

2. Jew and Gentile (3Q 2010—Redemption in Romans)

Biblical material: *Romans* 2; *Leviticus* 23, *Matt.* 19:17, *John* 1:17, *Acts* 15:1–29, *Gal.* 1:1–12, *Heb.* 8:6, *Rev.* 12:17.

Quotes

- I am neither Jew nor Gentile, Mahomedan nor Theist; I am but a member of the human family... *Frances Wright*
- Jew and Gentile are two worlds, between you Gentiles and us Jews there lies an unbridgeable gulf... There are two life forces in the world: Jewish and Gentile... I do not believe that this primal difference between Gentile and Jew is reconcilable... *Maurice Samuel*
- If you ever forget you're a Jew, a Gentile will remind you. *Bernard Malamud*
- God is sacred. Religion is profane. *Rain Bojangles*

Questions

Why discuss the difference between Jews and Gentiles? How does this relate to our perspective today? How does Paul explain what God thinks of such divisions? What does the written law do? How do we represent/misrepresent God? In what way do such concepts fit in with the issues revealed in the great controversy? How do we relate?

Bible discussion

Romans chapter 2 follows on the discussion about those who turn away from God, and then focuses on the need for repentance, literally “change of mind.” Most of all we need to change our mind about God, who in his kindness is trying to get us to think this way (2:4). Paul particularly addresses those who think that outward observance is the key to salvation, and makes it clear that motivation is key (2:7, 8). Specifically Paul is speaking to both Jew and Gentile, and explaining that whether you have the written law or not does not make a difference in terms of the basis of salvation, and that God has no favorites (2:9-11).

Nor is it a matter of just hearing what the law says, but doing. (Of course, a legalistic observance is also problematic, a subject he develops later). The foreigner (Gentile) who “naturally” do what’s right are still operating according to the law, even though they may not know it (2:15). Boasting about having some special relationship with God is also irrelevant, especially if it doesn’t change a sinful way of life. And to teach all the requirements of the law without following them yourself is pointless (2:17-22).

Worst of all is how God is misrepresented by those who claim to be his followers (2:23, 24). This slandering of God’s character results in others rejecting God because of the wrong concepts that have been portrayed—the ongoing issue in the great controversy. Paul then discusses the whole issue of “righteousness of circumcision,” pointing out that what counts is not the outward sign but an inner change in the heart (2:25-29). Only then can we begin to be made right by God, and as we’ll see in the next chapter, then we can come to an understanding of what this really means! For it is of God and from God, and that’s where our focus needs to be...

Comment

The disappointment inherent in these lessons is the stated perspective that “Because only one quarter has been allotted to the study of the book, we have had to be selective in what parts we can study.” Sadly in the assigned biblical material for this week there is not a single text from Romans, which seems rather perverse... For this reason I have added Romans 2 and this will be the basis for our study, since chapters 2 and 3 are very much about “Jew and Gentile.” A chapter a week really is not so difficult! The essential aspects of this chapter center on the fact that none of us have any excuses! We stand before God acknowledging our faults and failings, and yet confidently look to him for his gracious help and healing. Instead of claiming to have such a special relationship with God based on who we are, and our wonderful system of theological insight, we need to realize that God does not have any favorites. He looks to see results—what we are truly like in what we do, rather than in all our contemptuous claims. (Jonathan, why use a big word when a smaller one will do just nicely?)

So much of what Paul writes to his Jewish contemporaries applies to us today. With an emphasis on law, with much reliance on rules and regulations, we can easily become sidetracked. This is not just overt legalism (although that has always plagued the church), but also a preoccupation with our legal standing before God, even as we stress “righteousness by faith”! Making our salvation into some kind of “legal fix” with God does not deal with the heart of the problem—our evil, corrupted minds that Paul describes so well.

Jew or Gentile—while our backgrounds certainly impact our ways of thinking, our social environment, and how we relate to each other—before God we have nothing to claim. That’s why everyone needs God’s good news, for none of us has anything in ourselves to boast about. As Paul concludes this chapter, “What makes you a Jew is on the inside, a “circumcision of the heart,” following not the letter of the law but the spirit. Such a person looks for praise from God, not from people.” (2:29 FBV).

Ellen White Comments

During His earthly ministry Christ began to break down the partition wall between Jew and Gentile, and to preach salvation to all mankind. Though He was a Jew, He mingled freely with the Samaritans, setting at nought the Pharisaic customs of the Jews with regard to this despised people. He slept under their roofs, ate at their tables, and taught in their streets.

The Saviour longed to unfold to His disciples the truth regarding the breaking down of the “middle wall of partition” between Israel and the other nations--the truth that “the Gentiles should be fellow heirs” with the Jews and “partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel.” Ephesians 2:14; 3:6. This truth was revealed in part at the time when He rewarded the faith of the centurion at Capernaum, and also when He preached the gospel to the inhabitants of Sychar. Still more plainly was it revealed on the occasion of His visit to Phoenicia, when He healed the daughter of the Canaanite woman. These experiences helped the disciples to understand that among those whom many regarded as unworthy of salvation, there were souls hungering for the light of truth. {AA 19-20}

...in heaven there is no respect of persons; that Jew and Gentile are alike precious in God’s sight; that through Christ the heathen may be made partakers of the blessings and privileges of the gospel.... {CC 335}

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