

## **Remember The Christians**

**Unity Through Christ**

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Recently my wife and I saw the movie "Remember the Titans." Many of you have probably seen it yourself. But when I watched it, I was very positively impressed by it. I am not usually impressed too much by movies. I enjoy them for their entertainment value, but it is a rare movie that makes me really think about other things that might apply. What impressed me was not the details of the situation it portrayed but the overall themes and principles that it illustrated. It was not so much the struggles and triumphs of integrating a high school football program as much as how analogous it is to our Christian life.

I do not want to take the time to rehearse the plot. I would probably bore those of you who have seen it, and I would give it away for those who have not. But the overall subject of "Remember the Titans" deals with the difficulties of integrating two very different groups into one unit. In this instance, the school board in this northern Virginian area decided in 1971 to integrate two high schools—one all black, and one all white—into one. The vehicle to illustrate all the problems that this caused, and the way they worked it out, was to use the football team as a microcosm of, not only the school, but the way that the town itself dealt with the problem.

By naming the film "Remember the Titans," the writer or the producers of the film wanted us to recall rallying cries of years past. We all remember "Remember the Alamo!" or "Remember the Maine." We are living at a time when racial unrest is beginning to bubble to the surface again. It has kind of slowed down since September 11<sup>th</sup> because terrorism has sort of taken the front burner, so to speak. But these people who made this film wanted us to consider, remember, the Titans.

Remember how, even though they had a problem that they were faced with (integrating a black and a white school), they found ways to overcome it. So the writers or the producers wanted us to think about how two hostile

camps—with a little bit of time and effort—could become one, work together, and accomplish something remarkable. They want us to think that it can happen again, that it can be repeated, and there does not need to be the separation.

Now, the analogy has an obvious spiritual application to it. First of all, we will see from the Bible how it applied in the New Testament church. Then we will apply it to us, more personally. So I have titled this sermon "Remember the Christians." Please turn to Matthew 15 and we will read a little passage that comes out of the life of Christ, where we will be able to see the *tensions* between the Jews and the Gentiles. I will be using this tension—this set of *prejudices*—between the Jews and the Gentiles as an illustration, and show you how it affected the New Testament church.

**Matthew 15:21** Then Jesus went out from there and departed to the region of Tyre and Sidon.

This was over on the coast. It was predominately a Phoenician, or Gentile, region.

**Matthew 15:22-28** And behold, a woman of Canaan [In Mark, she is called a Syro-Phoenician. So she was obviously of Gentile extraction.] came from that region and cried out to Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David! My daughter is severely demon-possessed." But He answered her not a word. And His disciples came and urged Him, saying, "Send her away, for she cries after us." But He answered and said, "I was not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Then she came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, help me!" But He answered and said, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs." And she said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs eat the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." Then Jesus answered and said to her, "O woman, great is your faith! Let it be to you as you desire." And her daughter was healed from that very hour.

Some might look at this and say that Jesus was just continuing the prejudices of His forefathers against the Gentiles. That would be a very surface understanding of what was going on here. One might even say that His

attitude of her was rather dismissive. "I don't want to have anything to do with you." He would not answer her. Then, when He did, He said that He was not sent to her or to anyone like her. And then, when she still persisted, He insulted her by calling her "a dog"—which was a common Jewish epitaph against the Gentiles.

I could probably name to you some epitaphs that we use for other groups. And we would immediately react with offense. It is the same thing that happens with this lady. She could have acted with offense. But I do not think Jesus' attitude was intended to cause offense—nor was it intended to be dismissive of her. He was *testing* her. He was putting roadblock after roadblock in front of her to see the extent of her desire, her faith, and her resolve to have this problem overcome by Him.

Her attitude was (excuse the pun) dogged determination. She would not give up. Like a bulldog on a bone, she would not let go! She just kept on. Even though He was putting up all these roadblocks and obstacles in her way, she just kept smashing through them—with a great deal of humility, and a great deal of determination and persistence. He was just amazed that here was a woman—not an Israelite—who would show such great faith.

But all of this is just to show the great divide there was between Jew and Gentile. She knew it. She knew the epitaph and what it meant. He knew it too, and He tested her by seeing how she would react to something like that being thrown at her. She passed with flying colors, but we still see that tension there.

