

My Two Conversions

By

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Whenever the opportunity avails itself, I try to relate to people that my Christian testimony is centered around my “two conversions.” Realizing that might sound confusing, I hasten to explain what I mean.

I do *not* mean to infer that after being converted I became lost again, which necessitated yet *another* conversion and thus, was saved again. No, I refer to something far more splendid, and in harmony with the Biblical revelation, about my Christian journey and my walk of faith.

My first conversion centered on the time that I was brought to faith in the finished work of Christ in my behalf, which secured my eternal salvation. I clearly understood the claims of Christ and trusted his death, burial and resurrection as the full and final payment for my sin. That happened when I was seventeen years old and was exposed to the Bible teaching ministry of M. R. DeHann. I had the privilege of sitting under some great Bible teaching and was grounded in pre-millennial teaching and elementary doses of dispensational truth. I fully embraced the doctrine of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and firmly believed them to be true from cover to cover. (I have often stated to folk, “I even believe the cover is true!:)0)

However, I almost made shipwreck of my faith. I fell into false doctrine and did not know how to refute it. I had stumbled into the error of Pentecostal teaching and all the predictable excesses that accompany it. I had been led to believe that God, in this present evil age, speaks verbally to people; that he moved some people to speak in tongues. I was taught that whenever people *did* speak in tongues, the message must of necessity be legitimate ... directly from God. How legitimate? Why, as true as the Scripture, for both are of God and equally true.

I was also taught that there was a blessing called, The Baptism of the Holy Spirit, that believers could experience and that when this happened, it was ‘verified’ by the individual speaking in a foreign language not known to the person speaking. [Other tongues.] Healing, personal revelations, the supernatural possession of knowledge and other issues were among those that were confusing to me.

Anyone who even casually watches the overwhelming majority of television ministries today can witness the squalor of ‘Christian entertainment’ that have nothing to do with the message that God has ordained to be proclaimed in this present *age* of grace. Many of us have heard the shysters ... the ‘darlings’ of the charismatic camp ... in their efforts to beg, solicit, appeal and cajole their listeners to give them money. “God wants you to prosper! He wants all those who call on his name to be in good health. If you send your money (to THEIR particular ministry) God will repay you two, five, seven, tenfold – take your pick. Have you heard or read

preaching that is filled with promises like this? I have. In fact, I even preached such drivel in my early years as a teacher of the Bible. I was, in fact, preaching a gospel that was perfectly legitimate –it was ordained to be preached to the Jewish nation – *before* God replaced it with *another* gospel (of a different kind) that God has commissioned to be preached among the ‘heathen’ (unbelieving Jews *and* Gentiles) of this present age.

As I said before, I was a believer in the sacrificial nature of the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. During those days, I was among the multiplied millions of believers who were languishing in a sea of confusion. I had almost resigned myself that there were no satisfying answers available.

Then, one day I met two obnoxious believers, who possessed the tenacity of a weed, who asked me questions for which I had no answers. They called attention to many passages in the Epistles and they especially ‘held my feet to the fire’ about Ephesians 3:1, ff:

“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; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Whereof I (Paul) was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:” Ephesians 3:1-9, KJV. (Emphasis mine.)

My Christian friends, who caused me multiple headaches, were not argumentative, nor were they trying to win a contest. Instead, they were mannerly and allowed the Scripture to be the final authority. [And, no, they were not *really* obnoxious. I merely perceived them to be when they asked me about Scripture ... you know, those for which I had no answers!]

As months passed, these two believers loved me enough to ‘keep at it’ with the questions that revealed my ignorance of one of the most significant distinctions in Holy Scripture!

James and Chris Healen were their names and they turned out to be my personal Aquila and Priscilla, in that they preached unto me the “the word of God more perfectly.” We continued to interact until a light began to shine in my consciousness and I started to see the layout of scripture from a new, and more accurate perspective. What they were trying to help me see in particular was the distinct revelation that was given to the Apostle Paul and how that revelation was separate from, and clearly distinct from, the message and revelation that was given to the twelve disciples.

I saw such things because I had a preconceived Roman Catholic, and yes, a staunch Protestant view of the scriptures that taught that God’s message and purpose for this present age is the message that was given to the twelve apostles [directed to the *nation of Israel*] and *not* on the later revelation that the *risen* Christ gave to Paul.

