

7.07.19 ~ **All are Accepted by God, in Christ, Ephesians 2:11-13**

In our study today (**Ephesians 2:11-13**), Paul addresses the disunity existing between the Jewish and the Gentile believers, in Ephesus.

But first, some important background information: Prior to Christ, the world was basically inhabited by two main groups: Jews and Gentiles [non-Jews]. The Jewish nation (Israel) was chosen by God to bless all nations, through Abraham and his descendants (**Genesis 12:2-3**), "I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing; and I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

God made the Jews to stand out among, and be separate from, all the peoples of the earth; they were to be so different that they couldn't socialize with, or be amalgamated within, other nations. God did this by commanding very specific laws concerning their diet, clothing, marriage, worship, etc., including a special covenant which called for the circumcision of all male children.

God intended these distinctions to set the Jewish nation apart, as His witnesses among Gentile nations; but Israel used these distinctions to promote isolation and self-righteousness.

Most Jews accepted the blessings of God but not the mission of God.

**Isaiah 42:6**, "I will appoint You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the nations."

Speaking of the One who would come through Israel (Messiah, Savior), through the tribe of Judah, God says, **Isaiah 49:6**, "I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

Jesus speaking to His Disciples said (cf. **Acts 1:8**), "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."

**John 14:26**, "the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."

**John 15:26-27**, "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, *that is* the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify about Me, and you *will* testify also, because you have been with Me from the beginning."

The Jews of Jesus day, and for the centuries before Christ, didn't want to share their God with non-Jews, even though this was God's intended purpose for them, that they would bring God's message of God's Son to all nations.

The special covenant relationship God had with Israel was purposed, in order that, through Israel, all nations would come to know the God of Creation. But the

Jews held contempt for all Gentiles and didn't want them to have relationship with God.

Jonah is a great example of this: Jonah lived in the late to mid 700's B.C., during the reign of Jeroboam II (cf. **2Kings 14:25**). Israel was plagued by attacks from Syria and Assyria, whose capital was Nineveh, which was estimated by archaeologists to take three days to walk the radius of that city.

Now it came to pass (**Jonah 1:1-3**), God sent Jonah to Nineveh to preach repentance, although he clearly didn't want his enemies to be saved; Jonah, like the rest of Israel, hated non-Hebrews and didn't want them to know God and to receive God's blessings.

However, Jonah reluctantly did what God commanded (**Jonah 3:4-10**), and the people of Nineveh responded by believing in God; but instead of being happy (**Jonah 4:1-3**), Jonah would rather die than have it be known he had taken part in the salvation of the Ninevites.

It is said that when a Jew reentered Palestine after traveling through other lands, he would shake the dust off of his sandals and clothing so as not to contaminate the Holy Land with Gentile dust.

The enmity between Jews and Gentiles developed over many hundreds of years, and it caused problems in the early church. The converted Jews and converted Gentiles weren't totally accepting of one another, due to their very different traditions, practices, and biases; much like some of the divisions we find within the so-called church today.

God expects Christians to be different, for we are each unique, but even so, we are to act as God's witnesses, in a manner that is pleasing and honoring to God.

The Jews failed as a faithful witness for God, for some of the same reasons the church today is failing: a lack of genuine love [*agapao*], an abundance of self-concern.

**Read Ephesians 2:11-13...** The Jewish converts considered themselves more righteous than the Gentiles, because of the covenant of circumcision; in fact, they called the Gentile Christians "uncircumcised," and themselves "the circumcision" (lit. *in the flesh, made by the hand*).

**Romans 2:28-29**, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and circumcision is that which is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from men, but from God."

**Romans 10:12-13**, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same *Lord* is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for 'Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.'"

One main barrier between the Jewish and Gentile converts, was circumcision, something done to the flesh by the hand of man -- a physical act and cultural practice -- having nothing to do with attaining or displaying righteousness.

