

Faith and Acceptance

A sermon by Larry Kirkpatrick

2009-03-07

<http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/pdf/2009/kirl-acceptance.pdf>

<http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/ser/kirl-acceptance.php>

Help One: Divine Forgiveness Cannot Be Seen But Providence Can	3
Help Two: Daily Reaffirmation of Our Decision	7
Help Three: Away With Suspicion	8
Help Four: Thank God for the Gift of Jesus	9
Conclusion	10

Presenter: Larry Kirkpatrick
Location: Mentone Seventh-day Adventist Church, CA, USA
Delivery: 2009-03-07 16:26Z
Publication: GreatControversy.org 2009-03-07 16:26Z
Type: Sermon

CITE THIS ARTICLE AS: Larry Kirkpatrick, "Faith and Acceptance." ONLINE AT:
<http://www.greatcontroversy.org/gco/pdf/2009/kirl-acceptance.pdf>. THIS ARTICLE IS subject to
a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses>).

Today, the capstone. Our recent messages have followed the first six chapters of the book *Steps to Christ*. Indeed, volumes could be offered on these topics; of necessity, we focus on only a few things.

Today's topic builds on the previous five. And so it is assumed that each of us has given some consideration to God's love, our need of Christ, repentance, confession, and consecration. But here is another important topic: faith and acceptance.

Because we cannot earn our salvation, we cannot look to this or that thing that we have done and say, "I have fulfilled a contractual checklist, therefore I know that my salvation is assured." The upshot of this is lack of certainty. How then can I know that I am saved?

Realize that the question is not, "Has God guaranteed me heaven?" but "do I accept that God loves, me, that promises have been made by deity, and that God is working for my transformation?" Salvation is never confined to one's momentarily desire. God does not seek our utterance of a few words in exchange for an eternity soaking in heavenly hot tubs.

If salvation is mostly about what happens in the future, not what happens now, then it's witnessing utility is limited. Heaven wants changed people now because changed people now influence others to be changed now.

The seeking of certainty is not unexpected when we understand certain historical and theological influences in the evangelical context. Those will not be our topic today. But we do want to discover how we can experience a genuine kind of faith and acceptance that, above all, is spiritually helpful. We want to be able to know that we are forgiven. God needs to be quite persuasive about this. If He can forgive us, then it is to be expected that He can make plain to us that He has done so.

So. Can He?

Today then, four helps, so that we can believe that Jesus pardons us personally and individually.

Help One: Divine Forgiveness Cannot Be Seen But Providence Can

Here is a rather long sentence from *Steps*, but worthy of our consideration:

Jesus healed the people of their diseases when they had faith in His power; He helped them in the things which they could see, thus inspiring them with confidence in Him concerning things which they could not see—leading them to believe in His power to forgive sins (*Steps to Christ*, p. 50).

Healing comes in train with faith in Jesus' power. But forgiveness of sins is something that we cannot see. Therefore, God helps us where we can see His help, to inspire our confidence in Him in places where we cannot see His help.

The classic example is Jesus and the paralytic:

‘That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’—he said to the paralytic—‘I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.’ And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all (Mark 2:10-12 ESV).

Immediately before this, the man's friends had broken up the roof of the house and lowered the him into Jesus' presence. When Jesus had seen their faith, He had told that man, “Your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5). Angry whispers, “He blasphemess!” had filled the small room. To help their faith, Jesus had then proceeded to heal the forgiven man.

In order to facilitate their having faith in Him for forgiveness of sin, He performed a miracle of healing right before their eyes. Unfortunately, many still chose to believe what they

wanted to—that Jesus was not the true Messiah. Still, no one left that room that day without seeing Jesus demonstrate His lesson. What was it?

Yes, although no one can see it, I can forgive sins. I heal this man that you can see today so that you can have confidence in Me with reference to the things that you cannot see.

But we are not in the room with Jesus and the paralytic. How can we see where God has helped us in our lives?

Would not Jesus say to us today,

Yes, although no one can see it, I can forgive sins. I have acted providentially in your life before now and you can see that today, so that you can have confidence in Me with reference to the things that you cannot see.

Here is what we need to do. We need to mark the waypoints along our personal spiritual journey. Every one of us has a unique history, a life marked by specific events. But we do not reflect on what God has done enough to discern what these are. We need to learn how to see God's hand in our lives. We need to learn how to rightly interpret His mighty works for us individually. We need to have a working understanding of how God has led us personally in the past.

We have all had someone come to us and claim, "God said to me . . ." But then when we stop to think about him, we realize that this is his habitual way of talking. Every incident in his life he interprets as a providential intervention.

This is not the way that God leads us. His interventions may be large and they may be small, but every event, every moment, is not a divine intervention. He grants us free will and intellect. He wants us to learn how to live as free, just beings. Think about it; what value would the Book of Proverbs be if God never allowed us to apply its principles? What value would the

teachings of Jesus have for us were we never allowed to process matters and re-calibrate our actions based on non-manipulated results?

