust in Christ alone for salvation, God says that He looks upon you *in Christ* and sees you perfect and complete in Him.

Christ took your place on Calvary and paid for your sins so that you might stand before God "*complete in Him.*" That's what Col. 2:9,10 says:

"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

"And YE ARE COMPLETE IN HIM...."

Do you suppose He means just that? Of course! Just think for a moment. If God looks at you *in Christ*, you must be complete. Did Christ come short of the glory of God or the holiness of God? Could God find any fault with Him? Was there anything He lacked? No, God said, "*This is my beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased.*" And God sees you *in Christ*.-that is, if you have trusted Him as your Savior.

Christ was willing to hang in your place on the cross; the question is simply, *are you willing* to cast aside your own "goodness" and stand before God in Him, depending only on His merits?

"But," says someone, "Surely that is not all." Men are afraid to depend wholly on Christ for salvation. They say, "Must we not be baptized? Did not John the Baptist say, 'Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins?' and didn't Peter preach the same message at Pentecost?"

Ah, but that was all *before* the rejected Lord had reached down from heaven to save the chief of sinners and send him forth with the message of grace to a lost world (I Tim. 1:13-16). Just listen to I Tim.2:5-7:

"For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

"WHO GAVE HIMSELF A RANSOM FOR ALL, *TO BE TESTIFIED IN DUE TIME.*

"Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle...."

This is why Paul says in Eph. 3:1-5:

"For this cause I Paul, 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:

"How that BY REVELATION HE MADE KNOWN UNTO ME THE MYSTERY...

"WHICH IN OTHER AGES WAS NOT MADE KNOWN UNTO THE SONS OF MEN...."

"Grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John1: 17), but Christ *on earth* did not preach grace to a lost world. It was not until "*the house of Israel*" had rejected Him that, from His throne in heaven, He stooped down in love to save Saul, the chief of sinners, and sent forth the message of grace to a lost world. Israel had rejected Him both in humiliation and in glory, but "where sin abounded *grace did much more abound...that grace might reign*" (Rom. 5:20, 21).

This "*present evil world*" (Gal. 1:4) is God's *reign of grace*, and remember, when grace reigns you cannot mix it with works. You can't mix it with sacrifices or holy days or water baptism. Grace is everything for nothing. Rom. 11:6 says, "*If by grace,*

then is it no more of works....But if it be of works, then is it no more grace." Thus Rom. 4:4, 5 declares:

"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."

God is not selling anything, He is *giving* it. If you pay Him one cent for it, it is no longer a gift but a purchase. God declares, however, salvation to be "the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

There are those who would add religious works *after* salvation. They argue, "You don't have to be baptized to be saved-only to join our church." They insist, "You are saved without it, but you're not really complete as a Christian until after you have been baptized." But God says, "YE ARE COMPLETE IN HIM."

Suppose for a moment that you are painting a house and your helper wants to put red coloring in with the paint. You say, "No, no. That's not necessary. We painted the barn red but we want the house white." "But he argues, "I know it's not necessary, but let's just add it extra for good measure."

Well, if you do, the house will be red, not white! What's the difference whether it was necessary or not, if you put it in you adulterate the paint and make it red. Just so, people add things to the grace of God.

They agree that these things are not necessary but feel more complete when they have added them. So the grace of God is adulterate. As the Judaizers of old added circumcision to salvation, so Judaizers today add water baptism to salvation. John 1:31 plainly says, *I knew Him not: BUT THAT HE [CHRIST] SHOULD BE MADE MANIFEST TO ISRAEL, therefore am I come baptizing with water.*" Is this why our baptizing friends come baptizing with water today? Do they not know that Gentiles were both circumcised and baptized only while God was dealing with Israel?

Water baptism is the number one divider in the church today. Even sound, evangelical believers are confused and divided over it. It is because we have turned away from God's message and program for this age of grace and have followed human traditions instead.

It is true that in Paul's early ministry he baptized some, but only so long as was still dealing with Israel as a nation. But even then he wrote to the Corinthians, *"I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name"* (I Cor. 1:14, 15). The Twelve Apostles would have been out of the will of God if they had said this!

Rather, the Twelve were distinctly sent to *"teach all nations, baptizing..."* (Matt. 28:19). But Paul, God's messenger of grace, said, *"Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel"* (I Cor. 1:17). The reason for this omission of water baptism from Paul's commission and message is that for the "one Body" there is "one baptism"--and that performed by the "one Spirit," as I Cor. 12:13 makes abundantly clear:

"For By ONE SPIRIT ARE WE ALL BAPTIZED INTO ONE BODY...."

