

**Faithing Facts**  
Ephesians 2: 2-10  
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I know they aren't as big a deal nowadays, but for a long time, bumper stickers were the way to "post". Thoughts, funny quotes and quips, names of places you've been or bands you've seen. They're clever and cutting. They make you laugh; make you mad or just make you wonder. They're serious, sassy, and just plain silly. They make statements about politics, religion, relationships, and life in general.

*If the world's a stage, I'm completely unrehearsed.  
Individualists of the world—Unite!  
I dieted for a month and all I lost was thirty days.  
Boldly going nowhere.  
I childproofed my car—but they still got in.  
The more people I meet the more I like my cat  
I don't need google, my wife knows everything.  
Join the dark side, we have cookies.  
Rhinos are just fat unicorns.  
Seen it all, done it all, can't remember any of it.  
I want someone who looks at me like I look at chocolate.  
You're never too old to yearn.  
Ban Bumper Stickers.*

One of my mom's favorites is: ***Subvert the dominant paradigm.***

Subvert the dominant paradigm. A "paradigm" is a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices which guide our decision making and choices. The dominant paradigm I see in the world today is fear. It leads to suspicion, anger, and despair. It causes acts of violence and hate. It tells us to see strangers not as potential friends but present enemies. It leads us to trade freedom for security.

How do we deal with fear. We "faith facts." We faith our fears. Jesus "*subverted the dominant paradigms*" of his day. He challenged attitudes, actions and systems that labeled persons as unworthy, unwanted, marginalized, and discounted. He welcomed instead of excluding. He accepted instead of rejecting. In a world of hostility, he chose radical hospitality. He invites us make those choices also.

Our text is from Ephesians. It's the designated Epistle—the letter—for today. Ephesians is a "general letter", likely written by Paul, but not

necessarily to a particular community or to address a specific issue. It was written to Christians who were Gentiles, not Jews before their conversion. They were the outsiders. Paul describes how Jesus brought them together with God and one another. He reminds them what that means. His word speaks to us also.

Paul reminds both Jew and Gentile their inclusion in God's new community is a gift of grace. It wasn't something they did or earned. Through Christ, God's grace and love made a place for them.

**The bumper sticker version might read:**

Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

That's a fact. A fact we have to faith. Faithing that fact that there is nothing we can do, or not do, to make God love us anymore. Or any less.

Paul ended the previous verse with the teaching that salvation is a gift of God. Here, he continues with yet another reminder that works do not and cannot save us. Good deeds are important in the lives of believers, but they do not provide salvation. It has been said we work *as a result of* our salvation, not *to provide* our salvation. Paul's Jewish upbringing had emphasized devout adherence to the law as the means to please God. He was faithful to his religion, yet did not know God. His salvation came when God revealed Himself to Paul by grace and Paul believed and was saved (Acts 9).

One reason for Paul's frequent reminder about the futility of works is noted here, as well. If salvation could be earned, those who earned it would brag about their success in obtaining it. No Christian can brag about their "goodness," since we are saved entirely by the grace of God, not by our own good deeds.

**If I would to give your flash cards, or Cliff's notes, Spark notes, its that through these letters,** Paul repeatedly emphasizes that salvation is accomplished on the basis of grace, through faith. Good works, human effort, and our best intentions will never be enough to earn salvation. In some ways, that's both good news and bad news. Every person's sins--deliberate and accidental actions, move them away from God. The second part, he just touches on here, is that EVERYONE are part of the same spiritual family.

**One scholar puts it this way:**

Ephesians follows a theme common in Paul's writings: connecting theory with practice. As a letter meant to be read by more than just the believers at Ephesus, this is an important look at how Christian belief should translate into Christian action. The first three chapters lay out spiritual ideas, the last three chapters show how these truths should be applied in the life of a mature believer.

Our place in the Church is also a gift of grace. Through Christ's cross and resurrection, we've been redeemed, restored, and reconciled. God has chosen to love us. Nothing destroys that love. Nothing we say or do changes who or Whose we are. Nothing anyone says about us changes it either. That's Paul's foundation; his fundamental truth. When we face our own questions of inclusion, who belongs and who doesn't; that's where we begin. We begin with God's loving inclusion of us.

We're often tempted to think that our primary task as Christians is to get good with God. Right relationship. That's where we start. That's not where we end. God also wants us to get us in right relationships with one another.

*I was teaching a class on John's gospel. We talked about Jesus' relationships with persons. We especially talked about how he treated those that others set aside. We raised the question of what that meant for us. I gave the class an assignment. I asked them to intentionally look at each person with whom they interacted that week as someone Jesus had sent them. They were to see each person as a child of God, as Jesus himself or as a person Jesus wanted them to meet.*

*The class returned the next week to discuss their experience. One woman had taken the suggestion very seriously. As we shared, she said, "You just about ruined my week. Do you have any idea how hard it is to see everyone as someone Jesus has sent and then to treat them as he would? Faith, I work in an automobile repair shop. I kept looking at everyone who came in my office as a person Jesus wanted me to meet. It changed everything."*

It does change everything. To see them as Jesus would; to see them as Jesus. To look at them faith to faith. It's a radical choice. It's dangerous. It can lead to a cross. It changes everything. I invite you to try it.

Jesus' first response was never judgment, it was always welcome—especially for those on the margins, for the outcast, the unwanted and the set aside. His final answer to every question wasn't condemnation, it was compassion.

Max Lucado's friend Kenny and his family went to Disney World. "I saw a sight I'll never forget," he told Max. "I want to share it with you."

Kenny and his family were in Cinderella's castle. It was packed with kids and parents. Suddenly all the children rushed to one side. Cinderella had entered. Kenny said she was perfectly typecast; a gorgeous young girl with each hair in place, flawless skin, and a beaming smile. She stood waist-deep in a sea of kids, each wanting to touch and be touched by her.

For some reason Kenny turned and looked toward the other side of the castle. It was now vacant except for a boy of seven or eight. His age was hard to determine because of his disfigured body. He was dwarfed in height and his face was deformed. He stood watching quietly and wistfully, holding the hand of his older brother. You could see what he wanted. He wanted to be with the other children. He longed to be in the middle of the kids reaching for Cinderella, calling her name, being touched by her. He's afraid. He's afraid of yet another rejection. He's afraid of being taunted and mocked again.

Lucado asks, "When you hear that story, don't you wish Cinderella would see him and go to him?" She did! She saw the little boy. She immediately began walking in his direction. Politely but firmly inching through the crowd of children, she finally broke free. She walked quickly across the floor, knelt at eye level with the stunned little boy, and placed a kiss on his face.<sup>1</sup>

That's grace. "Cinderella" saw that boy's need to belong and be recognized—she heard his unspoken cry. She responded. Jesus saw the unwanted on his day. He saw those who stood on the edges. He saw those nobody chose to see. He moved toward them. He gave them God's "holy kiss" of love and acceptance.

Roy Lloyd is a Lutheran minister. He had an interview with Mother Teresa. One of the questions he asked and her answer stands out in his mind.

He asked her, "What's the biggest problem in the world today?" Without hesitation, she replied, "The biggest problem in the world today is that we draw the circle of our family too small. We need to draw it larger every day."

Jesus would agree. He continually reminded us that our neighbor's welfare was important as our own. I offer you this final bumper sticker. It's one Jesus might distribute. "**Koinonia stamps out xenophobia!**" Koinonia (community) stamps our xenophobia (the fear of strangers). That will **subvert the dominant paradigm**. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado, *A Gentle Thunder*, pp. 86-87