

Grafted in

1. Having Yuki, our Japanese exchange student, here for a month was a wonderful experience. Everyone loved him. He fit right in at our house. He seemed to feel very comfortable with us. We had shared hobbies and interests. And he even looks like my nephew, Charlie.
2. I find it interesting that the program that sent Yuki to us is one that sends dozens of Japanese students to America every year. My understanding of the Japanese is that they don't get along well with other cultures, and even the non-Japanese in their country are more tolerated than welcomed.
3. Our experience with Yuki was just the opposite. He seemed comfortable here, and even his family contacted us multiple times and seemed genuinely excited that Yuki was with us.
 - a. This makes me wonder, are the Japanese actually this insular? Was Yuki an anomaly? Or does our interaction with different kinds of people help us to understand different people more than basic stereotypes?
4. Look at all of the racial fighting that has been going on. It is a problem on both sides. Obama was a strong race-baiting president. Anyone who opposed him was also called a racist. But then you get things like Charlottesville last week, and you wonder where the heck these people even came from. I fear we are at a turning point in this country where we are going to see more hardline racial fighting. I hope that I am wrong.
5. I wonder, though, how much of this would be avoided if people moved beyond stereotypes and got involved in people's lives, loving them with Christ's love, and preaching the gospel of his grace.
6. Racism and xenophobia aren't unique to 21st century America. They have been a part of the world since the dawn of different cultures, and were prominent in the first century. The Jews saw themselves as superior to other cultures, in large part because they were the people of the covenants and promises of God. The Roman Empire looked down on the Jews, seeing them as second-class citizens. We hear a lot in the NT about Jews and Greeks.
7. When the discussion of Jews and Greeks comes up, it is generally about Jews and non-Jews, and particularly in relationship to God. Jesus came, the scriptures tell us, to the Jew first, and then to the Greek. It was only once the Jews rejected him and the gospel that there was a focus on taking the gospel out to the Gentile (Greek) world.
8. In Romans, Paul spends the majority of Romans 9-11 on how these two groups relate and what God was doing through them.
 - a. Christianity, remember, is the fulfillment of the Jewish faith; and yet, it also became a new religion because the Jews rejected Christ. One of the problems that post-Jesus Jews had with this supposed fulfillment of their religion was that it included the Greeks, the non-Jews.
 - b. There has also been a history- going back to the first century- of anti-Semitism within parts of the Christian world. Thus, Paul is addressing, in Romans 11, an issue that was present in his day, and that has persisted to the present.

9. How does Paul reconcile it? He puts both groups in their place. He makes clear that the Jews have rejected God's covenant and so God is doing his work through the Greeks. At the same time, he reminds the Greeks that these are promises that have come to them by way of the Jews, and that they are grafted into the promises which God had made with Israel.
10. This language of being grafted in is used to remind them that they have been brought, by God's grace, into something that wasn't originally for them. They are adopted. It isn't that they don't matter, or that they are second-class. Instead, they aren't to be haughty and boastful about their placement within the kingdom as though they are better than the Jews.

Who else?

1. There are two ways which we should understand this "grafting in" of the Greek, aka, non-Jew. First, it is a statement about the place of the Greeks as a whole. In other words, there has been a grafting in of all those who were once left out.
2. The second way would be more specific. The non-Jew has been grafted in, or had the promises of God opened up to them. That means that each of us has the individual opportunity to be grafted in to God's people and his promises.
3. Both ways are important for us. It is important to know that we, as individuals can be grafted into God's covenant through Jesus Christ, and that, when we are, we remain his forever. That is why Jesus came, died, and rose again. That we would be able to come to God through Christ's shed blood.
4. However, we need to understand that other aspect of grafting in, which is that the way has been opened by Christ to all people.
 - a. Are African-Americans made in the image of God, and did Jesus open the way for them to be grafted into the people of God?
 - b. Are Native Americans made in the image of God, and did Jesus open the way for them to be grafted into the people of God?
 - c. Are Muslims of various races from all over the world made in the image of God, and did Jesus open the way for them to be grafted into the people of God?
 - d. Are White-supremacists, made in the image of God, and did Jesus open the way for them to be grafted into the people of God?
5. I could go on and on. There are so many groups that we could try to leave out. It isn't that any specific group is good and has been brought into God's kingdom. It is that we need to remember that Christ's blood has been shed for all in order to open the way for all.
 - a. Racial differences are irrelevant, as the bible is clear that people from every nation will come to the mount of the Lord in the end. Ideological differences will need to be addressed and adjusted as people encounter Christ and are brought into his kingdom. The Holy Spirit will do the work of conforming us all to the image of Christ.
6. What is our role in this world, then, as we look around and see the great divide by grace and ideology? Do we jump in, taking one side or the other? Do we push for the government to solve all of our problems and to save us? Or do we recognize that we have been saved by God's grace in Jesus, and realize that preaching the truth of his gospel is the only thing that will heal the divide and fix this mess of a world?
7. When we see events like what happened in Charlottesville, they hit home. Of course, in that same time, there were a number of terrorist attacks in Europe. Both of those things

should break our hearts, bring us to our knees in prayer that God would heal this world, and bring us out into the world to share the healing power of Christ's blood with this broken, broken world.