

The Image Rescued

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In **week one** of this series, we considered God’s original plan for humanity—a plan that would see his image bearers populate all of his good and sinless creation with gloriously diverse expressions of his divine image. **Last week**, we saw how sin interrupted that plan. We saw how sin blinds us and hardens our hearts, so much so that we are prone to attack the image of God wherever we see it. And, we considered how this tendency in us can readily lend itself to racism.

- So, in week one, we saw the image of God given.
- And, last week, we saw the image of God attacked.

This week, we get the rescue. You see, God won’t allow sin to divert his plans. His original plan will be fulfilled. His divine image will be multiplied and diversified among all peoples and for his glory. And, we’re going to see that the gospel of Jesus is how God will accomplish all this. We’ll see that the work of Christ was to rescue or reinvigorate or redeem God’s original mission in and for us. And, this good news in Jesus Christ makes racial reconciliation and racial justice a priority for all those who’ve been reconciled to God.

Let’s read today’s passage of Scripture together and see how.

Ephesians 2:11-22

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.

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.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

As we dig in here, there are two things that are clear in our text, and another that's exemplified in the early church. In the passage of Scripture above, we see that **(1st) Jesus reconciles us to God**. Ever since Adam and Eve rebelled against the Lord in the garden, our relationship to our Creator has been broken. So, Jesus rescues it. He restores it. **(2nd) Jesus reconciles us to one another**. When peace with the Lord is disrupted, peace with the rest of his creation is also disrupted. So, Jesus rescues it. He empowers us to truly love our neighbor—no matter what differences there are between us. Finally, **(3rd) Jesus requires reconciliation**. We'll close today's sermon with a brief look at how seriously God takes reconciliation across racial boundaries. Friends, it is near and dear to his heart. He demands it.

Let's look at these three truths together.

1. Jesus reconciles us to God.

Consider where the apostle Paul begins here. Talking to Gentile believers—which would include most if not all of us—he tells us to look back at our history. When we do, he reminds us of how hopeless our existence without a true knowledge or intimate relationship with God was (v. 12).

Friends, I wonder if you can relate. Paul isn't just talking to those in Ephesus who lived two thousand years ago. *Don't read Scripture as if it were some textbook! Don't read the word of God as if it isn't speaking to you—right here and right now!* Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the apostle says—think back upon what you once were before you knew the Lord; remember your hopelessness; remember your emptiness. Recall what it was like without God in the world (v. 12).

Do you remember trying to fill yourself up with all those things the world has on offer—all those things we’re told will satisfy us? Often we tend to misremember what it was like. Friends, the grass wasn’t greener.

David Foster Wallace was not a Christian or even a theist. He, however, saw how futile it is to try to find our satisfaction or purpose in the things this world offers. He summed it up in a commencement speech delivered to the 2005 graduating class of Kenyon College. Here’s what Foster Wallace said.

If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It’s the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.... Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.¹

Friends, remember that struggle, recall the futility of it. Then, with great joy, praise God for rescuing you from it. Praise God for his reconciliation in Jesus Christ, because, as Paul reminds us—We “who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ” (v. 13). We have been brought into the presence of the Lord. We have been welcomed into his courts through faith in Jesus. We’ve been embraced by our Creator—not merely as friends but as sons and daughters. *Amen!*

Friends, for just a moment, reflect on the drastic divide Christ Jesus bridged. Consider the stark difference between you—a selfish sinner—and the holy Creator of all things. We had no rights before God. We had no business entering his presence. We had despised his good gifts and cursed his grace to us through our sinful actions. All of us deserved judgment. Yet, in Christ, we’ve been given the rights of the sons and daughters of God. We can call God Father. We can enter into his heavenly courts without fear of judgement. This is what Paul is talking about. This is our inheritance. This is our reconciliation in Christ. *Let it sink in!*

If this is the gap that has been bridged for us, if this is what we have received, then what divide can stand in the face of the love, power, and glory of Christ Jesus?

¹ David Foster Wallace, “This Is Water,” 2005. You can read the full manuscript [here](#).

Certainly no human sin can stand against the reconciling power of the love of God. Surely not divisions based on culture. Definitely not divisions based on linguistics. *And, most certainly not divisions based on the color of someone's skin!*

Friends, if we can be reconciled to the Lord, then no reconciliation is too big! The gospel must reconcile us to other people. The gospel must overcome the divides which we encounter in this fallen world life. *Praise God for that!*

And, that's precisely where Paul turns next.

2. Jesus reconciles us to one another.

This is such a rich passage of Scripture. I thought about just summarizing it, but it's too good. Let's hear it again in full. Just take in what Paul is telling us.

