

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>Scripture Memory</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>21</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
<b>Text:</b>	<b>Ephesians 2:11-13; Colossians 1:21-23</b>		
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### THEN AND NOW

In Ephesians 2:8-9, we read familiar words: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” The “you” addressed in these verses were once “dead” in “trespasses and sins” and destined for God’s judgment (“children of wrath”) (2:1-3). But now, we are told, they have been saved by grace as a sheer gift from God, apart from any works of their own. The whole scenario is recreated in Titus 3:3-7:

For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

Likewise, in Colossians 1:21-22 we read: “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.” Similarly, 2 Timothy 1:9 stresses that God “saved us . . . not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace.” In Ephesians and the Pastorals, the “works” repeatedly rejected as playing a role in salvation are good “works” in general, deeds done “in righteousness,” as Titus 3 puts it. And those “saved” or “justified” by divine grace are sinners, plain and simple, slaves of their sins and otherwise destined for divine judgment; they are not Gentiles inquiring about entrance requirements to a desired community. In broad terms as Stephen Westerholm points out, the interpretation of these texts is not controversial. Now nothing in these texts allows us to decide what question Paul addressed in Galatians and Romans when he spoke of justification by faith, apart from the “works of the law.” The suggestion is often made – and a plausible suggestion it is – that a Pauline formula originally designed to address a particular mid-century crisis (so Galatians and Romans) was later reformulated and generalized when the original crisis had passed (so Ephesians and the Pastorals). Something along these lines is, from the perspective of the New Perspectivists, what must have happened. What can be said with certainty, however, is that already in the first century the Pauline justification texts were invoked to address the predicament of sinners facing God’s wrath; and already in the first century they were used to insist that God offers such sinners salvation in Jesus Christ by grace, through faith, apart from a demand for righteous deeds that they are in no position to meet. The claim that such a reading “modernizes” Paul can only be maintained if we date the onset of modernity prior to the composition of Ephesians.<sup>1</sup>

I. **THEIR PAST RELATION TO GOD (VV. 11-12).** Outward privileges, such as those enjoyed by Israel, do not exempt men from the wrath of God. However, the Jews did occupy a unique position before God, one which Gentiles did not. Therefore, Paul declares **Remember** (Gk. *mnēmoneuete* – imperative. The word implies not only the mental process of recalling, but the attitude of repentance and gratitude in the process). *That you Gentiles in the flesh*, were considered in the following way:

- A. **As viewed by the Jews** – the *circumcision*, outwardly, the physical emblem, you Gentiles were called *akrobustia* (lit. “uncircumcision,” a term of intense derision and contempt among the Jews – especially since they proudly called themselves the “circumcision”). The Jews referred to the Gentiles as *haggóyim*. “The Jew had an immense contempt for the Gentile. The Gentiles, said the Jews, were created by God to be fuel for the fires of hell. God, they said, loves only Israel of all the nations that he had made. . . . It was not even lawful to render help to a Gentile mother in her hour of sorest need, for that would simply be to bring another Gentile in the world. Until Christ came, the Gentiles were an object of contempt to the Jews. The barrier between them was absolute. If a Jewish boy married a Gentile girl, or if a Jewish girl married a Gentile boy, the funeral of the Jewish boy or girl was carried out. Such contact with a Gentile was the equivalent of death.”<sup>2</sup>
- B. **As it actually was** – What other people think is one thing; how things really are, that’s something else. The Jews despised the Gentiles and rightly saw the Gentiles’ condition before God. But the Jew completely failed to see his own! (comp. Romans 2). Paul is quick to point out to the Gentile Christians their past. **At that time**, before Grace found you (Paul uses *five* predicates to describe their condition):
1. You were *without Christ* – this is *what* they were;
  2. You were *aliens from the commonwealth of Israel*. The word translated “alien” is *apēllotriō menoī*, a strong verb used again in Ephesians 4:18 and Colossians 1:12. It expresses generally the idea of being a complete stranger as over against someone who was at home or comfortable in the presence of another person. Gentiles were not part of the theocracy established by God with Israel (cf. Amos 3:2). This attitude was manifested by Jesus in Mark 7:24-30 and Matthew 10:5-6. This is *where* they were;
  3. You were *strangers from the covenants of the promise*. The word “strangers,” *xenoi*, expresses the idea of one who is not a member of a certain state or class, as having no share, strictly an outsider or foreigner. The covenant referred to is the Abrahamic, it is **the covenant** in Scripture (cf. Genesis 13:15; 15:18; 17:18; comp. with Galatians 3:17-19). This is *who* they were;
  4. You were *without hope*. Hope is built upon promise, and Gentiles did not have any to rest upon. They were “hopeless,” no hope of any kind. God was truly the “silent God” as far as Gentiles were concerned. This is *how* they were;
  5. You were *without God* (Gk *atheoi*, from which we derive the word “atheists”) in the original sense of the word, being without God, and also in the sense of exhibiting hostility to the true God because they refused to worship Him (cf. Romans 1:18-32). This is *why* they were the way they were.

