

CHURCH vs DISPENSATION

Please don't confuse our CHURCH with our DISPENSATION

| OUR CHURCH | OUR DISPENSATION |
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| <p>Our CHURCH, the body of Christ, began when the Spirit of the ascended and glorified HEAVENLY Lord Jesus Christ began INHABITING people on earth.</p> | <p>Our current DISPENSATION, the dispensation of his grace and longsuffering, began WITHIN a church that was ALREADY INHABITED by the Spirit of Christ.</p> |
| <p>After the Lord's one sacrifice for sins forever (the blood of sprinkling of the New Covenant,) sinful humans could be washed, sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God, and thereby become members of the church of God, citizens of heaven and eligible to inherit the kingdom of God.</p> | <p>The church of God which Paul (then Saul) persecuted, was IN CHRIST and the Holy Spirit of Christ was in each member. This church was a SECT OF JUDAISM. In this present dispensation of grace the church of God is formed of a saved remnant of Israel plus saved Gentiles. All members are saved according to the election of grace.</p> |
| <p>The beginning of our CHURCH was the beginning of a body of people – a heavenly ARMY chosen to become CITIZENS OF HEAVEN while we still walk the earth – i.e. before our earthly bodies die. Although our bodies live out a normal life span (martyrdom aside), we are accounted as DEAD as all of God's dead saints in heaven – we are fellowcitizens with all of the dead saints in heaven.</p> | <p>The beginning of our present DISPENSATION of his grace and longsuffering was clearly marked in the SALVATION, BY GRACE ALONE, OF THE UNREPENTANT, IGNORANT AND UNBELIEVING CHIEF OF SINNERS – our beloved apostle Paul, who went on to become the MASTERBUILDER of the new body of doctrine for our CHURCH in this DISPENSATION of grace. Our apostle's salvation is the salvation pattern for this age*.</p> |
| <p>Prior to Paul's salvation the membership of our CHURCH was purely on a VOLUNTARY basis. The Lord's ARMY was formed entirely of Jewish VOLUNTEERS – those Jews who cheerfully and willingly repented and were water baptised in the name of Jesus.</p> <p>Prior to Paul's salvation events were unfolding according to PROPHECY. God's hidden or MYSTERY plan of grace had not yet been revealed.</p> | <p>With the salvation of an ignorant, unrepentant and unbelieving blasphemer, the Lord began his previously hidden or MYSTERY dispensation of GRACE. It sounds sweet and gentle but in God's PATTERN case (Paul) it was more like the DRAFT**. Instead of waiting for volunteers the Lord is DRAFTING those he wants (Jew or Gentile), when he wants them, according to his OWN PURPOSE AND GRACE. Paul was first softened up by a taste of the TERROR OF THE LORD and then became his willing, compliant and joyous bondservant. "Yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel!"</p> |

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| <p>Our CHURCH is God's heavenly ARMY – constantly engaged in spiritual warfare with Satan and his angels.</p> <p>His heavenly army began when the ascended, glorified Lord in heaven first sent his Spirit to INHABIT a bunch of his Jewish followers on earth who had VOLUNTARILY repented and been water baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus.</p> | <p>Our DISPENSATION is God's current policy and administration for the recruitment and training of his heavenly ARMY.</p> <p>When the ascended, glorified Lord in heaven first started DRAFTING sometimes stubborn and ignorant Jewish OR Gentile sinners, ACCORDING TO HIS OWN GRACE AND PURPOSE, he began our present DISPENSATION OF GRACE.</p> |
| <p>If our CHURCH is defined by the presence of the Spirit of the ascended, glorified, heavenly Lord Jesus Christ in its members then it must have started in Acts 2.</p> | <p>If our DISPENSATION of his grace is defined as his recruitment and subsequent training of formerly ignorant sinners, according to his own purpose and grace, from any nation in a world in which all are equally concluded in unbelief, then it must have started in Acts 9.</p> |

* Paul as our pattern for salvation

*“Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in **me first** Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, **for a pattern to them which should hereafter** believe on him to life everlasting.” (1 Timothy 1:16 AV)*

Other bible versions emphasise Paul's “ME FIRST” as meaning “ME MOST GREATLY” rather than “ME FIRST EVER IN HISTORY” and they also leave out the word “HEREAFTER”. The New American Standard Version has translated “me first” as “me as the foremost” which gives the impression that Paul was the “most notable” rather than the FIRST person in history saved under God's present arrangement of grace and longsuffering.

“And yet for this reason I found mercy, in order that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience, as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.” (1 Timothy 1:16 NASV)

Taken together, the “ME FIRST” and the “HEREAFTER” of the Authorised King James Version are very strong scriptural evidence that Paul saw himself as the TEMPLATE for salvation in this present age.

The “ME FIRST” simply means that Paul saw himself as the first in which the Lord demonstrated his PATTERN of salvation for this present age. Paul obtained MERCY in spite of his being in a state of IGNORANCE and UNBELIEF prior to his being saved.

“For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.”
(Romans 11:32 AV)

“Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it ignorantly in unbelief.*” (1 Timothy 1:13 AV)

The “HEREAFTER” means “PAUL-AFTER” or “FROM THIS POINT ON” – “THIS POINT” being Paul’s template salvation.

** The Lord’s drafting of sinners

By likening salvation in this present age to the drafting of soldiers rather than relying solely on an army of volunteers, I am bound to have the bone of Calvinism pointed at me by certain angry teachers who love to point the bone at anyone who disagrees with them.

Paul’s salvation was NOT VOLUNTARY. He was far too blind to ever get saved by repenting and being water baptised in the name of Jesus (as all of the other Jews saved since the Holy Spirit arrived on the day of Pentecost had done.)

Prior to his salvation, Paul was serving God as he understood him at the time. He was a devout Pharisee obeying the law of Moses and a student of Gamaliel, a highly respected teacher of the law. But God’s ways are not our ways and God’s thoughts are not our thoughts. Paul was serving God to the best of his NATURAL ability – his man-thinking, not God-thinking.

“Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.” (1 Corinthians 15:46 AV)

“But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned.”
(1 Corinthians 2:14 AV)

“But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (Galatians 3:23-24 AV)

Paul’s very strong and stubborn intellect required God to exercise what the Calvinists call “IRRESISTIBLE GRACE”. I totally agree with them. Irresistible grace is very much like the draft. We are saved ACCORDING TO HIS OWN PURPOSE AND GRACE.

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called **according to *his* purpose.**” (Romans 8:28 AV)

“In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:”
(Ephesians 1:11 AV)

“According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:”
(Ephesians 3:11 AV)

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,” (2 Timothy 1:9 AV)

However I also believe that God expects us to do our best in a NATURAL manner before he steps in and saves us by his grace. He instructed us to ASK. He instructed us to SEEK. He instructed us to KNOCK. He instructed us to ask, seek and knock with IMPORTUNITY (persistent and pressing solicitation).

“I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will rise and give him as many as he needeth. And I say unto you, **Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.** For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: **how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”** (Luke 11:8-13 AV)

The closer those in the darkness of the NATURAL mind move toward him, the closer they are to being saved by grace – the closer they are to being drafted.

“Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded.” (James 4:8 AV)

When I was persistently petitioning God for years prior to my salvation, I thought I was asking for a predominantly pleasurable thing – blissful enlightenment. HA! I had no idea I was going to be drafted into a WAR!

“For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” (Acts 9:16 AV)

There’s that pattern again.