

Far From God, Loved by God!

Thomas Robinson, *Ephesians – Growing Up Into Christ* 7, October 30, 2011

Ephesians 2:10-16

¹⁰ For we are **his handiwork, created in Messiah Jesus for good works,**
which **God prepared beforehand**, that we should **walk in them**.

¹¹ Therefore remember that **at one time you Gentiles** in the flesh,
called “*the uncircumcision*” by what is called “*the circumcision*,”
which is in the flesh made by hands –

¹² remember that you were at that time **separated from Messiah,**
alienated from the commonwealth of Israel
and **strangers to the covenants of promise,**
having **no hope** and **without God** in the world.

¹³ **But now in Messiah Jesus**
you who once were **far off** have
been **brought near** by (in) the **blood of the Messiah**.

¹⁴ For **he himself is our peace**, who has **made both one**
and has **broken down the dividing wall** – the **hostility** – **in his flesh**
¹⁵ by **abolishing the law** of commandments expressed in ordinances,
that he might **in himself**
create the two into one new human being (humanity) so **making peace,**
¹⁶ and might **reconcile us both to God**
in one body through **the cross**, thereby **killing the hostility**.

Galatians 6:14-15

¹⁴ But far be it from me to boast except in **the cross of our Lord Jesus Messiah**, by which
the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. ¹⁵ **For neither circumcision counts for
anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.**

Galatians 3:23-29

²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified
by faith. ²⁵ But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, ²⁶ for in Christ Jesus
you are all sons of God, through faith. ²⁷ For as many of you as were **baptized into Christ have
put on Christ**. ²⁸ There is **neither Jew nor Greek**, there is neither **slave nor free**, there is no
male and female, for you are **all one in Messiah Jesus**. ²⁹ And if you are Christ's, then you are
Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Isaiah 57:19

“*Peace, peace, to the far and to the near,*” says the LORD, “*and I will heal him.*”

Acts 14:15-17

¹⁵ (Paul to the people of Lystra) “*We bring you good news, that you should turn from these
vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in
them.*” ¹⁶ *In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.* ¹⁷ *Yet he did
not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful
seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*”

Remembering a Long, Hard Story

The distinct nature of God's work of grace as the Bible reveals it: God acts/intervenes to deliver/save/give life first. From that act of grace a relationship is built that moves into the future and creates community and hope. Later generations remember: Exodus/Passover. The Exodus was the center of a great story of promise, covenant, law, judgment, hope. But what about the rest of the world. Paul works with Gentiles, who shared none of that story. He grew up stressing difference and separation; though Paul knew there is only one God. He opposed Jesus' followers. God called him to proclaim a crucified messiah to non-Jews. He had thought that the law & temple were God's final word and that they marked off Jews permanently as God's special people. Now he saw that both pointed to a Messiah who opened all God's promises to all people. But it was promises to Abraham that he opened. The Gentiles were not included by negating God's work with Israel but by radically affirming it in the Messiah and calling all the world finally to share in the story/work of Israel's God. Thus a New Exodus is opened. Deliverance from death that unites all people in new life. The Gentiles are called to remember, like Israel: We were aliens, God brought us to himself. It is only Israel's story of promise, deliverance, covenant that can bring us all in.

The Messiah's Work Destroying Barriers

Looking at the cross puts all human religious claims in perspective. Circumcision? It had its significance and importance, but often marked the barrier, like the wall around the temple. But Jesus' Cross, because he is the Messiah embodying Israel, the presence of God, and the new Adam of all humanity, breaks down all walls that we set up to mark our special claims. These barriers – Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female (Gal 3:28), racial, ethnic, socio-economic, cultural, language, etc. – are part of our distorted, self-centered view "*in flesh*." He takes our hostility into himself "*in his flesh*" and destroys not us but the hostility itself.

The Messiah's Work of Creation

Just as Paul talked of the way God in Jesus makes us alive by Grace through faith as "creation," so what happened on the Cross was nothing less than the creation of a new human being. The Genesis story portrays the breaking apart of humanity by separation from God, murder of each other, a deeply corrupted heart, divided cultures. The Messiah opens the road back to God's Garden, to the full image of God in humanity, seen in Jesus Messiah. As people (Jew, Gentile, ...) are united to him in the life that he gave for them/gives to them, they are united to each other. We have different memories of the journey, but God has brought us to the same place/identity. We are one body created by Jesus' cross/life. In that process we are reconciled to God so that the deepest alienation of humanity is healed and God's own life can be shared with all his creatures by his Holy Spirit. This is the miracle Paul sees when he looks at the church. Every color of humanity is brought together. Every culture is honored and incorporated. Every language becomes a language of praise and pray. Every kind of gift, all talents, all wealth can be used with gratitude to enrich life, serve others, and express love and creativity. Our fleshly hostility is broken down and we learn to see people as God does, to love with his self-giving love toward us.