Let us go to Luke 4. We have not even gotten to what would be called the New Testament church time. We are still in the life of Christ, and we are seeing this come out very clearly. This is right after Jesus announced His ministry—there in Nazareth. He gave the quotation there from Isaiah 49, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me." Then He said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." And remember, I said that we are here in Nazareth.

**Luke 4:22-30** So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" [Meaning, "Isn't this the kid from down the street? Don't we know him?"] He said to them, "You will surely

say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.'" Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

This passage clearly illustrates the Jewish-Gentile poor relations of the time. He was amongst friends here. He was amongst His own—the people of Nazareth. So you would have thought that He would have gotten a good reception from the hometown folks. But He knew that was not to be the case. And He comes out with both barrels, saying here, "I know you're going to reject Me. I know I won't be able to do any works here."

And then He gives these illustrations, and this just enrages them! Why? First of all, He was the kid down the street. Let's not forget that. He was the kid that they had all grown up with. And here He was, coming back to their town and saying that He was fulfilling prophecy; and He was comparing Himself to the great Elijah and the great Elisha. He came back saying, basically, "I am that Prophet that Moses spoke about back there in Deuteronomy." That was the first thing that got them set off. Here was "little Jesus" from down the street saying that He was their Savior, the Messiah (if you wanted to put it that way).

The second thing that enraged them were the examples He gave of who was going to receive the miracles. He said, "That widow lady from out on the coast, who was a Gentile, was the one that received God's favor during that time of Elijah." And He said, "That leper Naaman (not only was he a Gentile, a Syrian—but he was a leper and unclean) was the one who received

God's favor during the time of Elisha." And where did that leave them? On the outs!

And here was the Messiah (though they did not accept Him as such) saying that they would be below both the Gentiles and the unclean. That is why they took Him through the midst of the city. That is why they nearly threw Him over the cliff, but He miraculously got away. So, you see, it did not take much to touch off a great rage and anger in the Jews. All you had to tell them was that they were not as good as the Gentiles, or that they would be left out and the Gentiles would be allowed in—and they were ready to make a mob scene immediately. And, you know, this is exactly what happened.

Let us go to Romans 10. This is a combination of a prophecy and a present-time news report. Here in Romans 9-11, Paul was basically telling them the way it was going—and, looking into the future, about the way it would continue to go.

**Romans 10:1** Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.

Sure, he wanted Israel to be able to hear the Word of God and to accept it, and to eventually be saved and in the Kingdom of God.

**Romans 10:16** But they have not all obeyed the gospel. [As a matter of fact, very few of them did.] For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our report?"

And I am sure Paul was feeling the same feeling of frustration and depression. Here he was, talking all day long; and his own people were not listening—were not accepting it.

**Romans 10:17-18** So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, have they not heard? Yes indeed: "Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world."

Yes, the witness has been made! What is the best selling book in the world? What is the best selling book among Christian countries, in which Israelites are a large part? The Bible! Has that not made enough witness on its own?

**Romans 10:19** But I say, did Israel not know? First Moses says: "I will provoke you to jealousy by those who are not a nation, I will move you to anger by a foolish nation."

Notice how far He goes back to show that God, from ancient times, already knew that His own people would not hear—and that they would have to be provoked to jealousy by people who would hear. "A foolish nation," he calls it.

**Romans 10:20-21** But Isaiah is very bold and says: "I [God] was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me." But to Israel he says: "All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people."

Now let us go to Romans 11, where Paul sums this up.

**Romans 11:11** I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?

Meaning, "Is this rejection final? Just because they haven't accepted it at the first, does this mean that they are doomed forever?"

**Romans 11:11-12** Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles. Now if their fall is riches to the world, and their failure riches to the Gentiles, how much more their fulness!

Meaning, "It's going to work out so well in the end. Everybody is going to be blessed by the way that this works out."

