

Tuesday, January 22nd

Read Ephesians 2:4-6

4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

What did He do with His great love with which He loved us? Three things: He made us alive with Christ, He raised us up with Christ, and He seated us with Christ in the heavenly realms. Notice Paul doesn't say that He made us alive, that He raised us up, and that He seated us in the heavenly realms. He says He did each of those things with Christ. Paul is saying, what is true of Jesus, becomes true of us.

After Jesus died on the cross for our sins, God made him alive again. Not only in terms of a heartbeat, but the real meaning here is that through Jesus we were brought into a relationship with God. If we have our relationship through faith in Jesus, we are also brought into a relationship with God. You are welcomed into the family of God. God delights that He has a relationship with you that's been restored.

“God raised us up with Christ.” God took Christ out of the grave and put Him into a new set of circumstance. He raised him out of that place into a new one. And in the same way He takes us up out of our old circumstances into new ones. He takes us out of our old identity into a new identity. He pulls us out of our old spiritual family into a new family. We're raised up with Him into a place and into relationships that are appropriate for the new identity we have in Christ.

And he says that “He's seated us with him in the heavenly realms” which is probably the hardest one for us to understand. The seated language is about authority. Jesus has authority over all spiritual forces, over every demonic spirit, He's been given authority over Satan. In verse six, Paul message is, because of our faith in Christ we have been seated with him in the heavenly realms, which means we have been given a position of authority as well. Not only are we set free from bondage to Satan, but we are placed in a position of authority over Satan. The devil no longer has authority over you, the roles have been reversed and you have authority over him.

In the book of James chapter 4 verse 7 he says this, “Resist the devil and he will flee.” Flee is terror language. Webster's dictionary describes flee as, to run away from danger or hurry toward a place of security. This is the language because Satan has no authority over you. Not in Christ. The only thing the devil can do is to work by intimidation and identity theft. The devil cannot stand against you. This is the Word of God's teaching to you. The devil cannot stand against you when you belong to Jesus and are part of God's family. His only hope is to convince you not to take a stand against him. To summarize the Biblical teaching on how to engage in spiritual warfare is when you become aware of the fact that there are spiritual forces at work, say, “In the name of Jesus get out.” The most complicated thing about spiritual warfare is how often we fail to recognize that it's happening, and therefore fail to take a hold of the authority that we have in Christ. The devil cannot resist you, the devil cannot stand against you. His only hope is to make sure you don't take a stand against him.

Smith, Craig. “Identity Theft.” *Identity Theft - Freedom-From-Darkness*, 31 Oct. 2016, <https://bit.ly/2VDzsGY>

Wednesday, January 23rd

Read Ephesians 2:7-10

⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

In verses seven and eight, Paul is explaining that God did all that we have talked about because he wants us to know how kind He is. Salvation doesn't depend upon our effort and we do not have to work ourselves into a relationship with God. All we have to do is take hold of the work He has already done on our behalf. This is the essence of the Gospel. Not by our works, but by grace. By God's undeserved kindness. All we have to do is say, "Jesus, I know I've done wrong and I'm sorry for it. I believe you died on the cross. I believe you rose from the dead. Come into my life and forgive my sins." And we suddenly take a hold of God's grace.

Christianity is all about works. It's just not about our works. It's about the work God has done. Our call is not to work our way into God's family, but to rest in our adoption. Our call is not to strive to impress, but to take hold of the fact that God loves us, and that everything else flows out of that. "*For we are God's handiwork created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*" Created in Christ Jesus to do good works. Not works that lead to a relationship with God but works which flow from a relationship with God. We were created in Christ. In other words, He wiped the slate clean and He recreated us from the ground up. If you are in Christ, you have not gotten a little bit better, you are a new creation. You're not what you were. You are a son or a daughter adopted into a family made alive in a relationship with God, seated in the heavenly realm with authority over the spirit that used to drag you around.

It's a holistic, fundamental transformation. We are new creations, and as a result of our new creation, "we do good works." Our works don't get us to God, but our lives become defined by good works because of who we are in Christ. Paul is showing us one of the most important steps of discovering what it means to find our identity in Christ is good works that flows from our relationship. To embrace your identity in Christ, embrace activities that comes with that identity. The people of God worship so we embrace worship, and that allows us to embrace our identity. The people of God are bold, and so we act courageously in the world outside. The people of God serve one another, and so we get involved in serving. The people of God sacrifice for the cause of the kingdom, and so we need to make a sacrifice for the cause of the Kingdom and stop living so much for ourselves.

These passages lay forth two basic challenges. Number one begin to live with a consistent reminder of who you are. Remind yourself that you are a new creation in Christ. The second point is to expect and seize the opportunities to demonstrate your new, true identity. God has created good deeds for us to do in advance. When we begin to expect opportunities

and to embrace them, we will find that our day is filled to the brim and overflowing with opportunities to bless others. Good deeds do not earn us God's favor, but they demonstrate the reality of who we are in Jesus. We have the power to change what life looks like because we are regularly reminded of who we are in Christ.