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 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, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and 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.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (vv. 14-22).

Look, sometimes you don't need to preach too much. Sometimes you just read what the Lord has given for the edification of his people. Dear Friends, this is one of those occasions. Simply reflect on this holy text.

- Jesus is peace! His very person is peace. His life is the message of peace. His work is the mission of peace (v. 14). *Amen!*

- The dividing wall of hostility is gone. It is destroyed. Jesus took it away and put it to death (v. 14). *Amen!*
- And, two peoples have been made one. Two very different races of people, with a history of violence and hatred, have been made one (v. 15). *Amen!*

I could go on. I've just scratched the very surface. Nevertheless, dear friends, you can already see what this means; can't you? You can see where this is taking us. You can see how God is rescuing his original mission. There will be a great diversity of image bearers in Christ's kingdom, just as he purposed from the very beginning. Sin cannot disrupt or divert or defeat the plans of God. You and I will—in Christ—witness and be a united part of the glorified image of God throughout all of creation, worshipping the Lord for ever and ever along with people from every tribe and tongue and nation on the face of the earth. *Amen!*

Jesus has reconciled us and is reconciling us to one another. *Racial divisions cannot stand before him!*

But, as we close, I want to show you God's commitment to this.

3. Jesus requires reconciliation—an example.

There's this strange story, in the book of Acts, where Luke records a vision which Peter has of a sheet with various kinds of non-kosher foods upon it descending from heaven. And, God says to Peter—"Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." Peter, however, being a good Jew tells God that he can't eat such things. This happens three times, and each time God says—"Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." (This is all recounted in Acts 10.)

Now, simultaneously, the reader knows there's a Roman Captain being visited by an angel of the Lord. The guy's name is Cornelius, and he's a devout god-seeker. The angel essentially tells him that his prayers have been heard and that his search for God is being honored. However, in order for this to happen, the angel tells him to call for Simon Peter. The presumption is that Peter will be the one to tell Cornelius and his whole family about Jesus. (Again, this is all in Acts 10. After today's service, please go back and read this account for yourself. Reflect upon it and what it tells us about God's purposes for racial reconciliation. *It is powerful!*)

So, Peter is told that God determines what is clean and what isn't—not Peter. And, Cornelius is told by the angel that he should call for Peter to receive a message from the Lord. Well, here's the thing—and Luke makes this abundantly clear to us—Peter is in a little place called Joppa while Cornelius is in a town called Caesarea. Anyone who was familiar with Israel's geography would have immediately known that there would be some traveling involved for Cornelius to call for Peter to come and for Peter to walk back to him—a *38 mile walk, 76 miles roundtrip!*

Friends, let's talk about efficiency. Peter has a vision that only God determines what is clean or unclean. If this vision is meant to tell Peter that the gospel is for all, which is later clearly established as its point (Acts 10:28), why the whole journey? Why the 76 mile roundtrip?

And furthermore, Cornelius has an angelic visit. God sends an angel to him so that he knows to send for Peter. Yet, if Cornelius and his family needed the gospel, if they needed to understand who Jesus was and what he had accomplished for them, why on earth not simply have the angel tell them? I'm going to be honest with you, Peter's sermon once he arrives is pretty mediocre at best. It comes off a bit offensive and a lot awkward. And, he doesn't even get to finish before the Lord interrupts him with an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Why all the walking and awkward preaching? Why all the inefficiency?

The answer is because God is doing a work in Peter, and God is doing a work in Cornelius. The answer is that these two need to be brought together in relationship so that they can be brothers. Oh, it'll be messy. It'll be awkward. It won't be efficient. *Yet, it will—by the power of God—be transformative for all involved!* Peter changes. Cornelius changes. There is divine reconciliation across racial barriers.

In short, Peter walks all that way because God demands racial reconciliation. The Lord is making a point. Don't miss his point, friends.

And, this is not just the Lord's calling on Peter's life and on Cornelius's life. It is his calling on all of our lives. God intends to reconcile us to himself thru Christ. God intends to reconcile us to others thru Christ. Friends, the Lord intends to destroy whatever boundaries divide human beings thru Christ Jesus.

- Political divides cannot stand. We see that in Cornelius and Peter.

- Economic divides cannot stand. We see that in Cornelius and Peter.
- Social divides cannot stand. We see that in Cornelius and Peter.
- And, racial divides cannot stand. We see that in Cornelius and Peter.

Friends, are you ready for the messy, inefficient ministry of reconciliation which God Call you to in Christ Jesus? Are you ready—by the power of the Spirit—to walk the long walk towards racial sanctification? Let's pray for willingness.