

This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of the promise in Christ Jesus. *Ephesians 3.6.*

So far in *Ephesians* we have learned that this muddled, sad world is not yet finished. God has a plan to bring all the brokenness together in Christ. We know God is able to do this, because he has shewn his power by raising Christ from the dead at Easter. And this joining together plan has already begun by breaking down the ancient dividing wall between Jew and Gentile. The Gentiles have been grafted on to God's chosen people, Israel, through Christ, 2.12-13 ... and 3.6...

The world desperately needs more of this bridge-building. We are tired of walls which divide people. Isn't it wonderful that God has given us hope, by revealing to us that he has a plan to join everything in heaven and earth together in Christ, 1.9-10...? Paul tells us here that it is a *mystery*, a *secret*, lately revealed to him, that the Gentiles are to be included with Israel, 3.4-6... But was it really a secret, previously hidden? Last week we saw how the Bible is basically the working out of God's promise to Abraham that through him *all* the peoples of the earth would be blessed by God. (That's the 'promise' referred to in our text, 3.6...) Two whole books of the OT are devoted to non-Jews: *Ruth* (the great-grandmother of the great King David himself) and *Jonah* (who was sent to preach to the non-Jews of Assyrian Nineveh). And didn't the prophet Isaiah repeatedly call Israel a 'light to the *Gentiles*'?

So it's not really a secret in the OT that God intended to include the Gentiles with the Jews. Perhaps the Jews had become

so used to being God's 'special people' that they had ignored this OT teaching. It had become a 'mystery' to them.

The point is that God's plan to save the world is, to use the modern trendy word, 'inclusive'. And this, folks, is where we start to get into bother. Inclusiveness is our modern religion. Despite biology, women over 40 *must* have free access to IVF, because they must not be *excluded*. It is now a criminal offence to exclude people, to discriminate against them.

This is what today is ripping the Church apart, especially the Anglican communion. In the name of inclusiveness, homosexuals demand the *right* to the full privileges and highest offices in the church. After all, isn't the Church an inclusive institution? Doesn't Jesus include *everyone*? (I remember replying to a woman who was insisting on this, that by *her* argument, that meant that Jesus included all the paedophiles too. She spluttered at that and went quiet).

I think we need to make clear what we mean by this deceptively simple word 'inclusive'. The world has an ideology based on *its* sense of inclusiveness. Sexual deviants are very welcome in their Big Tent, though Christians can't be so sure.

God *also* is inclusive but it's completely different from trendy secular ideology. Canon Mary Glasspool, the American lesbian minister, demanded to be made a bishop in the Episcopalian Church on the grounds of her human rights.

This makes complete sense from a worldly point of view. But it entirely misunderstands God. None of us, not one of us, has any right whatsoever to rush into God's company waving our human rights to demand our entitlements. He is a holy God, a

consuming fire. Who shall abide the day of his coming? Who are we to demand our rights of God? We are sinners - all of us - and the only thing we deserve from him is to be sent straight to hell.

My point is this. We are included by God. We are welcomed by him, but it is on *his* terms, not ours. None of us has any right whatsoever to sit around this holy Table to dine with the living Lord Jesus. None of us is good enough. We have no rights. But we *can* sit around this Table, simply because Christ himself has graciously invited us. We can enter God's holy presence, not because we have any right to, but because God has dealt with our sin which blocks him off from us. He has sent his Son, Jesus, to make an atoning sacrifice on the Cross. Once a person in a marriage has cheated on the other, the relationship is broken, isn't it? How can it be fixed? With great difficulty and much cost. So it is with the broken relationship we sinners have with the holy God.

Gentiles are included now in Israel, *not* because they have a right, but because God has graciously invited them. Sinners are included in Christ, not because we can wave our human rights and demand out entitlements, but because God has taken the measures required at Calvary's Cross to fix our broken relationship with him.

We sinners sit around this table with Christ because he has graciously invited us. Because he has paid the price for us, we can now hold our heads up high in God's holy presence, and feel absolutely confident that God wants to hear us, *Eph* 3.12... It's to do with repentance, not our rights!