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POSITION AND IDENTITY
IN CHRIST

CHAPTER 2

ACCESS TO GOD IN CHRIST

'Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God' (Rom. 5:2).

'For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father' (Eph. 2:18).

'in whom we have boldness and access' (Eph. 3:12).

The line of cars backed up for miles. Trudi and I were desperately trying to get back into the Middle Eastern country we called home for seven years. But a border strike in a neighboring country obstructed our path. Fortunately, a conniving medical doctor convinced our bus driver to work his way to the front of the line, hoping for some sort of break. As our bus inched forward, the doctor interviewed everyone on

board, searching out medical conditions that might get us through. Diabetes.... Asthma.... Headaches.... None of these would do. Then he spotted my wife. Eight months pregnant. Perfect!

The bus weaved its way to the front of the line. The doctor and driver disembarked with hopes that they might persuade two tea-sipping officials to allow our bus to cross the border. The doctor returned shortly, informing us that the officials wanted to see the pregnant woman. Trudi blissfully bounded off the bus. 'Slow down!' I hissed in English. So Trudi contorted her face, lumbered toward the officials, and drew labored breaths. When the border guards noticed her approach, they released a stream of expletives. An hour later, our bus was permitted to cross the border into our adopted country. We later learned that we were the only vehicle allowed passage for three whole days! We never would have received permission to pass apart from

Trudi. My wife gained access for us all. (The bus company refunded us the cost of our tickets out of gratitude.)

Our access to God is entirely because of Jesus. It isn't gained through anything we've accomplished. It is only because we are connected to Jesus that we have access to the Father.

There is more to this word 'access' in context than simply gaining entrée where none previously existed. When Romans 5:2 claims that through Christ we have obtained access to God, the implication is not only that we are given permission to enter God's presence, but also that we have One who personally introduces us as we come into God's presence, One who can justify doing so because He first justified us by grace through faith. That's why some translations render this rich word as 'introduction' rather than 'access.' We have access to God, to be sure, but we also have an introducer, Christ Jesus Himself. What if you were offered admission to the glorious throne room of the Almighty King of the Universe, but had to enter the hall alone? That would be terrifying! But Jesus, our Introducer, walks in front of us and introduces us—by name—to God the Father. It is through Christ that we have the right to come into God's presence.

I don't live overseas anymore. I now teach biblical studies at a Christian university. One of the most common complaints I hear from students is that they feel distant from God. There are many possible reasons they might feel this way, especially if their relationship with God is primarily based on their feelings. But before they can make any spiritual progress, they need to know that their access to God has been secured by Jesus. If they truly know Christ, their relationship with God is not broken, God is not distant, and Christ has not abandoned them. All of us who know Christ have been granted a relationship with God because of Christ's work on the cross. We can live in security and confidence that we have access to God *in Christ*.

CHAPTER 3

DEAD TO SIN IN CHRIST

'How can we who died to sin still live in it?' (Rom. 6:2)

'We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin' (Rom. 6:6-7).

'I feel like I'm in slavery. Is victory even possible?'

The student in my office had been describing a besetting sin. He had fought many battles to try to break free. Some he won; some he lost.

But repetitive sinning was not his destiny. If Paul could talk to him, Paul would explain that since this young man had died to sin, there was no reason to keep living in it. But, you know, Paul can sometimes

be difficult to understand. Paul likes deep metaphors. Crucified with Christ is one of them. Dead to sin is another. Freedom from slavery is a third. All three show up in Romans 6.

Maybe we'll understand Paul's analogies better if we try one of our own. Bonded labor is one of the most common forms of slavery in the modern world. A desperately poor family seeks out the owner of a factory for help in paying medical bills. Forced labor is the means of paying off the contracted debt. But the terms and duration of such loans are often indefinite, resulting in long-term debt slavery.

I recently learned of a girl who was born in a brick kiln in Central Asia to parents who were bonded slaves. We'll call her Sara. Sara's father died when she was a baby. She grew up with her mother making one brick after another—all day long, seven days a week. Other children went to school; Sara made bricks. She was as much a slave as were the children of Israel who were forced to make bricks in Egypt. After the

owner of the kiln murdered Sara's beloved mother, the teenaged orphan was coerced into a marriage contract with her 70-year-old master.

The day before the marriage was to take legal force, a pastor arrived with enough money to cover Sara's debt. Sara narrowly escaped with the pastor. She was free.

That day, Sara died to her old way of life. This doesn't mean that her former tormentor was dead, simply that his power over her was broken. To employ a common expression from the country where she resides, he had become 'dead to her.' His power was broken.

Freedom from the power of sin is one of the main points of Romans 6. We were all born in the kiln of sin. We were trapped in slavery. Apart from Christ, we remain slaves. In fact, captivity to sin constitutes a primary difference between an unbeliever and a believer. An unbeliever is in bondage to sin. It is impossible for an unbeliever not to sin. He can break an individual habit, but a related sin will pop up somewhere else in his life. He might get himself transferred from one room in the kiln to another, but he cannot escape his prison; he still has to obey sin, since sin is his taskmaster.

But if you truly know Christ, the power of sin is broken. You have walked out of the kiln with Christ. He paid your debt. You are free. There is more to say about overcoming sin than this, but here is where it all starts. To overcome sin you must first believe that Jesus has released you from the power of sin. A lot of young people I talk to don't actually believe this. They think they are stuck sinning and will never be able to break free. But the Bible declares that the power of sin has been broken because you are *in Christ*.