So no, I do not see God intervening in every event, every moment. His providential workings for us always continue, but there are not dramatic interventions every event, every moment. Not every intervention is apparent in the moment. Israel was not always on the move every day of their forty years in the wilderness. Often they were camped for many months at a time. Jacob did not wrestle with the angel every night of his life as he did at the Jabbok (Genesis 32). This all makes sense, too, for those who spend all of their time praying will soon cease to pray at all.

Every impression felt is not the moving of the Holy Spirit. The vast majority of impressions that we feel are no such thing. Not even the prophets interpreted every impression they felt as sent from God, or spoke to people at all times saying “God said to me . . .”

So how do we tell true movings of God from false? We need to set aside time to think. We need reflection time. We need to interpret events that happen in our lives. We should watch, even write something down, keep a hardcopy. Not every day, but let this be done from time to time, as events shape your life. Especially mark developments of substance. Then it is time to set aside private moments, time in solitary to think about it, pray about it, to have the Bible with you and turn to the Psalms. God gave you a mind. From time to time He wants for you to pause and reflect with it. Take your head and your heart down to San Diego, to Point Loma, and sit on the mountain and look out at the vastness of God’s ocean, and try to understand why God allowed events to take a certain course in your life.

What kind of events are we talking about? Examples:

One morning near 5:00 a.m. a young man was driving to work. I was a shelf stocker at a department store, and I was late. I was moving at a very high rate of speed on 82nd Avenue in Milwaukie, Oregon. Suddenly in the dark, looming immediately in front of me, was a van dead stopped in the road. No lights. Based upon the speed I was going and human reaction times, there is no way I should have been able to maneuver around that obstacle. Somehow my car spun all the way around in a circle and I did not hit the vehicle. That morning ride was very important for me. I did not know God but I felt that He had preserved my life at that time. I have thought about that event repeatedly since then. I am unshakably certainly convinced that Heaven intervened that night and saved my life. God had no obligation to. I was not in His covenant, I had not accepted Him. In His mercy, He intervened for a rebel. The natural consequences of my stupidity—thankfully—were countermanded.

Then there was a time while I was at college and was under terrific discouragement. I had asked God that morning, “Why am I here?” and that night, long after I had forgotten my request, I had been studying with a friend of mine, and we prayed and parted for the night, and as he walked away across the parking lot he stopped, turned around, and called out to me, “Larry, do you know why are you here?” And he told me. No hints to anyone that day; no prompting. But there it was; God spoke to me so directly with a providential answer through my friend.

On another occasion, a member of my family fell from a terrific height, and survived with virtually no injury. In each of these situations, and others, I saw the hand of God. I considered events that happened in my life and understood them, interpreted them, reached a working understanding of them, of what God had been doing in them, and saw God in His mercy in action.

Yes, Jesus helped me in things which I could see, thus inspiring me with confidence in Him concerning things which I could not see. This has helped me to believe in His power to forgive my sins.

Each of us needs to do the same thing. Stop. Take time. Reflect on what God has done for you. When we get to heaven then we can know for certain what was and was not providential intervention. For now, all we need is a working understanding, an interpretation in light of our knowledge of what the Bible says. Learning to mark God's interventions in your life will help you to believe in Jesus' power to forgive your sins—something that you cannot directly see. Believe that He forgives your sins because He has promised to.

Help Two: Daily Reaffirmation of Our Decision

Steps offers a suggested prayer:

Now that you have given yourself to Jesus, do not draw back, do not take yourself away from Him, but day by day say, 'I am Christ's; I have given myself to Him;' and ask Him to give you His Spirit and keep you by His grace. As it is by giving yourself to God, and believing Him, that you become His child, so you are to live in Him (*Steps to Christ*, p. 52).

Let's be clear; merely uttering affirmations does not make them so. I can say "I have four million dollars in my bank account" every day for an hour, and it will not add four million dollars to my bank account. Nor is Mrs. White asking us to make ourselves Christ's on the basis of repeated verbal affirmations. The power is not in an affirmation, but an affirmation does remind us of a historical reality. Just as we can look back and see times when God intervened in our life and delivered us, so too we look back on our decision to join ourselves to God, to accept

Christ. We can look back on this and remind ourselves of that reality, the genuineness of our intentions then, the reality of our intentions now.

Day by day we may say, “I am Christ’s. I have given myself to Him.” That is true of your past, when you originally accepted Jesus as Lord, but it is also true of this new day. This morning, each morning, you accept Jesus anew. Jesus is my Lord today. Jesus is my Savior today. I am His today. Each day we may ask Him to give to us His Spirit to keep us by His grace.

