

God Revealed through the Church

The Church - A Demonstration of God's Universal Acceptance

When we look at the world we cannot miss the fact that it is full of conflict ranging from interpersonal conflict to nations at war and everything in between. There are constant tensions that arise on the basis of race, ethnicity, ideology, religion and many other factors. People find it difficult to accept each other as they are and have an inbred hostility towards anyone who is different to them. The question that we need to ask ourselves is “how does God view those who are different from us?”

Ephesians 2: 11 – 22

1) Segregation Revealed

- We can give numerous reasons to base segregation on but the heart of the matter is that segregation arises out of hearts of sin.
 - The “them and us” attitude goes way back to the time of the fall.
 - But generally everyone accepted each other and were capable of amazing feats as a united people.
 - Genesis 11: 6 “The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.”
 - They were working together for their own pride
 - Genesis 6: 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."
 - God brought confusion amongst them, scattering them over the earth. The nations were formed.
- Since then there has been enmity between people on all levels – a universal unacceptance of each other.
 - This isn't revealed more than in the colonial era where the colonisers not only conquered lands but made every effort to change the local people into the same culture as theirs.
 - We often regard our people and culture as superior to others.
 - This was the big problem in South Africa during apartheid.
 - The attitude that is strongly portrayed in this is “If the people from other cultures are going to advance in any way then they ought to become like us. They need to change their views to think like us and do everything the way we would. If they can't then we ought to rather remain separate”.
 - This type of thinking has the sin of pride as its foundation.
- God had chosen the nation of Israel to be a channel of His purposes here on earth.
 - God had made His covenants with Israel
 - In the Jewish mind the world was divided into two – Jews and Gentiles
 - When we read the historical account of the nation of Israel we will notice that they had misunderstood God's purpose in choosing them as a nation and instead of being a blessing to all the nations of the earth they became conceited in their idea of being a chosen people.
 - When I started in ministry I ministered in an organisation led by a Jewish believer. He said that before he believed he would give evangelists a hard time and tell them that he is going to heaven because he is of the chosen race – the Jews – and that they are the ones going to hell.
 - Genesis 12: 1 – 3 The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."
 - We need to be careful, as the church, not to judge Israel but to be aware that we are also capable of being exclusive in regard to who we invite to our church and homes and who we would reach out to.

- We need to remember God's grace upon us so that we don't exclude anyone from God's plan of salvation.
 - We need to remember that at one time we too were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world.

2) Universal acceptance and reconciliation through the cross

- When God made the covenant with Abraham He foresaw what He was planning to do through Israel in Christ.
 - Jesus came as a Jew firstly to the Jews and then also to the Gentiles fulfilling the promise that through the nation of Israel all peoples on earth will be blessed.
 - God was at no time exclusive but desires the blessing for all people.
 - Jesus interacted with Roman Centurions, Caananite women and Samaritans just to name a few non Jews who He interacted with.
 - After His resurrection He commanded His disciples to go and make disciples of all nations.
 - When Peter went to Cornelius's house and the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius, a Gentile, and his household Peter and the Jewish believers were amazed that God would extend His promises to Gentiles as well.
 - Jesus had offered universal acceptance through His blood
 - He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.
 - God wasn't concerned about a person's race, religion, nationality, gender or any other characteristic.
 - His sacrifice on the cross was for all people that through His blood shed on the cross all people may be reconciled to God and to one another.
 - In God alone can man meet man George Macdonald (1824–1905)
 - To reconcile man with man and not with God is to reconcile no one at all.
Thomas Merton (1915–1968)
 - It was at the cross that the hostility in our hearts towards God and others is removed that we may live at peace with one another.
 - It is at the cross that we see each other through the eyes of God and not through the eyes of race, religion or gender.

3) A new citizenship

- Through Christ God has created for Himself a new people
 - 2 Corinth.5: 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!
 - Galatians 3: 28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus"
- God has created for Himself one body that has the full rights of citizenship to enter into His throne room of grace to worship Him.
- We are citizens with God's people and members of God's household without discrimination nor segregation.
 - At the cross there has been reconciliation and not merely integration of diverse people
 - Integration forced some people to change their behaviour. Reconciliation invites the changing of hearts
Spencer Perkins
- It is when the church lives out love and acceptance for one another regardless of our racial, religious or gender background on the basis of what Christ has done for us on the cross we become a demonstration of God's universal acceptance to the world.