

BIBLE ANSWERS TO BIBLE QUESTIONS

And Interesting Facts About the Holy Word of God

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ISSUE 3

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“Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Phil.. 3:17).

Even though I was saved at a young age and faithfully attended a fundamental, Bible-believing church my entire life, I was relatively new to the Grace message when I moved to Wisconsin to attend the *Berean Bible Institute* (BBI). A year before I moved, Dr. W. Edward Bedore, the Executive Director of the BBI at the time, had visited my Grace church in Duncansville, Pennsylvania to talk about the ministry of the school and challenge people to consider attending BBI. Several months after that visit, my family and I took a trip west to get the layout of the land. The *Berean Bible Institute* had just purchased their current building in Slinger, Wisconsin, so a couple of fellow students and I met Dr. Bedore at the new building to help move a few items. We ended up having an experience that no one else, to my knowledge, ever had the privilege to experience. We crawled up a tiny ladder to the old belfry and looked around.

Soon enough, I was sitting in classes with a wide variety of Grace teachers that have influenced my life and ministry to this day. One of those teachers was Dr. Ed Bedore. I was impressed with his in-depth understanding of the Scriptures, especially the way he could tie the Bible together at a level even I could understand. He poured his wisdom into us during those class lectures, as well as his commentary on a wide-variety of subjects and life stories. He and Linda were always welcoming and made you feel like BBI was a family. (I also have to thank Mrs. Bedore for her patience as I endlessly bugged her after every semester's end to get me my books for the next semester early so I could start reading them ahead of time.)

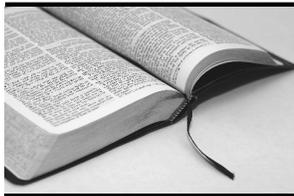
While he may be uncomfortable with these words, Dr. Bedore is one of the people that comes to mind when I read Philippians 3:17. He was one of the flesh-and-blood examples of following Paul that I marked to follow. We all need those examples in our lives; people who walk to please the Lord Jesus Christ according to the mandates of Grace that we can regard as our model. Will any human being be perfect? No, and it is foolish to think we have reached a point where we can stop learning of Christ. How wise it is to follow those who have the experience and knowledge of living according to the Gospel of the Grace of God. Who are those people in your life? Do me a favor and tell them thank you. Even further, be the one that other people mark to be their example of following Paul as he followed Christ – in faith and practice.

Speaking of the Bedore's, many of you are aware that Dr. Bedore has been dealing with Parkinson's disease. Without the Bedore's prompting but with their permission, a Youcaring page was set up to give people the opportunity to donate financially to help the Bedore's with the funds to participate in a stem cell treatment for Parkinson's. You can visit the page at www.youcaring.com/dredbedore-1062818.

While waiting to undergo the Parkinson's treatment, the medical doctors informed Dr. Bedore that he had a cancerous tumor in his parotid gland, between his ear and jaw. In weighing the options, it seemed trying to remove it would be the best, but there was the danger of damaging the many facial nerves. Praise the Lord that Dr. Bedore's surgery went well, and his recovery is progressing. Unfortunately, they were unable to extract all of the cancer during the surgery, so the Bedore's will need to meet with the

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“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” II Timothy 3:16



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doctor to decide upon the next step. Continue to keep Ed and Linda in your prayers in the months to come.

Humbly, in order to give Dr. Bedore time to recoup after the surgery, I agreed to serve as the editor of this edition of BABQ. It deals with an important subject: the believer's forgiveness.

Pastor Matthew Ritchey

Many times in my thirteen years as a pastor I have dealt with questions concerning the forgiveness of a believer's sins. In fact, my one question during my short tenure as associate editor at *Berean Bible Institute* had to do with this same topic. The forgiveness of sins as pertains to a member of the Body of Christ is a passionate subject; there is even some disagreement among those who acknowledge the uniqueness of the Apostle Paul. This periodical has talked a lot about the forgiveness of sins in recent months, but our forgiveness of sins **as a member of the Body of Christ** is the focus of this issue of *Bible Answers to Bible Questions*. A proper understanding of this subject will only come when we understand that an application of forgiveness is different under the dispensation of Grace as contrasted with the dispensation of the Kingdom. The forgiveness of sins for the believer under the revealed Mystery message is different than the believer under the covenants and the prophecies.

QUESTION: "If the believer in Christ is not required to confess his sins in order to be forgiven, why does the Bible tell us that Jesus gave His apostles authority to forgive sins (John 20:23) and, elsewhere, if you confess your sins you will be forgiven (1 John 1:9)?"