**Romans 11:13-14** For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.

So, what Jesus proclaimed there in Luke 4 began almost immediately to come to pass. It was the Gentiles—a people He did not first go to—that heard, that responded, and that eventually formed a great part of the New Testament church. It was the Jews—who had all the background for understanding, who should have known better, who should have been able to say, "Ah, ha. This is it. This is He. This is the One we've been waiting for. Hallelujah! Let's get on the bandwagon and go." But they were the first to reject it. They rejected it so vehemently that they killed the Messenger, and then they proceeded to kill all His messengers. (And is it not ironic that the apostle Paul was killed by the Gentile [Nero]? It is just kind of funny how all that worked.)

This prophecy that we have here in Romans 10-11 shows that the Jews will be among the last converted; and they will be converted not in the best way—because they are provoked to jealousy. Here the Gentiles are getting all the blessings that should have come to the Jews as God's original people.

Now we are getting to a point in this sermon where we have to begin looking at how the Jews and the Gentiles worked together in the early church. It was not all "fun 'n games" in the church. Let us begin in Acts 1. The apostles themselves—especially the original 11 or 12 (I guess we should include Matthias in that.)—had traveled with Jesus for most of His ministry, if not all of it. So they should have known. Even though He sent them to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, they should have known—by especially the things He said, as well as His approach to some of these things—that it was going to go wider than just the Jews and the Samaritans.

I mean, look, He went to the Samaritans quite a bit. He passed through their country and preached. And though they often did not want to have anything

to do with Him, He was still willing to go to them. They were a mixed bag of Jew and Gentile, and whatever else was mixed in there. They certainly were not pure Jews.

So they should have had an idea, an inkling, that Jesus was going to go beyond Judea and Galilee—especially here in Acts 1. Here He is, just about ready to ascend into heaven for the final time.

**Acts 1:6-8** Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me [meaning, you will take My gospel] in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

I could have gone to the last few verses of Matthew, and we would have seen the same thing. We could have gone to Matthew 24:14, where it talks about "you shall take this gospel to all the world as a witness." There were enough clues there for them to understand that the gospel was not just strictly for the Jews or for Israel as a whole. They should have been able to get it. But there are such things as *prejudice* and *tradition*, a little bit of *blindness*. They had fair warning from Christ that there was going to be more to this than just a ministry to the Jewish people or to the Israelitish people.

Now, let us go to Acts 9. By this time, they should really have known it! This was the calling of Saul, or Paul, on the road to Damascus. In verse 10, Saul had already been struck down.

**Acts 9:10-15** Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, "Ananias." And he said, "Here I am, Lord." So the Lord said to him, "Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for one called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand on him, so that he might receive his sight." Then Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he



has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name." But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel."

Here was the apostle that was called to do this specifically. He was to take charge of the gospel "to the uncircumcision," as it was later called. This is ironic too. God called an ardent, zealous Jewish man—raised and taught in all the traditions of Judaism—to take His gospel to the "dogs," to the Gentiles. (He might have thought that his career had gone to the dogs, as it were.) But God sweetened the pot a little bit by telling him that he would also take it before kings, and he would not be lacking in work before the children of Israel. Here was His chosen vessel to take the gospel to the Gentile world.

And in Acts 10, a little bit later God opens up His gospel to the Gentiles—through Peter, first. Peter was the one who brought it into the church and then handed it off to Paul. But I want to go through this because it is very interesting to kind of read between the lines, to see some of the reactions here. Peter is in Joppa, praying.

**Acts 10:9-16** The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready he fell into a trance and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air. And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." [What I think is interesting is what is said in the next verse.] This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

Was Peter a hardhead, or something? Did it have to happen three times? Did he not get it the first time—when God said, "Peter, what I've cleansed you must not call common." This gives you an idea of how deeply engrained

these traditions were. I am sure Peter understood that he was not being told anything about clean and unclean meats here. He does not say that directly, but verses 34-35 show exactly what it did mean. After the third time, it hit him.

**Acts 10:34-35** Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

God was not worried about those animals. He was concerned with *people*. Only men are made in God's image. Those wild things, and creeping things, and birds of the air—they do not mean as much as people to God. Peter finally got it. He was talking about the Gentiles. Now was the time to go and evangelize to them, and God wanted them to start in the house of Cornelius.

