

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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What is the Truth of the Gospel? Preached unto the Gentiles

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. (1 Timothy 3:16)

Although first century Judaism allowed Gentiles to convert and hold "Proselyte" status, it carefully limited Gentile participation in its culture and worship. Paul refers to this limitation as a wall.

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us. (Ephesians 2:14, KJV 1900)

The "both" of this verse refers to "both" Jews and Gentiles. The barrier between Jews and non-Jews in first century Judaism seemed insurmountable to the informed first century Jewish worshipper, but God removed it. In fact, it seemed impossible to Peter as he experienced the breaking down of that barrier at the house of Cornelius.

And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? (Acts 10:28-29)

Peter's statement to Cornelius indicates that "...it is an unlawful thing...to keep company..." with a Gentile. From the perspective of Jews vs. Gentiles, first century Jewish worship maintained strict barriers between the two, the point Paul addresses in Ephesians 2:14 and context.

Some commentaries observe in our study verse that Paul presents three couplets, three contrasting pairs of ideas.

1. Flesh and spirit.
2. Angels and Gentiles.
3. This world and glory.

In the angels-Gentiles couplet, on one side we see those somewhat mysterious beings whom God created as His special emissaries to aid and protect His people in this life. The first chapter of Hebrews says more about the work of angels than appears in any other single passage in the Bible. (Hebrews 1:4-14; particular Verse 14) The contrast observed in this couplet juxtaposes angels, those beings

closest to God, and Gentiles, humans most distant to God.

As Paul points out in Ephesians 2:14, Jesus in His coming dissolved the distinction between Jew and Gentile. While angels saw what they could not have imagined beforehand, Gentiles experienced what they had never thought possible as well. Let's examine more of Paul's teaching from the second chapter of Ephesians.

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 2:17-18)

Preaching the gospel to Gentiles didn't begin with Peter and the house of Cornelius. **It began with Jesus.** We read of Jesus' tender attention to Gentiles throughout the gospels. In several instances, Jesus called special attention to the incredible faith that Gentiles showed toward Him. (Matthew 8:10 and Matthew 15:27; read both lessons in their full context)

Jewish worship in the first century was based on a rather intense elitism, Jews considering themselves to be God's special, chosen people to preserve His worship. We observe this arrogant attitude and think ourselves supremely blessed that we do not live in such a culture. Well we should. However, well-meaning Christians often impose their own form of elitism onto others that is no less unbiblical than the first century model. Consider just a few prevailing ideas that many contemporary Christians embrace and promote.

1. If only those who believe and obey the gospel are born again, become God's children, God must surely have a special bias that favors western European people over any other region or culture in the world. While we see Christians from most cultures in the world, the number in any of those cultures is scant indeed when compared with Christians of western European background. At times this bias has taken on highly objectionable forms as in past Armstrong claims that God appointed the British Empire as His new Israel. Most of the time the point is more

subtle, but nonetheless quite present. This prejudicial idea, blatant or subtle, contradicts God's proclamation that He has a people in every nation and culture with no indication that He favors one over the other. (Revelation 5:9)

2. Occasionally denominational groups will claim that only the people who believe their particular teachings, follow their rules, and remain true to those rules "Till death do us part" are children of God. If this be the case, heaven will be barely populated, and hell will suffer a population explosion.
3. More startling than either of these views is the occasional myopic belief among people who claim to hold to the doctrines of grace that God imposed two elections onto His administration of grace, not one. According to this view, God indeed chose a vast number from every race and culture to be His children, but He also chose a finite number, a near-microscopic number out of that vast multitude, whom He favors with an irresistible, effectual revelation of truth so that they alone actually come to know the truth of the gospel and to enjoy its special blessings. This view seems to have more in common with first century Jewish elitism than either of the other views, though all of them fall prey to a form of arrogant elitism.

What does Scripture say about the availability of the gospel and its rich blessings to God's regenerated, or born-again, children? Does Scripture justify any of these elitist ideas?

Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all. (Romans 4:16, KJV 1900)

While the third chapter of Romans deals extensively with God's purpose and work in the eternal deliverance of His chosen people, the fourth chapter builds on that base and teaches extensively on the blessings of walking by faith, serving God in the here and now, and enjoying the special blessings that God promised to Abraham as he and his heirs walked by faith.

The "it" of this verse refers to God's blessings to Abraham that He promised on the condition of Abraham and his offspring walking according to "...the righteousness of faith." (Romans 4:13) This term, "the righteousness of faith," simply describes a right lifestyle that builds on indwelling faith (Indwelling faith will never direct behavior that contradicts God's moral Law). God did not promise these special blessings to Abraham or to His "seed" simply because they were some kind of special people, the elitist error of first century Judaism. God gave the promise of blessing only as Abraham

and His offspring obeyed God and walked by faith in Him, despite the obstacles and trials of the path.

How does this verse address the question before us? It refutes any notion of elitism whatever. The promise of blessing, according to Paul's inspired words, is a matter of faith, not a matter of God choosing one of His children to those blessings and not choosing others. People who have experienced the miracle of God's grace in their heart receive the promise of blessings in obedience that God gave to Abraham. This promise is "...sure to all the seed..." not just to a minuscule percent of the seed. God never intended to limit this promise to Abraham's natural descendants at the exclusion of Gentiles. Paul presents Abraham as "...the father of us all..." Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female (Galatians 3:28); God proclaims the blessings of the gospel to every child in His family on the same basis, the "...righteousness of faith..." In this promise, God erases any and all forms of elitism or exclusivism. In fact, He frowns on the idea.

In human families, one of the most toxic elements to a healthy family is the favoritism of the parents toward one child over the other children in the family. Most of us have seen this travesty at one time or another, so we have seen the devastating impact it has on a family. God orders His family after a better model than this fallen and broken example. He saves every member of His family by grace alone. We experience the new birth in exactly the same way, by the sovereign work of the Holy Spirit. (John 3:8; "...so is **every one that is born of the Spirit**") God doesn't have multiple ways of producing the new birth. He created one way from the beginning, and that way successfully produces the new birth in every one of those whom He chose in love to save.

And, after we experience this life-giving transformation, God continues to manifest His amazing love toward every heir of His eternal glory. The promise of blessings in the here-and-now is just as broad as His work of grace. Every person who has experienced that work within has the same promise of blessings. Those blessings are contingent on our "...righteousness of faith..." our living in harmony with the testimony of His Law, written in our hearts and minds. Every child who walks by faith shall rejoice in the Abrahamic blessings that God promised. Every child of God who refuses to walk according to the "...righteousness of faith..." shall suffer the absence of those blessings. Even Gentiles now enjoy exactly the same privilege of blessings as Jews, for all of these blessings flow through the "...righteousness of faith..." not through a superficial or artificial restriction. While angels saw God manifest in the flesh and marveled, Gentiles now hear the joyful proclamation of the gospel and realize the good news. We, no less than Abraham himself, may rejoice with "...joy unspeakable and full of glory." (1 Peter 1:8)

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Worship service each Sunday
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10:30 A. M.
Pastor