Smith, Craig. "Identity Theft." *Identity Theft - Freedom-From-Darkness*, 31 Oct. 2016, <https://bit.ly/2VDzsGY>

Thursday, January 24th

Read Ephesians 2:11-13

Jew and Gentile Reconciled Through Christ

¹¹ Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)— ¹² remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

In this passage, Paul is reminding the gentiles of several things that separated them from the Jews. If the word "Gentile" is unfamiliar, in the ancient world there were two categories of people. There were the Jews, the people of God that he had called to Himself, and there were the Gentiles who were everybody else. Paul begins to speak about the things that were distinctive about the Gentiles, some were obvious, and some were not as obvious, but they were more important. First, he talks about circumcision, but in a dismissive manner. He says, "It's something that's done in the body by human hands." It might have been a major distinguishing feature of the Jews and the Gentiles but at the end of the day, it doesn't count for much. He goes on to mention five things that are less obvious, but they are more significant. Paul says that they are separate from Christ as Gentiles, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners of the covenants of promise, without hope and without God. Five things that boil down to the same thing, which is saying they were without hope.

The Jews knew they had the savior coming. They had hope. But the Gentiles didn't have a promise of a savior. They didn't have the hope of a savior and they were excluded from citizenship in Israel. They were excluded from citizenship in Israel and weren't a part of the nation that God had poured blessings on. The Gentiles were also foreigners to the covenants of promise. God had entered into several agreements with the Jewish people and each one of those agreements had a promise attached to it. The Gentiles, Paul says, were without God and didn't have hope.

Today's reading concludes by God saying the Gentiles who were unacquainted with God, were brought to an acquaintance with Him through Christ. They were brought into favor and fellowship with God. As the Jews of the Old Testament approached God by the blood of their sacrifices, so the Gentiles can approach God through the blood of Christ.

Clarke, Adam. "Ephesians Overview - Adam Clarke Commentary." *StudyLight.org*, www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/ephesians.html.

Smith, Craig. "Identity Theft." *Identity Theft – Theft_power-of-peace*, 21 Nov. 2016, <https://bit.ly/2SEd1zo>

Friday, January 25th

Read Ephesians 2:14-18

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

We have mentioned in ancient times there were two basic categories of people, Jews and Gentiles. It is also important to understand the degree of hostility the Jews had toward the Gentiles. One glimpse into this mindset is from the Gospel of Luke, verses 4:23-29, when Jesus began His public ministry by teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth. Here He includes the Gentiles as recipients of God's blessings. In verses 28-29, it says, "*all the people were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city...in order to throw Him down the cliff*". The Jewish people were very protective of what they viewed, although incorrectly, as their chosen status with God. It is with this reference that Paul is speaking to the Ephesians.

Paul explains, God gave the Jews hope because he wanted them to announce that hope to the rest of the world, just as He expects us today to both possess hope and to proclaim it. God wanted the Jews to live their lives in light of the hope that He has given for the purpose of making them distinct. The old testament commandments were intended to set the Israelites apart to make them distinctive and allow them to proclaim hope. In the book of Genesis, God's plan was to bless the Israelites and make their name great, so they could be a blessing to others. That was why the Jewish people were called into existence as a nation.

But over time, the things that were intended to allow the Jews to proclaim hope to the Gentiles became a point of hostility between them. God's purpose was to create in Himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace. In one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross by which he put to death their hostility. *He came and He preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.* For through him, we both have access to the father by one spirit." Jesus brought peace where there was hostility. There was hostility in a lot of levels, here God is focused on overcoming the hostility between Jews and Gentiles. He says not only does Jesus bring people together with the Father, but he brings Jew and Gentile together. Jesus has brought peace where there was hostility.

The way He brought the two together was to get rid of the dividing wall of hostility. There are many possibilities as to what the "walls of hostility" are, but one obvious dividing wall is the Old Testament rules and regulations. The text says, "He destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility by setting aside in his flesh the law, with its commands and regulations."

Jesus wanted to get rid of the hostilities, so he got rid of the barrier that was causing it which was the law. Jesus cared very much about the principles. He didn't care that much about the specific regulations that expressed them. A good example, Jesus said, "You've

heard them say, 'don not murder.'" That's a specific regulation. But Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, is to say, "I care about the principle. I care about the anger and the hurt that's allowed to fester until it leads to murder." I'm concerned about the principle behind it." Jesus didn't care as much about specific rules and regulations, but he cared about principles.

Jesus set aside the rules and the regulations of the law in order to bring peace where there had been hostility. He wanted to bring the two together, because over time those people who followed the rules and regulations, began to look with contempt upon those people who didn't.

Jesus doesn't save the Jews and the Gentiles. He saves His church in which there was no distinction between Jew or Gentile. As far as God is concerned, the barrier is gone, the division is gone. He is not saving Jews and Gentiles, He is saving his people.

Holy Bible: New American Standard Bible. La Habra, CA, Zondervan, 1999.

Smith, Craig. "Identity Theft." *Identity Theft – Theft_power-of-peace*, 21 Nov. 2016, <https://bit.ly/2SEd1zo>