



Preacher's Pen *by Gene McCoy*

God has established places or occasions to mark significant events. The cross stands as one of those “stakes in the ground,” marking the occasion when God provided the payment for our sins. Calvary is the definite place where God provided atonement for our sins through the blood of His Son.

The Lord's Supper is an occasion for reflection and rededication — the place ordained by God to recall the atoning sacrifice of Jesus and occasion to repent of our sins and to celebrate our redemption.

God has also provided a place where or occasion when His salvation is granted to sinners. It is a definite point in time and place in history to which we may look with confidence and say that our sins have been blotted out, covered, and washed away. It is an event every bit as definitive in time and space as Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, which it portrays (Romans 6), and as our physical birth, which is why Scripture refers to it as being “born again” (John 3). It is a corner post, if you will, from which our lives of faith derive strength and direction.

It is an objective basis, not a subjective one. In other words, the basis for this confidence comes not from within ourselves, but from without.

It isn't based upon our feelings or our experience, but rather upon the solid and secure guarantee of One Who is higher and holier. It isn't founded upon our wishes but upon the sure word of the One whose word cannot be broken (John 10:35).

A problem with subjective bases is the fact that they depend upon our interpretation of feelings and experiences. The determination of their meaning comes from within ourselves. The problem with that is the fact that salvation does not originate with or emanate from us. The only sure basis for salvation must be the promise of the One Who gives it.

The GRACE Place

The basis for salvation is the same for everyone (Galatians 3:28). It isn't something we determine, but it has been determined by the One who gives it. It isn't subject to personal or private interpretation, as are feelings and personal experiences, but is a definite and determined point in time that the Giver ordained. It isn't subject to speculation or second-guessing. It is, simply, an offer made that we may either accept or reject.

Salvation is God's to give and the sinner's to receive. The sinner is in no position to dictate or determine when or how the gift is given. That is the prerogative of the Giver alone. Faith simply accepts the terms and receives the promised benefits. Grace gives and faith receives.

Sin creates two distinct problems for the sinner. One is

a legal problem. He has broken God's law and is subject to the penalty, which is eternal death. The other is a health problem. We are sick. Our heart is diseased and we are spiritually sick. Paul refers to this in Ephesians 2 as spiritual death.

Salvation addresses both of these problems. Baptism is the place, the occasion, the point at which both of these problems begin to be remedied. This is related in Acts 2:38, that says baptism is “for the remission of sins,” which addresses the guilt resulting from breaking God's law. And Peter goes on to say that in baptism “you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” This addresses the health issue. The Holy Spirit provides the power by which our heart is regenerated — the power to get well.

Baptism is, then, the grace place. It is the occasion when the Giver has promised to do what is necessary to forgive and to heal, to reconcile and restore, to save and empower us. Grace gives. Faith receives.

The grace of God is seen most clearly in the action of baptism. There is nothing that is more indicative of God's grace — nothing that illustrates God's grace better—than baptism for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. In baptism, we are passive participants who are lowered into the watery grave, where the old man of sin is crucified and we put on the new man (Rom. 6:6; Gal. 3:27; Col. 3:9,10). Baptism is the sinner's expression of faith in the working of God (Col. 2:12, 13), providing for us what we

could never accomplish. It is acceptance of the atonement God provides in our place and for our benefit.

Baptism is God's promise to relieve us of guilt and to give us power over sin. Baptism is the occasion when God promises to regenerate our heart, cleanse us, and raise us to life everlasting. The same power that raised Jesus from physical death is exerted in baptism upon the dead sinner, raising him to spiritual life. No passage of Scripture is more clear than Romans 6 to show that baptism is where the blood of Jesus is applied to sinners.

It is the place where God promises to forgive all sin and to give His blessed Holy Spirit to be our resident Counselor, Comforter, and Guide. It is where the Great Physician promises to heal us and make us strong. Rightly understood, baptism is not something we would argue regarding its necessity, but a promise to receive with gratitude and in humility.

This article is adapted from the sermon, "The Grace Place," preached by Gene McCoy on Sunday, June 22, 2008. A recording of it is available on CD. All the sermons in the series on grace reflect the teaching of Dr. Jack Cottrell, professor at Cincinnati Bible Seminary, 2700 Glenway Ave. Cincinnati, OH 45204. I urge you to express your appreciation to him for his teaching ministry by sending a card to the address provided.