**Acts 10:44-48** While Peter was still speaking these words [He had, in a sense, just preached a short sermon to those that were in Cornelius' household.], the Holy Spirit fell upon all those who heard the word. And those of the circumcision [the Jews] who believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter [All of them! All the rest of them that were with his traveling party.], because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then Peter answered, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then they asked him to stay a few days.

Notice the wording in verse 45. Those of the circumcision were astonished! Why were they astonished? Had they never considered that God would take the gospel to the Gentiles? Were they so tied/bound in their traditions that they could not see that God would go beyond their own kind? I think so. They were still thinking nationally. They were not thinking in terms of Christ's Body. To me it is an amazing thing. We see these words in here; but the flavor does come through that they could not believe it. That is, that God would open salvation to the "dogs" (as they looked upon them). There was a great deal of prejudice there—against the Gentiles.

But they could not discount *the sign* that was there. It was the very same sign that the apostles had manifested when they had been given the Holy Spirit, in Acts 2. They spoke in tongues. And God was obviously manifesting a great miracle here, to finally get it through to them that the Gentiles had the same station under His administration that they did. They were equal under Him, in Christ.

Let us go to the next chapter. This was not over. Just because they saw the sign of the tongues and that the Holy Spirit came, still they had a lot of Jewish Christians to convince.

**Acts 11:1-3** Now the apostles and brethren [Notice that. The apostles and the brethren—not just the brethren. This goes all the way up to the top.] who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him [They argued with him. They were hostile to this new thing that Peter had brought into the church.], saying, "You went in to the uncircumcised men and ate with them!"

"How contemptuous! You defiled yourself there in Joppa, Peter. You stayed with that Roman centurion. You ate meals with them. Don't you know that is against the law?" It really was not against the law. It was against their tradition. It is just so hard to break through prejudices. Then, in verse 17, we have skipped over a great deal of what Peter says to convince them. He basically retells the whole story from the beginning. He gives them a blow by blow account, so that they would come to the same conclusions that he did.

**Acts 11:17** "If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?"

"Look, God was doing this. Not me! I'm just His messenger. Don't kill the messenger."

**Acts 11:18** When they heard these things they became silent ["Oh, God did this, huh."]; and they glorified God [They were finally convinced.], saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

But it still was not over. This was continuing. Let us go to chapter 13. This was in Antioch. We are now looking at one of the journeys of Paul and Barnabas.

**Acts 13:42** So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.

The Jews really did not want to have anything to do with Paul; but the Gentiles were begging for more.

**Acts 13:43-51** Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. [Now, listen to this.] On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God. [Antioch was a big city. It was the major city in Syria.] But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul. Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, "It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles. For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, that you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was being spread throughout all the region. But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from

their region. But they shook off the dust from their feet against them [just as Christ had told them to do], and came to Iconium.

Paul and Barnabas experienced the same sort of resistance in Antioch, and in other places. Almost everywhere they went where there was a sizeable Jewish community, they met resistance. Some of the Jews, they converted. In some places (I believe it was Corinth) the ruler of the synagogue was converted. But that did not happen everywhere. Normally it was the Gentiles that *believed* and the Jews that *persecuted and rejected* them.

It is really an upside down circumstance when you think of it. Here were these Jews (Paul and Barnabas) bringing what was thought at that time to be a teaching that sprang out of the religion of the Jews. It really did not. It was the original religion of God—but it was considered to be a sect of the Jews. The Jews were the ones that rejected it the most, and it was the Gentiles that accepted it—just as Jesus had prophesied, just as Paul said in Romans 10-11. So their preaching ended up reaping persecution from "the chosen people"—and the ones that were held at arms length in former times *rejoiced* in it, *accepted* it, and *glorified God* for it.

Now we can go into chapter 14. There is a great deal in this book in particular, but also through out the whole New Testament, about this very hostile attitude of Jew towards Gentile and back again (Gentile towards Jew).

**Acts 14:26-28** From there they [Paul and Barnabas] sailed to Antioch [They were coming back now.], where they had been commended to the grace of God for the work which they had completed. Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them, and that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. So they stayed there a long time with the disciples.

There is really no chapter break here. There is a break, let us say, in the paragraph; but they are still in Antioch.

