

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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HOW THE CHURCH IS CONSTITUTED

Contrary to a very popular belief, the Bible nowhere teaches “the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man”. Jesus specifically rejected that doctrine when He declared that the Pharisees were of their Father...the devil! (John 8:42-47) The true condition of men outside of Christ is nowhere more vividly set forth than in our text today. Paul seemingly exhausts his vocabulary in depicting the hopeless situation of unbelievers before Grace finds them. The misery of man’s natural state, whether realized or not, exists. The terrible tragedy of so much of the “Gospel” preaching and evangelistic efforts that are popular today is that they entirely over-look or intentionally by-pass the statement of Paul. The Apostle is doing more than presenting an effective backdrop for the Gospel, he is exhorting believers to be constantly remembering the truth of the Gospel as manifested in their own lives. The conduct and attitude of the natural man, as he is *in Adam*, was described in 2:1-3, while the glories of Grace occupied Paul’s attention in vv. 4-10. Grace found men DEAD in sin and in active rebellion and hostility toward God. Grace supplies that which dead men lack. Grace enables. Grace is Grace, and it must be seen as such or it ceases to be Grace. In vv. 11-13 Paul undertakes to portray the situation of Gentiles, who, like the Jews were “objects of wrath”, nonetheless existed outside the covenant that God made with Israel.

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. *MNEMONEUETE* – 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 *HAGGOYIM*. “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 into 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.”¹
- 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. Rom.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 trans. “alien” is *APELLOTRIO MENOI*, a strong verb used again in Eph. 4:18 and Col. 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 Mk. 7:24-30 and Mt. 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. (cf. Gen. 13:15; 15:18; 17:18; comp. w/Gal. 3:17-19). Rowland Ward sums up the Biblical account of God’s dealing with Abraham. “God’s choice of Abram occurs in the context of the disunity of humanity and the impression God’s creation covenant will fail. That would be a wrong impression for the choice of Abram is with a view to the fulfillment of the creation covenant. Abram and the descendants God gives him are to be a means of bringing the covenant blessings to the whole world. Abram is like a dead man, his name (meaning *proud father*) a mockery, for he has no children and his wife is barren (Gen 11:30). But God calls into being things that are not (cf. Rom 4:17), and he commands Abram to leave his father’s house and go to a land he will show him. In contrast to the Babel builders, *God* will act to make Abram a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, decide the fate of men on how they relate to him, and to bless the whole world through him (Gen 12:1-3). It will be 25 years before Abram has the child of the promise (Gen 12:4; 17:1, 21), and his faith was tested. Yet he believed the LORD and it was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). The thought is not that faith is meritorious, but that the one in whom Abram trusted provides for him the righteousness he needs as the basis of fellowship, a righteousness he receives as God’s gift through faith. A year before Isaac’s birth God formalises his promise in the covenant of circumcision. Abram’s name is changed to Abraham, *father of a multitude*, because God’s blessing will result in him being the father of nations and of kings (Gen 17:1ff). Whereas in 1:28 God had said to Adam and Eve ‘Be fruitful and multiply’, and similarly to Noah and his sons in 9:1, the emphasis now is different. God says to Abraham, ‘I will make you very fruitful’ (17:6). The heart of the covenant is God’s total commitment: ‘I will be your God and the God of your children after you’. The New Testament does not provide any greater promise, but rather discloses the implications of God’s commitment. Abraham is also assured of possession of the land of Canaan as a free gift. We find therefore, no total lapse in Abraham. He is kept by the power of God. God does not favour him because he is worthy but because God is gracious and provides righteousness for him. He is promised greatness by God, not rewarded for already existing greatness. God’s total commitment to Abraham is shown ultimately in the gift of God’s son as the true and Last Adam. Adam was given the whole earth to subdue whereas Abraham is promised the land of Canaan as God’s gift (15:7; 17:8). Nevertheless, all nations will be blessed through Abraham (12:3 cf. Gal 3:8). When the writer to the Hebrews speaks of Abraham looking beyond Canaan to a new creation (Heb 11:9-10, 16), he writes perceptively, for Canaan has replaced the whole earth only temporarily and typically. Abraham is the inheritor of the creation covenant as a new Adam. As Paul puts it, Abraham inherits the world (Rom 4:13). The inclusiveness of the church composed of both Jews and Gentiles, which is so insisted upon in the New Testament, reflects the reality of all believers, all true children of Abraham, as God’s new human family united in Jesus Christ, the Last Adam.”² All who are outside of Christ are strangers to God’s promises. 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. Rom. 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. *NUNIDE*, 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.”³ 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; II Tim. 2:5).
- C. The Effect – BROUGHT NEAR (Gk. *EGENETHETE EGGUS*, refers directly to the privileges denied them in vs. 12. This parallels Paul’s remarks in Rom. 11:24; Gentiles are heirs together *with* Israel to the promises made to Abraham!

CONCLUSION: Each Lord’s day we are called to *Remember* the Lord Jesus in the bread and the wine. Here are a few aspects of Christ’s work that should occupy our thoughts. “All that was threatened against the First Adam fell on Jesus. He wore the crown of thorns that speaks of the curse (Gen 3:18). Having borne our sin, “he was raised for our justification”. The resurrection showed Jesus to be righteous and accepted by the Father. He was justified having fulfilled all God’s law required. In his death believers died, in his resurrection they too are justified – raised with him and seated with him in heavenly places. Forgiveness for the breach of God’s law together with eternal life as held out in the Adamic covenant, is God’s free gift through faith in his Son, together with adoption into God’s family. These vital and precious evangelical truths are appropriately secured in our thinking as we appreciate Jesus is the Last Adam, his obedience in his life and in his death dealing effectively with the consequence of the First Adams’ disobedience. “For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19).”⁴ Paul had prayed that these Christians would KNOW the power of God that wrought them up from the dead, and is at work in them (1:15-2:10). To help them realize this truth he urges them to remember the situation out of which God had brought them (comp. w/Gal. 4:8-9). Forgetfulness is an all too common vice in the Christian life. By this, I am referring not to the lack of memory, but to the purposeful neglect of those things that God calls us to heed. REMEMBER! Why? So we might *praise* the God who has dealt so kindly with us; REMEMBER! Why? So we might *prize* that which He wrought for us; REMEMBER! Why? So we might *proclaim* His glorious Gospel of Grace to others shut up to the misery of the present world; REMEMBER! Why? So we might *point* only to the Lamb of God, Christ our only Savior, now and forever.

ENDNOTES

¹ W. Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and the Ephesians* (St. Andrews Press, 1958) P. 125

² R.S. Ward, *God & Adam: Reformed Theology and the Creation Covenant. An introduction to the Biblical Covenants.* (New Melbourne Press, 2003) p. 32

³ *Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries* Vol. XI (Eerdmann, 1974) p. 149

⁴ Ward, op. cit. p. 197