

Relevant or Relic?

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What relevance does the "Grace Message" have in today's world? How can our doctrinal position help me to be a better spouse, parent, friend, co-worker, or lay person? Is it merely "dry doctrine" for theologians to debate? What difference does it make in my everyday life?

These are questions I have heard asked aloud by some, while others merely wonder in silence. Pastors and Bible teachers wax eloquent about our doctrinal position, but what about an average lay person like myself? Does the "Grace Message" have any relevance in my life as a 38-year-old mother of three who holds down an almost-full-time job and tries (desperately, at times) to keep ahead of the laundry pile?

First, what do I mean by the "Grace Message"? The "Grace Message" certainly includes: the incorporation of both Jew and Gentile into one new organism, the Body of Christ; this truth being revealed first to Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles; the church beginning in mid-Acts instead of at Pentecost; and the one spiritual baptism by the Holy Spirit into the Body of Christ. But I see the "Grace Message" as more than this. And I see it as relevant to my life today.

Our doctrinal position is, in essence, a tool for understanding the Bible and forming a theology. It is a key which unlocks the Scriptures. It is something not so much to be revered or debated as it is something to be *used*. That is not to say I don't value our doctrinal position, or that I won't take opportunities to share my beliefs with another, but it is primarily a tool which gives me insight and understanding into the Word of God so I can better understand how to apply it to my life. By "rightly dividing" God's Word, I understand what my position is in Christ; I understand what God expects of me and how I should respond to Him. The seeming contradictions in Scripture disappear when I understand them in light of their dispensational context. I can read and revel in the Old Testament, finding principles which transcend dispensational limitations, but not frustrating my Christianity by trying to apply Old Testament promises to present-day situations. By having some understanding of God's purpose and work in the Church today, I can experience the freedom of allowing the Holy Spirit to work through me, knowing I don't *have* to do anything except (!) yield to Him. I am not encumbered by a works-oriented theology; God accepts me for who I am because of who He is.

I can encourage a friend who struggles with a low self image, because our doctrinal position helps me understand who I am and where

I stand in Christ. I can share with a friend who is struggling in her marriage, because our message is one of reconciliation. I can offer guidance to a friend who thinks the Bible is too confusing to ever understand, because our message enables me to understand Scripture dispensationally. This is relevance! It can become dry doctrine useful only for nit-picking if we choose to study it only for the sake of knowledge (and we know what Paul said knowledge alone does! 1 Corinthians 8:1). If we approach the "Grace Message" as a vital tool to a clearer understanding of Scripture, and if we allow the Spirit to apply these truths to our lives, then it becomes very relevant indeed!