II. **THEIR RELATIONSHIP THROUGH CHRIST (v. 13).** What could the Apostle possibly say after that stunning speech! The world has summed up the situation, and said, “let us eat, drink and be merry . . . for tomorrow we die” or some version thereof. Paul spoke truth. **But now** (Gk *nuni de*, a very strong contrast) “at *that* time you were . . . *but now* you are this!”

- A. **The New Situation** – *in Christ* . . . *you who were once far away* (Gk *makran*, stresses distance and separation), but not anymore!! Why?

- B. *The Means* – *the blood of Christ* – comp. 1:7. There is no relationship with God except through Jesus Christ and His shed blood. “Outside Christ,” declared Calvin, “there are only idols.”<sup>3</sup> No religion, no works, in short, “no nothing” can change the situation of v. 12 but the Gospel of Christ crucified. Is it any wonder the Apostles demanded this? (cf. Acts 4:12; 2 Timothy 2:5).
- C. *The Effect* – *brought near* (Gk *egenēthete eggus*, refers directly to the privileges denied them in vs. 12.) This parallels Paul’s remarks in Romans 11:24; Gentiles are heirs together *with* Israel to the promises made to Abraham!

**CONCLUSION:** Amazing grace is not amazing unless it is actually *saving grace*. Greg Foster underscores this when he writes, “Every tradition besides Calvinism claims that God’s saving love is aimed not at particular individuals but at humanity in the mass. [They say] God may well love individuals, personally. But that aspect of his love is not what saves people. Jesus did not die on the cross and rise again because he loved you personally – loving you, the individual whom he knows completely and intimately. He did it because he loves people in general, in the abstract.

“In short, Jesus died on the cross and rose again because he ‘loves humanity.’

“It is important to clearly grasp the difference between saying God loves all people – loves each of them personally, as individuals – and saying ‘God loves humanity’ in the abstract. It is one thing to say God loves you personally, and also loves me personally, and also loves this person, and that person . . . and so on until we have included every individual in the human race from Adam to the last person born at the end of history. It is a very different thing to say God ‘loves’ the theoretical concept of ‘humanity’ – that he loves the abstraction, the mass as mass, impersonally.

“ . . . All theological traditions besides Calvinism claim the saving ‘love’ for ‘humanity’ that led Jesus up to the cross and down to the grave, and then back up out of it, is a love that does not embrace any specific individuals at all. If it did, that would put us right back where we started with our problem. If the love that led Jesus to the cross is a love for any individual people, it is either a love for all individual people or only for some. We don’t want it to be only for some, because that thought is horrible. But if it’s for all people then either they’re all saved (which we know is not true) or God’s work fails in its purpose (which we also know is not true). So God’s saving love is either a personal love that embraces some and not others, or it is not a personal love at all; it embraces no individuals. It is entirely abstract.”<sup>4</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>This section is adapted from Westerholm’s lecture, “Justification by Faith is the Answer: What is the Question?”, given at Concordia Theological Seminary: Symposium on Exegetical Theology (5/22/06). A fuller development is seen in his excellent *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>2</sup>W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians* (St. Andrews Press, 1958), p. 125.

<sup>3</sup>*Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* Vol. XI (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 149.

<sup>4</sup>Greg Foster, *The Joy of Calvinism: Knowing God’s Personal, Unconditional, Irresistible, Unbreakable Love* (Crossway, 2012), p. 52.