How many of us allow the external distinctions of other believers to become an excuse for us to alienate ourselves from them, or worse, to think we are more righteous (acceptable to God) than they (i.e., their preference in clothing, diet, hairstyle, jewelry, to tattoo or not to tattoo, different types of music, or forms of entertainment, education, or economic status, etc.).

God has brought equality to all who trust in Christ, so that, no matter what nationality, ethnic group, level of income or education, etc., we might enjoy unity in the fellowship of believers, as members of God's family; and so, Paul reminds the Gentile believers of their condition prior to their conversion.

**See Ephesians 2:12a... separate from Christ...** They had no Savior or Deliverer; they were without Christ. They had no past or future hope, as a people of God, no purpose, no destiny--only the impending and eternal judgment of God.

Even though God's ultimate plan was for the Gentiles to be one in Christ, by Grace, through faith, they had no such relationship until the coming of Christ.

**See Ephesians 2:12b... excluded from citizenship in Israel...** God made Israel a separated people, set apart from all other people, a theocracy; and He gave them His special blessing, protection, and love, selectively sustaining them (cf. **Amos 3:2**), "You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth." Only those who belonged to the Nation of Israel could obtain spiritual favor with God.

**See Ephesians 2:12c... strangers/foreigners to the covenants of the promise, having no hope...** Prior to their Christian faith, the Gentiles had no covenant, no promised land, let alone the promise of eternal life. God's supreme covenant was with Abraham, the Father of the Jews.

**Genesis 17:7**, "I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.or the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you."

Israel had the assurance of God's promises and provisions, knowing that God was faithful. The Gentiles had no such hope, only an expectation of God's wrath because they weren't His chosen people, the people of the covenant, through Abraham.

**Ephesians 2:12d... without God in the world...** The Gentiles (as a people) believed in a plurality of gods, even that god existed in everything (rocks, trees, animals, etc.).

The Gentiles did not know or believe in the One True God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth. They didn't have a history of covenants and promises like that given to Israel; they didn't have Abraham as their patriarch making them heirs of God's blessings.

And yet, it was God's plan from the very beginning, to bring to Himself everyone who would come by faith and belief, just as did Abraham.

**Galatians 3:6-9**, "Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, 'All the nations will be blessed in you.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer."

**Galatians 3:26-29**, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise."

Notice, in **Ephesians 2:13**, Paul goes on to say the Gentiles [all non-Jews] "who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ."

It was God's plan from the very beginning for everyone to be brought near to God through a common faith and belief in Jesus Christ (not through rituals, covenants, sacrifices, dietary restrictions, traditions, law keeping or human ancestry).

**John 3:16**, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." No wonder Jesus said (**John 14:6**), "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me."

All Gentiles [non-Jews] (prior to receiving Christ as Lord) were separated from God, unable to know Him or please Him. All of us Gentiles were people without any hope.

God set apart the Jewish nation as His called out people, so that all the nations of the world could be blessed through them [through a Jew, Jesus, Yeshua = Deliverer or Savior]... But Israel, as a nation, failed, for they rejected God's Son, their own Savior; and in fact, they are still waiting for Him to come (that will happen, at the end of the Tribulation, at the White Throne Judgment, when all the dead are raised to stand before God; and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is LORD, and then all those who rejected Him while they had life, will be thrown into the Lake of Fire, forever).

But out of Israel came God's Son, proclaiming and providing eternal life to everyone who would trust and believe in Him (no matter what nationality, ethnic group, culture or tongue, they came from).

**1Peter 2:9-10**, "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for *God's* own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

Everyone who believes God's message (**Acts 4:12; 2:21**), and all who have obeyed God by acknowledging (cf. **Hebrews 11:6**) that God exists, and He rewards those who seek Him, have been brought near to God because of what Jesus accomplished on the Cross, at the empty Tomb, and during His many appearances before ascending back to the Father in heaven.

Every person who receives salvation, i.e., every person who will spend eternity with God, does so because of what Jesus Christ, God's Son, Lord and Savior, accomplished, as is recorded in the 66 Books of the Bible. No wonder John declares (**John 20:31**), "these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name; (**1John 5:11-13**), "And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life."

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