Giving yourself to God is not something that happens one time. For every Christian it is something that happens time after time after time after time. You gave yourself to God, perhaps years ago, and this day you gave yourself to Him again, this very morning. The flesh is weak, and so we constantly renew our giving. This is how we are to become children of God; this is how we learn to believe. It is how we learn to live in Him. And so, add this practice also to your “faith and acceptance” arsenal.

Help Three: Away With Suspicion

We often entertain a certain suspicion. We suspect that, somehow, God’s promises are not intended for us. They are meant for others, but not for us. We say it to ourselves. We suspect that God does not want us in His kingdom, that we are mere fodder in the Great controversy War, and that when our life is ended we are destined for the second resurrection, to fill the role of object lessons of rebellion and the destructive wages of sin.

Liberals are not suspicious enough; conservatives are too suspicious. As always, the Bible plan is best: “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21).

At first glance, this problem seems like a suspicion about ourselves, namely, that we are not good enough to be saved. Actually, it is a suspicion of God; that is how it is so insidious. It is

the hidden thought that God is a respecter of persons, that He has favorites and that He plays favorites and that you are not one of them. “But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8 ESV).

Jesus tells us, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). James has warned, “Ask in faith, nothing wavering. . . he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord (James 1:6, 7).

Here is where thousands fail; they do not believe that Jesus pardons them personally, individually. They do not take God at His word. It is the privilege of all who comply with the conditions to know for themselves that pardon is freely extended for every sin. Put away the suspicion that God’s promises are not meant for you. They are for every repentant transgressor (*Steps to Christ*, pp. 52, 53).

Some of us find it very hard to believe that Jesus loves us. But here is another inspired prayer for us: “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24 ESV). We need to learn to trust God implicitly. How would Abraham have fared on Mount Moriah had he been suspicious of God? Or Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? John on Patmos? Put away the suspicion that God’s promises are not meant for you.

Help Four: Thank God for the Gift of Jesus

Thank God for the gift of His dear Son. Some of us are not naturally expressive. We are introverted, and we are not the kind of persons who easily verbalize to others our thankfulness to them. And here is yet another help toward believing that Jesus pardons us personally and individually. Although no Bible verse, it is certainly true: expression deepens impression.

We ought to very frequently thank God for the gift of His Son Jesus. We should offer that whole thought in prayer. Not only, “Thank you for Jesus,” but, “Thank you for the gift of Jesus.” Because of the human tendency to try to earn our way into the kingdom, we want to counteract that very thought. Let us never forget that Jesus is a gift, His salvation is a gift to us. We have not earned it; our behavior has not merited it; our behavior will not merit it. We are saved on the basis of the free gift of Jesus.

If we come to Him with our whole heart, He will receive us. Nor is it our business to be always suspicious of ourselves and of our own motives. Remember, God alone can read the heart (Psalm 139:23, 24; Jeremiah 17:9; 1 John 3:20). Be as consecrated as you can be and then trust God. Don’t linger over doubts about your own sincerity. If you want to be forgiven, if you want to become more like Jesus, those thoughts are happening inside of you because you are seeking Him and He is giving you the gift of repentance. Pray to Him. Thank God for the gift of His dear Son.

Conclusion

Dear friends, Jesus pardons us, personally, individually. As Rob and Arnold have said, I am preaching to myself today, too. We have struggled, from time to time at least, each of us, I am sure, to exercise faith in God and to see ourselves as accepted in Him. Then implement these four simple helps:

1. Review your experiences and list some of the occasions where you are certain that God has delivered you in previous days. Remind yourself of these. And then trust in Jesus’ power to forgive your sin.
2. Day by day reaffirm the historical reality: you gave yourself to Jesus years ago and you gave yourself to Him this very morning.

3. Put away suspicion that God's promises are not meant for you. Trust Him. They are not meant for your hamster; they are meant for you!

4. Thank Him for the gift of His dear Son to you, and do so frequently.

Our God told Israel,

I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed thee (Isaiah 44:22).

He tells us the same. Long has He been delivering us, working for our salvation; the problem has been wholly on our end. We have tried to keep old sins close and put God off at a distance. But He has redeemed us. Why have we gone back and diddled with deadly bondage? Let us return to Him, even this day. He will most abundantly pardon. Go then to Jesus, and be accepted in Him. He will not disappoint.

Biographical Note: Pastor Larry Kirkpatrick is a convert to the Adventist faith. Since 1994 he has served in the ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He holds degrees from Southern Adventist University and the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. His work has included research assistant for the Ellen G. White Estate, pioneering Adventist internet ministry, involvement in GYC, and presenter at the 50th Anniversary *Questions on Doctrine* Conference. He is author of the books *Real Grace for Real People* and *Cleanse and Close*. For many years his sermons and papers have been published on the internet. Larry and wife Pamela have served churches in Nevada, Utah, and California. The Kirkpatricks presently serve at the [Mentone church](#) near Loma Linda, California.