

Why steal inferior treasure from Israel?

The spiritual blessings God now bestows upon us through the death and resurrection of Christ—and communicates to us via the particular good news of that particular psychopath turned saint, Paul—transcend the blessings of all other administrations, eras, and eons.

Remarkably, Paul is the only New Testament writer to use the word “transcendent” (Gk. *hyperbole*; English elements



OVERCAST) to describe spiritual blessings. It is not that Israel does not have grace and

peace and joy and an expectation. They do. Transcendence has to do with the degree of a thing, not the kind. In Christ, we have *ridiculous* amounts of grace, peace, and joy. Our celestial expectation is *ridiculously* above Israel's earthly inheritance. I'll let Paul tell you what is transcendentally ours:

2 Cor. 3:10 “the glory”

2 Cor. 4:7 “the power”

2 Cor. 4:17 “the burden of glory”

2 Cor. 9:14 “grace”

Eph. 1:19 “the greatness of His power for us”

Eph. 2:7 “the riches of His grace in His kindness to us”

Eph. 3:19 “the love of Christ” toward us”

So why are so many people trying to pilfer Israel's blessings? GOOD QUESTION!

Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

“If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong” --1 Cor. 13:1-2



Two out of three isn't bad.

Living in the spiritual new creation

I'll never forget an on-air conversation I had with the sound engineer Ricardo Johnson during a 1999 broadcast of our Cleveland radio show, Grace Café. The topic that evening was justification vs. the forgiveness of sins.

For those unfamiliar with the difference, here it is in a nutshell: One cannot literally be forgiven and justified at the same time. Forgiveness requires guilt. Forgiveness says: “You did wrong, but we will let you off the hook and forgive the penalty.” Justification denies guilt. Justification says, “You did no wrong. In fact, you are right.” It is impossible for a justified person to be forgiven. Why would you forgive a person who did the right thing?

This is how God looks at you: *you are right*.

“Right” is the root word of “righteous.” And yet it seems far more stunning—doesn't it?—to think of God telling us, “You are right,” rather than, “You are righteous.”

“Righteous” has become an easy, theological catch-term. Whenever I hear, “righteous,” I translate it in my mind as God telling me, “Zender, you are *right*!” This never fails to sur-



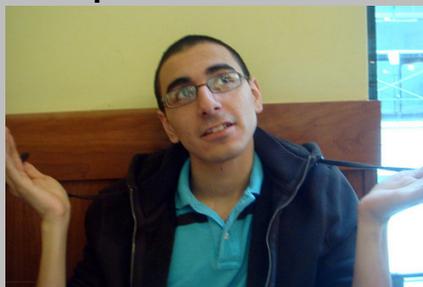
prise me, when I hear God saying it this way.

Forgiveness is still a wonderful thing. But as the sun eclipses a candle, so does justification eclipse forgiveness.

Justification belongs to Paul's evangel, not Peter's. You will find nothing in the gospel given to Israel of a man being right before God without working or being found worthy. Israel still labors under this. Even in the thousand-year kingdom, they are not justified by faith in the transcendent manner of which Paul speaks. Paul says, “We are reckoning a man to be justified by faith apart from works of law” (Rom. *Continued on page 2*)

GRACE

...requires sinful creatures



TRANSCENDENT

GRACE

...requires *really* sinful creatures



Radical Pharisee Damascus-bound

by AARON BEN LEVI

Left-wing radical Pharisee Saul of Tarsus departs Jerusalem today for Damascus on a self-proclaimed HOLIER THAN THOU campaign to eradicate outlaw members of “The Way.” His motives? “To kick Christian ass, mainly,” said the young Pharisee as he washed down a handful of grasshoppers with a firkin of goat's milk. *Godspeed, brave warrior!*

...the spiritual new creation

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3:28). Even when Israel at last accomplishes law, the law is still a works-based rather than a faith-based system. Israel will be righteous then, but not transcendentally righteous; they will be justified by works, not faith. Israel is right because they're doing right. We're right, not because we're doing right, but because we rely upon the living God, Who bases our righteousness on Christ's work, not ours. This tickles God's heart more than Israel doing law.

Transcendently more.

But back to the radio show.

Ricardo broke into our broadcast and asked about 1 John 1:8—

"If we should be avowing our sins, He is faithful and just that He may be pardoning us our sins and should be cleansing us from all injustice."

I asked him, "Ricardo, do you apply this to yourself? Do you actually believe that if you die in a car accident tonight without avowing a sin you might have committed today, that God hasn't cleansed you and that that particular sin will follow you into the resurrection? Do you believe it will keep you from being saved?"

Ricardo could not answer. He kept coming back with, "But read the verse, read the verse." We all understood the verse. We knew what it said. What was lacking on the other side of the broadcast glass was an apprehension of the people to whom the verse applied: Israelites laboring beneath a co-operative salvation plan.

Though we attempted to explain it to him in detail off the air, Ricardo never could grasp the difference between the gospel of the Circumcision and that of the Uncircumcision. If he did



grasp it, he refused to accept it. In either case, he missed the difference between law and grace, and between forgiveness and justification. He fatally mixed these things, producing a nonsense, bastardized gospel that not even he could explain. ("Don't feel bad," I told him. "No one can explain it.") Ricardo was one of those Christians for whom the term "righteous" was an empty theological catch-word. He could not, in his mind, free that glorious appellation from the shadow of law. The shadow of Sinai tainted any transcendent grace the man may have felt.

