

Episode 127

Anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

- *Romans 10.13*

Why does Paul spend so much time digging into the past, turning over every stone in order to bring clarity to the tension between Jew and Gentile?

In Paul's early years of ministry, taking the gospel to the gentiles had resulted in serious opposition from Jewish Christians. They insisted that certain laws be adhered to, and certain Jewish traditions be preached as kingdom commandments. At times, this had deeply divided the church. Now the pendulum has swung to the other extreme and Paul is writing to the church in Rome to address the mirror-error of what had happened in Antioch. At the time of writing, the church in Rome was predominantly gentile and had begun to look down their noses at the Jews, thinking that they had had their chance, and now it was their turn to take the lead and dust themselves off from any past mistakes the Jews had made in distorting the gospel.

Another factor contributing to the divide was that there was a long tradition of antisemitism among the Romans. Within Rome in particular, the Jews were viewed as a very strange people group, with their own laws, customs religious beliefs and festivals, as well as being very opinionated regarding their views on government, finance and politics - not to mention the church. Eventually, in 49 AD, Emperor Claudius expelled all the Jews from Rome. It is believed that tensions had boiled over leading to riots breaking out between Jews who had become Christians, and those who held to their religious traditions, and when the unrest that had become such an issue in Jerusalem began to fester in Rome, the Emperor passed an edict banishing all Jews from his city.

Fortunately, edicts such as these ceased to carry authority once the emperor died. And so, years later, when the previously expelled Jews returned home, they found that the gentile Christians who had been running the church for the past few years - rather enjoying making the church into a gentile institution - didn't want to have to deal with the Jews who were back in town. Even though they were part of the same church and part of the same body, they were left separated and segregated from their fellow believers.

And so, Paul writes to remind them that there is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for they are all one in Christ Jesus. While the law's way of making a person right with God requires obedience to all its commands, faith's way of getting right with God says that anyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.

I wonder if we will experience similar ripples running through the church as we begin to gather again, returning from lockdown, separated into pro-vaxxers and anti-vaxxers, divided along conspiracy lines of politics and people-groups, or will we hold to scripture that says that when we place our faith in Christ Jesus, there is no benefit in being circumcised or uncircumcised, vaccinated, or unvaccinated. But rather, what is important is faith expressing itself in love.

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