

# BEING JOINT HEIRS WITH CHRIST

*“That the gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise by Christ in the gospel”.*

Ephesians 3:6

It is wonderful that, in recent years, many Christians have received a new appreciation of the importance of Israel and the Jewish people in the purposes of God. We only wish there were more of us! But at least many of us have come to realize that Jesus, and all the first apostles were Jewish, that all the human authors of the New Testament (with the possible exception of Luke) were Jews. The mother church at Jerusalem was Jewish, and, for the first few years of its history, the Church as a whole was overwhelmingly Jewish in membership.

## Israel's Future

A growing number within the Church believe that Israel has a future and a hope in God. They believe that the Lord has promised repentance for the whole chosen nation, and that Israel's return to its Land, and the amazing growth of congregations of Israeli Jewish believers in Jesus, are of prophetic significance.

## A plea for balance

There is in all of us a tendency, when we see a new aspect of truth, to “pendulum”, and overemphasize the “new” thing we have seen, to the detriment of the full revelation of the word of God. If we yield to this tendency, we display immaturity. We can be so keen to emphasize the importance of Jewishness, that it is possible for us to obscure the truth that Gentiles are equal to, and as good as Jews in the Ecclesia. I wonder if we have had the nagging thought that the era of the majority Gentile Church is a tragedy, even a mistake (as if God ever made mistakes!).

Dr. Dwight Pryor could not be accused of being against Jewishness. In a tape, which I heard back in 1998, entitled “*Dangers in Jewish Roots Teaching*”, he made the point that Jewish Roots teachers (like many evangelicals) can tend to denigrate the Church, and make a blanket assertion that what is Gentile is inferior to what is Jewish, that the Church before the Emperor Constantine was good, and after him it all went bad. He makes a plea for balance, and says that ultimately the Jewish Roots movement will stand or fall on its affirmation or otherwise of Christ’s Deity and Saviourhood, of the Cross, and the importance of the Apostle Paul’s teaching. Jesus the Jewish Rabbi must never eclipse Jesus the Divine Redeemer.

## **Has there been any Gentile Contribution to the Church?**

All the foundations of the Church were laid by Jewish apostles. There is no doubt about that. The NT canon is the capstone of God’s self-revelation. We should look for no further revelation. Neither Gentile nor Jew can add to what has already been revealed in Holy Scripture.

I have heard it taught that the Jew is practical, concentrating on Torah, on real life situations, whereas the Greek is speculative, with too much interest in doctrine – the implication being that ethics is good, doctrine is bad. Of course, the real truth is that we need both.

## **The Church Fathers**

History shows us that the post-apostolic Gentile Church at its best was strong on both ethics and doctrine. The really sad

thing about the post-apostolic church is that its attitude towards unbelieving Israel became negative. Gentile believers, who owed so much to the Jew Paul, ceased to share his love for his Jewish brethren, who had rejected the true Messiah (Rom 10:1). They lost a vision of the Covenant-keeping God, who would never reject his people, whom he foreknew (Rom 11:1/2). Just as Israel became “*blind in part*” (Rom 11:25), so the Gentile church came into a partial blindness, but not a total blindness, as history teaches us.

Both prior to and after the death of the Apostles, a great flood of error assailed the Church, and only the firm faithfulness of the Church Fathers kept the Gospel alive. Gnosticism, had it been victorious, would have made the Church a “New Age” sect. Montanism (a 2nd Century over-the-top Charismatic movement) would have seen it lost in a slough of subjectivism.

Marcionism would have edited out anything Jewish from the New Testament canon of scripture, and Arianism (Fourth Century Unitarianism – the Jehovah’s Witnesses of that day) would have put “another Jesus”, who cannot save, into the place of the God-man, who wrought out our salvation on the cross, and made it available by His resurrection.

The British monk Pelagius would have given us a gospel of good works without saving grace and God-given faith.

Had there not been an Irenaeus, an Athanasius, the Council of Nicaea, an Augustine, there would have been no gospel today for Jews or Gentiles to believe in and be saved! It would have been lost without

trace! God used these Gentile men by his providential care to preserve “the faith once delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

Some reading these words might ask, “Arianism? What’s that? Irenaeus? Athanasius? Who were they then?” The very fact that these questions might be asked would be proof positive that some Christians have lost a grasp of their own history. The worst attack on the Church was not the pagan persecutions which killed the body, but the heresies which assailed the soul. Had it not been for those Gentile heroes of the Faith (in all their imperfections), whom God raised up, where would we be? The Church Fathers were the Church’s parallel to the Judges of Israel: great deliverers, with prominent “warts”.

Now it is perfectly true that some of the beliefs of the Fathers were somewhat odd. We can trace the beginnings of Mariolatry, the revering of relics and belief in pious miracles back to these men. But the truths they held far outweighed the errors they fell into. If this were not so, where would any generation of Christians be? For we all get some things wrong.

## The Glorious Reformation

The father of the Reformation, Martin Luther, became, sadly, an anti-Semite. There can be no excuse for that! But it is still true that God raised him up, and used him to restore to us the truth of Justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, which is the grand central pillar of the Gospel of salvation. The principle of “sola scriptura” (Scripture alone) made a revolutionary break from the Medieval trust in Church Councils and

Papal pronouncements as sources of Divine revelation. Modern believers, both Jewish and Gentile, still have much to thank Martin Luther for.

William Tyndale, that Gloucestershire Gentile, gave the Bible to the English speaking world. Many, even of Israeli believers, speak English, and can thank this man, who was willing to be strangled and burned in the town square at Vilvorde, Belgium, in payment for restoring to us the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures in “a language understood of the people”.

In Britain among the Puritans, the Scottish Presbyterians, the early Methodists & the 19th Century Evangelicals the world saw Gentile Christians, who had a vision for the restoration of the Jewish people to their promised land, and to their true Messiah, Yeshua, Jesus of Nazareth. If you haven’t seen it, get the DVD called “*The Destiny of Britain*”, and be thrilled by the vision and love your Evangelical fathers had for Israel. In many cases it was the Gentile Christians, who had a clearer vision for Israel’s restoration than the Jewish establishment of their day.

## Summing up

What am I saying? Simply that we need to affirm that, through faith in the Messiah Jesus, Jew and Gentile are equally loved equally saved, and equally of value. They are fellow-heirs and fellow-partakers of God’s salvation.

“Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God”, wrote the apostle Paul (1 Cor 10:32). He distinguishes in these words between three

groups of people, and is saying that Jews and Gentiles are different in character, but that the “church of God” is different again, for it is made up of people of both Jewish and Gentile origin, who are now “one new man” in Christ (Eph 2:15).

That is why, as far as being part of the Body is concerned, “*there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Gal 3:28). In Messiah the “*middle wall of partition*” has come down. The enemy of our souls would love to rebuild it. The one thing that will keep this from happening is love:

1. love for God and the truth of his word;
2. love for Christ, who died to destroy the wall of partition;
3. love towards the Jewish people, even in their unbelief;
4. love for the unsaved of the Gentile nations – the church still has a mission to them;
5. love of the brethren – for one another, whether we began as Jewish or Gentile sinners!

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