

Giving Dignity to the Dogs

But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Matthew 15:26,27

In the verses quoted above we see a vivid example of the position that Gentiles occupied during the earthly ministry of Christ. When a Syrophenician woman, a Gentile, came to Christ to request healing for her daughter, she was initially rebuffed. Her request for her daughter's healing was eventually granted, but not until she agreed with Christ's assessment of her as an undeserving, Gentile dog who was fit only to eat of the crumbs that fell from Israel's table.

In contrast to the attitude that Christ had about Gentiles, Paul presented a very different viewpoint.

For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: . . . That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel: Ephesians 3;1,2,6

No longer are the Gentiles eating crumbs from Israel's table, they are now fellowheirs with Christ and a part of His Body.

In the book of Galatians, Paul gives us the key to understanding how this marvelous transformation took place.

But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. Galatians 5:14,15

There are certainly many reasons why Paul could have gloried in the cross. It was the means of his forgiveness, his justification, his blessing, and his inheritance, to name just a few. But of all the reasons that Paul could have gloried in the cross, the reason that he gives is that it is the means whereby circumcision (Israel) and uncircumcision (Gentiles) were made meaningless in God's sight. It is by the cross that the distinction in humanity between Jew and Gentile was broken down. This is the reason that Paul gloried in the cross. In Ephesians 2, Paul explains in detail the process by which God used the cross work of Christ to break down the division in humanity.

The Division in Humanity

In order to fully appreciate the significance of breaking down the barrier between circumcision and uncircumcision

we must understand how profound and deep that division was. Paul referred to the division in humanity as the "middle wall of partition" (See Ephesians 2:14) and described the implications of it.

Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: Ephesians 2:11,12

Being on the wrong side of the middle wall of partition put the Gentiles at a great disadvantage. As Paul says, it made them "without hope" and "without God in the world".

We must be careful not to think that the Gentile's disadvantage was simply the result of racism or elitism on the part of the Jews. The Scriptures indicate that *God* initiated this division in humanity.

And ye [Israel] shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine. Leviticus 20:26

For thou didst separate them [Israel] from among all the people of the earth, to be thine inheritance, as thou spakest by the hand of Moses thy servant, when thou broughtest our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD. I Kings 8:53

The circumcision was different than the uncircumcision because God had made them different. He had severed and separated Israel from all the other nations of the world. From the passage quoted at the beginning of this article, it is clear that this division in humanity was still in effect during the earthly ministry of Christ.

Israel's Advantages

As we have seen, the erection of the middle wall or partition was an act of God. He created this division by giving Israel blessings and advantages that He did not give to the Gentiles. While Israel had many advantages over the Gentiles, two relate specifically to Paul's discussion in Ephesians 2.

God revealed His will to Israel by giving them His law. Receiving the law of God made Israel head and shoulders above the other nations of the world. While the Gentiles were wandering in ignorance, Israel was privileged to know the true God and His will.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and judgments, even as the LORD my God commanded me, that ye should do so in the land whither ye go to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this

is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Deuteronomy 4:5-8

Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, And knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, An instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Romans 2:17-20

In addition to having God's law, Israel was also privileged to have the dwelling place of God. In time past, God resided in Israel's tabernacle in the wilderness and later in their temple in Jerusalem.

Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Exodus 40:34,35

Now when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the house. And the priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house. II Chronicles 7:1,2

These advantages combined to make Israel the only means of access to God for the Gentile nations. In order for a Gentile to approach God, he had to come through the nation Israel. The Old Testament prophets confirmed that this was indeed the case.

Arise, shine; for thy [Israel's] light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising. Isaiah 60:1-3

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you. Zechariah 8:20-23

There could not be a more vivid contrast than the last phrase of Zechariah 8:23 and the last phrase of Ephesians 2:12 (quoted earlier). When the Gentiles realized that they were "without God in the world" they were to seek out the Jews because they knew that "God [was] with [them]".

The middle wall of partition was very high, very thick, and

very strong. It enclosed Israel in a position of privilege while separating the Gentiles from God and His blessing. In order for a Gentile to have access to God's blessing, he had to approach Him through that privileged nation, Israel. It is this humble approach that allowed the Syrophenician woman discussed at the beginning of this article to receive healing for her daughter.