ANSWER: I will attempt to address these issues you raise as concisely as possible, although I must admit that any thorough understanding will take an individual searching the Scriptures as part of the equation. I will address this issue by breaking the question up into the John 20:23 question and the 1 John 1:9 question.

First, we agree that Jesus gave the twelve apostles the power to remit (forgive) sins as stated in John 20:23; however, we are not the Twelve Apostles. The authority delegated in John 20:23 was given to the Twelve Apostles, not necessarily to any non-apostle that proclaimed Jesus Christ (e.g., see Acts 8:4-14, where Philip preaches to people, but two of the Twelve had to visit in order for the people to receive the Holy Spirit). Presently, there are no apostles living in the times in which we live, so no human authority figure currently has the power to remit or retain sins, neither have the keys to the Kingdom been passed down to any present denomination. In fact, the Scriptures tell us that the office of apostle, along with the accompanying signs, authority, and power, have faded from the scene when the revelation entrusted to the Apostle Paul was complete (1 Cor. 13:10 cf. Col. 1:25-26). So, no Twelve Apostles, no human authority to remit sins. As an added note, these twelve apostles could only forgive sins through the name of Jesus Christ (Mt. 1:21). They were ministering in His place with His authority.

Another part of the answer to John 20:23 has to do with the program under which the Twelve Apostles ministered. Jesus began His ministry TO ISRAEL (Mt. 15:24) preaching, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Mt. 3:2). During His earthly ministry, He confined the ministry of His chosen twelve disciples to only the nation of Israel (Mt. 10:5-6). Even before His ascension to heaven He told the apostles to begin at Jerusalem (Lk. 24:47-48). The reason for this is that Jesus was proclaiming the prophecies concerning an eternal kingdom of righteousness of earth, which were to be fulfilled through one nation – the nation of Israel (1 Chr. 22:10 cf. Lk. 1:32-33 and Heb. 1:5b; Eze. 37:24 cf. Acts 2:29-36; Acts 1:6; Amos 9:11-12). The Twelve Apostles were commissioned to continue the Kingdom message proclaimed and prophesied to Israel throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, and that then progressed by the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry.

The short answer to the issue addressed in John 20:23 is that this authority to remit and retain sins was given to the Twelve Apostles operating under the Kingdom program, not to us in the age of Grace.



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Next, we agree that 1 John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* A proper understanding lies in determining the identity of the *“we”* of whom John was speaking. In the same letter, John also tells us that the salvation of the *“we”* was dependent upon: doing the will of God (2:17), remaining in the truth (2:24, 27-28), doing righteousness (2:29; 3:6-7), practicing benevolence (3:17), heeding the apostle’s words (4:6), loving the brethren (2:9-10, 3:14; 4:20), keeping the commandments (2:3, 5:3), overcoming the world (2:15, 5:4), and abstaining from sin (3:9; 5:18).

First John makes it clear that salvation was affirmed by their (the *“we”*) continued acts of faith. We certainly have a contrast with Paul’s statement in Ephesians 2:8-9 (*“Saved by grace through faith... not of works”*) and Romans 4:5 (*“to him that worketh not”*), and Titus 3:5 (*“not by works of righteousness that we have done”*). Paul NEVER ONCE tells us to work TOWARD our salvation or TO KEEP our salvation, but, instead, to labor for the Lord BECAUSE we are ALREADY justified (1 Tim. 4:10, Titus 2:4). Why does John seem to contradict Paul? Are we the *“we”* of First John?

The reason there is a difference between John and Paul is that to Paul was revealed a new message through the risen Lord Jesus Christ. He did not receive it from men like James or John or Peter (Gal. 1:12), because it was a secret (a.k.a. *“mystery”*) unknown until it was revealed to Him by Jesus Christ (Eph. 3:1-9). Christ told Paul that He placed His promises to Israel, which includes the Twelve Apostles, aside for a while (Rom. 11:25), so that God could offer redemption through Jesus Christ to whosoever will trust only in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 11:32). Yes, salvation at any time has always been by faith in God’s Word, but God’s Word to Paul was unique to him.

John proclaimed the Kingdom message where salvation was tied to the promises made to Abraham and the covenants made with Israel. The *“we”* is a **national identity**, because the covenant was a national covenant. In order to partake in the benefits of the covenant (e.g., eternal life, righteous kingdom, the inheritance, etc.), individuals of the *“we”*

(national Israel) had to confess of the national sins and personally repent of them by turning to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Fulfiller of the Abrahamic and Davidic promises and the Mediator of the New Covenant based upon such promises.

