



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

2 CORINTHIANS 6:14-18

MAY 2017

One God, One Story, One People

Cultures clash over the narrative that defines them. Every culture has its story, and those whose story coincides with reality as God defines it in the Scripture have the potential to flourish.

Those who neglect or contradict God's story are doomed to failure. We in western civilization are increasingly being influenced by secularism and its God-denying narrative. The dominant theme of secularism is that there is no overarching narrative—that there are many stories with each one having more or less the same claim on reality. We are called to live in our culture with allegiance to the story that culminates with the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. As we do, there is a clash. We should try to have dialogue, but we can never mix the stories for the sake of peace.

We long for the unity that once

characterized God's creation. We detest the divisiveness that clogs the channels of communication. We are sick of the judgmentalism and prejudice that rule in so many areas. We beg members of the body of Christ to accept one another in love. We desire the citizens of our country to sit at the table of wisdom together to find common ground. But when the basic narrative is threatened, the core values that make us free are destroyed.

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul is clear:

Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness?

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Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?

2 Corinthians 6:14–16a (ESV)

The early church struggled with identifying the story. Were there two stories or just one? Was there the story of Israel as a nation and then another about Jesus and the church? Much of the debate throughout Acts and the Epistles includes these questions. The first true church council (recorded in Acts 15) was about this issue. They concluded that there is one story, one God, and one people.

God spoke and created a grand temple with his image placed in it.

It begins in Genesis with the creation and continues through the beginning of the new creation in Jesus' resurrection. The original story of Genesis 1–11 is repeated several times in biblical history. God spoke and created a grand temple with his image placed in it. Adam and Eve, as image-bearers,

were to partner with God in managing the creation in a way that his glory would fill the earth. They had children, and their family was God's people on earth. They chose to sin against God and were removed from the Garden. But God promised that there would come a seed of woman who would crush the head of the Serpent.

God speaks again to Abram who is a childless polytheist in the desert. He miraculously provides for Abraham and Sarah to have a seed that would reverse the curse that Adam had brought on the earth. Abraham's family was given a place of real estate and a mandate to bless the whole world. The story of Abraham's physical descendants makes up much of the Old Testament story. Again, they violate the direct word of God and end up being removed from their land (just as Adam and Eve were removed from the Garden). God's faithfulness to his promise stands as the exiles look for the day when the head of the Serpent will be crushed. The prophets chimed in. God would one day restore his people Israel. That people would accurately reflect his glory to all the nations in the world. Gentiles would be included in God's people.

Echoes of renewal float throughout the story. Noah's day looked forward to another day when there would be a new world and a new race. God's promise to Abraham of a singular seed predicted a Son that would begin again. The covenant with Israel looked forward to a new covenant that would not only instruct the people but empower them. God's promise to David that his son would occupy the throne ruling over God's creation gave hope for the final Son of David who ascended after his resurrection. Then came the day. Woman's seed in the person of Jesus came in spite of every attempt of the Serpent to stop him. He lived as humans were designed to live. He died as a fulfillment of covenant requirements. Then the great day of the new creation! Jesus was the firstborn from the dead. A new race was now on the earth. Heaven and earth had come together in one person. Those who believed in him as the true Savior and Messiah were born again to make up the new race that God is using to reflect his glory throughout the whole world. The wall between Jew and Gentile was torn down, and the new people are defined solely by their relationship with Jesus. There is one God,

one story, one people. The Serpent's head is crushed. The new family is together. Israel's exile is over. The glory has returned to the temple. The whole world is the new Garden. The Gentiles have been included as God's people.

God's promise to Abraham of a singular seed predicted a Son that would begin again.

Paul said to converted Gentiles, "We are the temple of the living God." The most precious place in Jewish thought was the temple. It is where heaven touches earth. It is where God meets with his people. Earlier Jesus told those who were selling sheep and oxen in the temple that he was the new temple. After his ascension, he sent the Spirit to indwell his people so that they are his now active temple. Paul goes on to remind us of what God had promised Israel in Leviticus and other Old Testament scriptures.

I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no

unclean thing; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be sons and daughters to me, says the Lord Almighty.

2 Corinthians 6:16b–18 (ESV)

Now, these promises are applied to the new creation people whose ethnicity is not an issue. Converted Gentiles along with converted Jews make up the new people.

What had been promised long ago is now fulfilled. “The day” came with Jesus. What had been a future hope for Israel is now a source of joy for those living in the new creation. Believing a promise produces hope. Embracing a fulfilled promise releases joy.

We walk in **forgiveness and love**,
“bringing holiness to completion in
the fear of God.”

By embracing the fulfillment of these promises, we walk free of guilt, shame, fear, and condemnation. We walk in forgiveness and love, “*bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God*” (2 Corinthians 7:1). That means that we are reconciled to God and renewed to be his partners in subduing the

earth. We are his ambassadors representing him as we proclaim the good news that God has acted in our behalf by making Jesus to become sin so that we could become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21). The one God has his one people on earth. They have one story, and it causes joy and flourishing. As his partners, we move through the earth reflecting his glory, thus fulfilling our created design. One God rules. His story alone testifies to truth. His people are fully human again. Through Jesus Christ, God has reordered creation, and we are working it out.



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