This is the *"one baptism"* of Eph. 4:5, a baptism which places each recipient into the Body of Christ and thus into living oneness with Christ. It is this Spirit-performed baptism that we are made *"complete in Him"* the moment we trust Christ as our Savior.

God has ceased dealing with nations, to now deal with individuals. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men," and there are no "ifs" or "buts" or "ands." It is salvation full and free by the matchless grace of God,

"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" (Eph. 2:8, 9).

If you have never done so, will you accept the gift of God's grace today? God offers eternal life to you freely, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It may seem too good to be true, but God says it is true, so take Him at His word, trust Christ as your personal Savior and stand before God "complete in Him."

The Baptism of Jesus

THREE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

BY DANIEL GROSS

"And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him" (Matt.3:15).

Matthew 3 gives us an account of the baptism of Jesus Christ. This is another one of those passages that is familiar to almost every Christian but understood by very few. In considering this passage we shall seek to find answers to three vitally important questions. As usual, we do not want to look at church tradition or denominational prejudice to find our answers. There is only one final authority--*the Word of God*--and that is where we will search for light on these pressing matters.

Why did John the Baptist, at first, not permit Jesus to be baptized?

Those who came to be baptized by John came "confessing their sins" (Matt. 3:6). His was a "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). John knew that Jesus was "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Since Jesus Christ was not a sinner, why should he undergo a baptism that was intended for sinners? This is the reason for John's hesitation in the beginning.

Why did John the Baptist later decide not to hinder Jesus from being baptized?

When John resisted, Jesus replied that he should allow Him to be baptized because "thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness." There are two aspects to the answer that Jesus gave:

First, Matt. 3:13-17 is the anointing of Jesus into the Messianic offices of Prophet, Priest and King. In order to "fulfil all righteousness" Jesus Christ had to strictly follow the righteous Law given through Moses. This is why Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day and sacrifices were offered in Jerusalem (Luke 2:21-24). The Law required that a priest be baptized upon entering the office. We read this in Ex.29:4, "And Aaron and his sons thou shalt bring unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and *shalt wash them with water.*" (See also Ex. 40:12 and Lev. 8:6). Strict observance of the law of Moses would require Him to submit to the ceremony of water baptism.

But why would John object to having Jesus obey the Law of Moses? Simply because he knew that Jesus was not a sinner and "the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners..." (I Tim. 1:9). When Jesus Christ was baptized, He was identifying Him-self with the "lawless and disobedient" in Israel. He had come to pay the penalty "for the ungodly and for sinners" and this required that He take their place on the cross. *His baptism identified Him with the ones for whom He would later die.*

John the Baptist may not have completely understood all of this, but he understood enough to cause him to permit Jesus to be baptized.

Should we follow the example of Jesus in water baptism?

The fact is that it is *impossible* for us to do so! This baptism identified One who was sinless with those who were sinners. We are already sinners! We can no more follow His example in baptism than we can follow His example and die on a cross. He is the only one in heaven or earth who could do this. In addition, we should again remind ourself that water baptism was a requirement of the Law. We, however, "are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6: 14). The Law condemns sinners. Grace saves sinners. Trying to fulfil the shadows and types of the Law through water baptism (or any other Law ceremony) can never make us righteous. Only the blood that Christ shed can do that!

Water baptism is one of the most misunderstood doctrines in the Bible. Therefore, we ask the reader to consider a few additional thoughts on this topic. We pray that you will honestly examine what the Bible *really* teaches.

- 1. Why do so many "scholars" teach that the Greek word, baptisma, means "immersed or dipped in water"? *The Bible* says Israel was baptized when they walked through the sea on *dry* ground (I Cor.10:1-4); Jesus Christ was baptized on the cross (Luke12:50); John the Baptist warned about a baptism with fire (Matt. 3:11). None of these baptisms have any connection with water.

. 2. Why do many teachers say that water baptism has now taken the place of circumcision? Jesus Christ was water baptized and circumcised! The same could be said about every God-fearing Jew at that time. Water baptism and circumcision were

both practiced in Israel together for hundreds of years. They had different purposes and one would never serve as a substitute for the other.

3. Why is it that every time there is a water baptism recorded in the Book of Acts, there is a miracle along with or shortly after the baptism? (See for example, Acts 8:38-39; 10:46-48.) Can you honestly say that this happens today? Why not?

When John the Baptist gained further understanding from God, he turned away from his own ideas. Are you willing to do the, same?