The short answer to 1 John 1:9’s forgiveness is that it is a statement to a nation under a national covenant. We are not this nation, because Christ has set aside this nation, Israel, for a season (Rom. 11:26-27, 32). We are not under a national covenant, but under grace (1 Cor.12:13; Eph. 2:11-16).

QUESTION: “I understand that salvation is not of works, but can’t we become unsaved if we sin by doing things like: not following the Law (1 Jn. 1:3-5), committing sin (1 Jn. 3:9-10) and not showing love to our fellow believer (1 Jn. 3:14-15)? After all, Paul says those who commit certain sins will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

ANSWER: Again, we will deal with this question in two parts: the place of John’s first letter and Paul’s conditional statement about inheritance.

There are many conditional statements of faithfulness in First John as well as the book of James (i.e., 1:21-25), Peter’s epistles (i.e., 1 Pet 1:13-16; 2 Pet. 1:10-11), John’s other two letters (i.e., 2 Jn. 9; 3 Jn. 11) and Jude (i.e., Jd. 21).

While I understand that there are differences of opinion even among solid, Christ-honoring Grace believers on the specifics of this issue, I strongly believe we must recognize the differences between the so-called *“General epistles,”* which infers they apply to all people after Christ’s ascension, and the Pauline epistles. Admittedly, there are many general PRINCIPLES in these books (the tongue can wound deeply – James 3:5) and truths that apply to the Kingdom and Grace believer (*“Amen”* to 1 Peter 1:18-19), BUT there are also dispensational truths that directly apply to only the Kingdom believer. I suggest a more accurate label for the non-Pauline letters would be *“Kingdom Epistles,”* *“Tribulation Epistles,”* *“Circumcision Epistles”* or *“New Covenant Epistles.”*

The Kingdom program has Jesus Christ as its salvation, same as we do, but the timing, requirements, and conditions are different from the



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Age of Grace. The Kingdom program was a covenant between the Lord and a nation. It will ultimately be fulfilled with the completion of the promises given to Israel's fathers, while the benefits of Grace are ultimately given and secured upon the moment one believes in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Our justification is finished (Rom. 5:1), our position is complete (Col. 2:10), and we are already citizens of Heaven (Phil. 3:20-21). The Kingdom believer's justification, position, and hope were also in Christ (1 Pet. 1:4), BUT he had to remain faithful to Christ until He returns (1 Pet. 1:5).

No, it was not a matter of the Kingdom believer falling out of Christ and entering into Christ again and out and in and out and in and out and in and etc. etc. It would take a conscious decision on the part of the person under the Kingdom to remain in Christ (Jn 15:1-6; 1 Pet. 1:7-9), but they also had the option to turn away from Him (1 Pet. 1:14). Whereas our security is based upon the guarantee of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 1:11-12), a gracious God (Romans 8:31-32), and a faithful Savior (2 Tim. 2:13).

Short answer: First John has many general principles for us (e.g., redemptive aspects, importance of love), but it was NOT written TO the Body of Christ. We have to get our understanding of our forgiveness from Paul's letters. It was the Lord who chose Paul to tell us: "In Whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace" (Eph. 1:7). Once again, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write: "Having forgiven you all trespasses" (Col. 2:13). Paul, tells us that today the person who has trusted in Christ is ALREADY forgiven of EVERY sin. We don't deserve it, but that is grace!

Second, if Paul says we are forgiven of all of our sins, why then does he tell us that *"no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ*

and of God" (Eph. 5:5)? The key is context. Paul reminds the Ephesians that "the wrath of God comes upon the children of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6) so don't do what they do (v. 7). Why? You were once a child of disobedience, but now you have been enlightened (v.8). You have the Holy Spirit (v. 9) Who will help you live in a way that pleases the Lord (v.10). In other words, you are a new creation in Christ, do not live the sinful way you once did. It is not a conditional statement regarding their salvation, but rather a statement of fact that these saved people in the Lord have been saved to live in a holy way.

The parallel passage in Colossians 3:5-7 makes this even clearer when it states, "You also walked according to the sins of your flesh when you were a sinner like them" (my paraphrase). I Corinthians 6:9-11 is the most obvious of these similar statements. It lists the deeds of the flesh that characterizes those who have no inheritance with God (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Then it makes the strong statement: *"Such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11).*

For you, the believer in the Dispensation of the Grace of God, you are forgiven of all your sins, declared righteous, positionally seated with Christ in the heavenlies, and blessed with all spiritual blessings. Since this is true of you, don't live like a sinner; live like the saint you have been made in Christ.

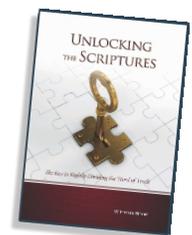
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