May this not be happening to you. ■



What a Revelation!

THE NEW EARTH OF REV. 21 TYPIFIES OUR PRESENT, SPIRITUAL REALITY

The earth of the thousand-year kingdom will be the same one we now occupy. It will not be a re-make, but rather a regeneration of the same raw material. Think of the Potter and the clay analogy from Jeremiah 18. The Potter doesn't ball up the clay, toss it, and start working with paper-mâché. He simply slaps the same clay onto the wheel and makes something different.

Not so the New Earth. Following the Millennial Kingdom, this present earth will be burned up with fire (2 Pet. 3:10-13). This is the equivalent of the Potter tossing the clay and bringing out the paper-mâché. With the New Earth, God is making something, well—new.

What is so great about the New Earth? There is no death; mourning, clamor and misery have finally passed away, and God Himself dwells with mankind. These wonders out-glorify even the thousand-year kingdom, where death still occurs and a priesthood still straddles man's world and God's.

The physical truths of the New Earth are now ours in spirit. Our blessings are as radically upgraded from Israel's as the New Earth is from the millennial reign of Christ. So when Paul says in 2 Cor. 5:17, "there has come new,"

he means: "Forget a regeneration of the same raw material; God, through Christ, has taken you beyond reform." It's such a sparkling, strange concept that the saints must pray for a realization of it (Eph. 1:15-23).

God is no longer reckoning us in accord with the old humanity. He now sees us as alive with Christ, sin-free. Not only this, but the spirit of God Himself dwells within us (1 Cor. 3: 16), never to leave. *Think upon these things!*

In search of the elusive joy bubble

Justification belongs to a radical new sphere that you and I now walk in. This sphere is a God-breathed reality, a bubble of joy (I used a non-scriptural term there—sorry) that can satisfy one if one simply thinks upon it. This special sphere is known as "the spiritual new creation." Paul speaks of it in 2 Cor. 5:16-17:

"So that we, from now on, are acquainted with no one according to flesh. Yet even if we have known Christ according to flesh, nevertheless now we know Him so no longer. So that, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: the primitive passed by. Lo! There as come new!"

We are to think differently than Israelites. Israelites think: "How can I make sure I get my sorry flesh into the kingdom?" We are to think: "How can I better understand the fact that God no longer considers me in accord with my sorry flesh?" Israel's challenge is: REFORM THE FLESH. Our challenge is: REFORM THE THINKING. You'd think it

Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur (Philippians 2:14). Therefore, I shall rant.



The gift of a plane-crash mentality

I have told my wife that if I ever die in a plane crash, she should not torture herself with thoughts that my final moments in this evil eon were unduly harsh. In fact, were I ever inside a plane that was plummeting toward an inevitable dissolution, I believe I would ask the flight attendant for an extra bag of peanuts and—what the heck—“Give me a regular Coke, please. And some apple juice, if you don’t mind.”



I once read a story about a businessman whose plane lost power mid-air and was surely doomed. The man reported an incredible inner peace because, for once in his life, he sensed that a higher power controlled his fate. His flight survived, however, and landed him in L.A. Thenceforth, the businessman attempted to re-create in his mind how he felt in the emergency.

Sometimes he could do it, sometimes he couldn’t.

The Higher Power (God) was always controlling the businessman’s fate, and that was the absolute truth. But relatively speaking (that is, as the man *related* to his everyday world), he assumed himself to be the captain (the absolute captain) of his own destiny. This brought him worry, pressure, and continual unhappiness. He

lived in this hell of delusion until God graciously granted him—via dramatic circumstance—the moment of clarity: *I am in the hands of the Living God!* And yet the most shocking moment of clarity followed: *This is the most peace I have felt in years!*

What if a person could tap into this peace, at will, without the emergency?

“God is operating all in accord with the counsel of His own will.” —Ephesians 1:11

Strange how imminent earthly departure makes us God-conscious. Can we live in that mode without the dire catalyst? I say: *Yes*. Let us, then, stretch toward eternity, even when all is temporally well. ■

...the elusive joy bubble

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would be easier to reform the thinking, but I’m wondering if it really is...okay, I’ve wondered long enough: it’s harder to reform the thinking.

Reforming the thinking requires a practical denial of what we see. What do we see? We see everything belonging to the old creation: death, sin, inadequacy, discouragement, futility—to name just a few juicy tidbits. Our so-called reality pummels our physical senses, staring back at us from the mirror, screaming at us through the newspaper, and taunting us via our fellow earth-travelers. Do other

people see us as a new creation? Um, not readily. But maybe they would begin to if we could begin seeing ourselves that way.

I understand why so many people gravitate toward the Circumcision evangel: It is much easier to deal with what one sees. But is it *really*? I am of the persuasion that, once the mind is trained to value God’s opinion above one’s own—and certainly above the world’s—then the bubble of joy will alight whenever and wherever we wish it to. ■