Breaking Down the Middle Wall

Immediately after describing the position of the Gentiles in "time past," Paul takes an abrupt turn in his writing with the phrase "but now".

But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Ephesians 2:13,14

In contrast to the separation that existed in time past, God has now "made both one" by breaking down the "middle wall of partition". In breaking down the middle wall of partition, God had eliminated the distinction between circumcision and uncircumcision, between Jew and Gentile.

The key to breaking down the middle wall of partition was in eliminating the law as a means of righteousness and access to God. As long as access to God came through the law, and Israel had the law, the division in humanity would continue. Through the cross of Christ, God was able to eliminate the law as a means of righteousness and access.

Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Ephesians 2:15-18

This conclusion is very much in keeping with Paul's instructions to the church at Colossi.

Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ. Colossians 2:14-17

In Paul's explanation of salvation by grace, he points to the fact that God's righteousness is now made known *without* the law.

But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: Romans 3:21,22

Notice that the manifestation of God's righteousness without the law occurs in the same "but now" time period as the breaking down of the middle wall of partition. When God took the law out of the way, He took the middle wall of partition out of the way. When Israel's law ceased to be

the means of access to God, Israel ceased to be the means of access to God.

In the Age of Grace, the "but now" time that Paul refers to, access to God's righteousness comes through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross. God's righteousness is made know through Christ, not through the Law of Moses. In the elimination of the law as the manifestation of God's righteousness one of Israel's great advantages was taken away.

The Dwelling Place of God

As we have seen previously, the second of Israel's great advantages was that they had the dwelling place of God. Paul continues in Ephesians 2 by explaining that this advantage has also now been taken away.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

Paul indicates that today God is building a new temple, a temple that is not made of stone and wood and decked with gold. The temple that God is building today is made of people, people that have been eternally, inseparably, united to Christ. Notice that Paul tells the Gentiles that they are "built" upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets and that they are "builded" together. The Gentiles themselves are the building blocks of this new temple. Once God has placed us into the building, the temple, He then comes to dwell in the temple that he has built with us. This is the amazing and wonderful truth of our identification with Christ. We are placed in Him as the building blocks of a new temple so that He can then come and dwell in that temple—in us! We are placed into Christ and He in turn is placed into us.

Paul consistently confirms the truth of this fact in his epistles.

For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building. I Corinthians 3:9

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. Galatians 2:20

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: Colossians 1:27

One of the most pointed passages in this regard is Paul's

instruction to Timothy about the role of the Body of Christ and the local assembly.

These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory. I Timothy 3:14-16

This passage is not, as is often thought, describing the incarnation of Christ. It is describing the ministry of the Body of Christ in the Age of Grace. The Body of Christ is God manifest in the flesh today. Just as Christ displayed God's glory in human flesh in time past, the Body of Christ is displaying God's glory in the flesh in the Age of Grace. As Galatians 2:20 (quoted above) points out, the life that is now lived in our body of flesh is not ours, it is the life of Christ.

In the Age of Grace God does not dwell in a temple in Jerusalem, He dwells in the Body of Christ. Israel's great advantage of having the dwelling place of God has been eliminated.

The Riches of God's Grace

As we consider the wonderful work that God is doing among the Gentiles today we ought not to think that the Jews have been abandoned with no hope of salvation. Paul explains in his epistle to the Romans that God has, in essence, declared the Jews to be Gentiles, separated from God. Whereas in time past, the Gentiles had to become like the Jews to be saved, today the Jews must become like the Gentiles.

For as ye [Gentiles] in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their [Jew's] unbelief: Even so have these [Jews] also now not believed, that through your [Gentiles] mercy they [Jews] also may obtain mercy. For God hath concluded them all [Jews] in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all [Jew and Gentile]. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! Romans 11:30-33

God's outpouring of mercy on the Gentiles, includes the offering of mercy to Jews. Today, all men have been declared lost, alienated, separated from God. God is now free to offer access through Christ to both those who are Jews by birth and those who are Gentiles by birth. Both can now be united in the Body of Christ as the dwelling place of God.

We should all join with Paul in glorying in the cross of Christ because it is by the cross that all men, without distinction, have access to God's salvation and blessing