That ‘later’ revelation was given specifically from the *risen* Lord Jesus Christ to the Apostle Paul and is the only foundation for church doctrine in this present ‘Age of Grace.’

It was important to *see* that distinction between the ministry and message of Jesus Christ while he was on earth, meant for a specific people, and the ministry and message from the Lord Jesus Christ from his risen position in heaven – to *all* people.

My *traditional* – (religious) *views* kept me from seeing the plain teaching of the epistles written by Paul in their distinct light. Before I fully grasped this concept, I would preach what Peter and the apostles taught and then, when I got my proverbial “tail in a crack,” I would run over to the writings of Paul to patch things up. You see, I *did* believe in the finality of Christ’s work on the cross. I did most certainly believe that eternal life was by grace through faith, plus or minus NOTHING ... PERIOD! (Eph. 2:7-9)

“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, KJV.

However, it was a constant struggle to adamantly and passionately embrace that position because of what Peter and the other eleven apostles preached certainly made it difficult to hold on to the teaching of pure grace.

To believe in the Gospel of Grace meant that I - and anyone in my theological camp – by necessity had to ‘tone down’ Peter and his preaching and practices in the early chapters of the Book of Acts. Incidentally, those very chapters are the fertile ground that “Christendom” teaches is the message and the methods we are to observe in this present age.

I was familiar with the Biblical account of the heavenly visitation of Christ when Saul (Paul) was converted. I was also totally ignorant as to its *significance*. Ignorant is the best word to describe my understanding of God's plan and program for today. This, in spite of the fact that I had read through the entire Bible over a hundred times by then. How could this be? How could one who had studied most of the Scripture be so 'in the dark' about understanding it?

The answer is quite simple. I had accepted the popular paradigm, which held to the view that held that the doctrine and duties presented in those early chapters of the Book of Acts were meant for practice by the church, the Body of Christ. I did not see that the raising up of Paul and the *new* revelation given to him was dramatically different from the message and ministry given to the twelve apostles that was ordained for the Jewish people. I held to that view IN SPITE OF Paul's plain words.

"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:" Galatians 1:1, 2, KJV.
"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man." "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Galatians 1:12, KJV.

"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." Galatians 2:7-9, KJV.

"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; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;" Ephesians 3:1-5, KJV.

It could be said that many believers are "gospel rich and epistle poor." I knew the four gospels backward and forward and regarded the epistles of Paul as whimsy, anti-climatic and incidental. But, after many months of study and learning Scripture – and something far more difficult: *unlearning* unscriptural traditions - I fully

embraced what Paul frequently describes as 'my' gospel. (See Romans 2:16 for a start.)

I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not saying I was now "really saved" but was not before understanding this concept. That might have been the case had I not had enough "Pauline" truth of the free-ness of salvation unto eternal life. It might be helpful to communicate this concept by saying:

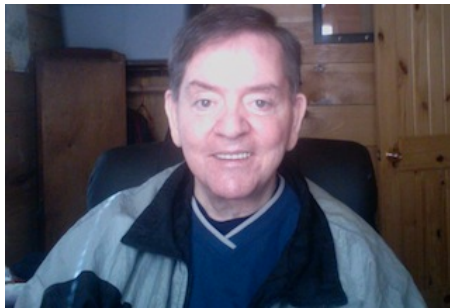
"By believing the death, burial and resurrection of Christ in my behalf was enough to save me, but, embracing Paul's authority as the apostle to the Gentiles and his church epistles as the body of *doctrine* for believers in this present age of grace has saved me from fanaticism and the inevitable onslaughts of constant confusion. I now had/have a Bible, that through the principle of right division (2 Timothy 2:15), I can clearly understand and enjoy my Bible study.

Both the messages of the twelve apostles and of Paul are equally true - for their designated times. The confusion that plagues most of the 'Christian' public has evolved by not discerning that the Kingdom Gospel preached by the twelve apostles has now been replaced with a new, wonderful message of free grace to Gentiles which is administered by God to the sinner on the basis of it being "by grace through faith."

Yes, it is a long update. But it will not hurt anyone of you. ☺

*"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour;
Who will have all men to be saved, **and** to come unto the
knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:3 & 4, KJV. (Emphasis mine)*

I salute you in the Gospel of Grace,



Bob b