**Acts 15:1** And certain men came down from Judea [It is interesting that it says "down from Judea." But, actually, they came north from Judea to Antioch and to Syria.] and taught the brethren, "Unless

you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

Now, here is the same thing springing up again—Jew versus Gentile. They are saying that the Gentiles, to be true Christians, must first become Jews. That is, they must be circumcised.

**Acts 15:2-6** Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension [Here we have it—arguing and debate in the church.] and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them [I get the idea that the "certain other of them" were the ones who were on the other side of the argument.] should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question. So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses." Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.

It got to the point where there was so much debate, so much arguing, so much "uncertainty" (let us say), so much fog about this issue that they had to have a church council to decide what was going to be done with these Gentiles. Did they need to be circumcised and become proselytes to be accepted? Or, should they just be accepted "as is," as long as they accepted the sacrifice of Jesus Christ?

Basically, what they decided is that they can be Gentiles; and all they have to do is what we do now. That is, to accept Christ as their personal Savior. And they added to this that they abstain from things that were normal Gentile idolatrous practices—like the eating of blood and certain sexual things, eating animals that had been strangled where the blood was still very much on the meat, and stuff like that.

The prohibitions that are given at the end of James' speech, there in verse 29, were just (in a way) reminders that they were supposed to lead a life of integrity according to normal Christian rules of conduct. They wanted to emphasize these certain things because they were particularly rampant among the pagan Gentile religions at the time. So they are just making sure that the Gentiles understood that they were *distinctly Christian*, and could not revert back to Gentile practices. They were still to keep God's law; but they did not have to become Jews to do it.

And what really drove the knife into this dispute, at this time, was that James himself agreed totally with Peter. Remember, Peter was the one that had been the first that God approached (after Paul)—that the Gentiles could come into the church. Peter, as the leader, was the one that brought it into the church and announced it to all. But James was known, in the church, as the leader of the Jewish Christians. That is, the ones who were most wrapped up in the law, the ones who were holding the law closest to their chest. When James said that theologically Peter and Paul were right, this drove the knife into the whole argument. Now that James was on their side, as it were, there was no more "energy" on the other side to do much to get it changed back. And it was the right decision, obvious. Here it's recorded in the Bible.

But, even after all of that, it did not end there. There was still more to come. Let us go to Galatians 2. Some of the chief people who were involved in this had a relapse of Judaism; but Paul never did. Paul never shrank from anything. He writes very forthrightly:

**Galatians 2:11-12** Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James. . .

Notice that these "certain men came from James." They were the ones that were thought to be the law-abiders within the church, or the ones who pushed the law.

**Galatians 2:12-13** For before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And

the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

I can just imagine Paul going up jaw to jaw with Peter, and telling him off. What he did was he publicly denounced Peter's sin for everyone to see. He shamed him publicly to show that he was playing the hypocrite. I looked these words *hypocrite* and *hypocrisy* up, and they are two different words; but they both mean the most evil form of hypocrisy. They had said *with their mouths* that they believe the way Paul did, but they said *with their actions* that they did not. That is hypocrisy if there ever was any.

So Paul makes a very public display of this, and lets them know that they were in the wrong. The reason he did this was because of what it says there in verse 12. They withdrew and separated from the others. Their actions caused division within the church, and that is the worst sort of thing that could happen—this Body of Christ, divided. So Paul thought, if any time was the right time, this was the best time to nip such a thing in the bud. Even though it was Peter, he did not flinch from doing it. The guy had a lot of guts!

Now, I do not want to give the impression that it was all from the Jew's side. Let us go back to Acts 16. I want to show that the Gentiles were not 'without fault' in this. It was not all one-sided. This was in Philippi. (By the way, the "we" and "us" in these verses mean that Luke was with him at the time.)

**Acts 16:16-22** Now it happened, as we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaimed to us the way of salvation. [That was true.] And this she did for many days. [They put up with it for a long time.] But Paul, greatly annoyed [I think Luke was being kind here.], turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour. But when her masters saw that their hope of profit was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the market place to the authorities. And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, [Notice the next phrase.] being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach



customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods.

Then they were sent to prison. So, here we see just one small vignette of Gentiles reacting against the Jews. Silas was probably a Hellenistic Jew, and Paul certainly was a Jew—and very obviously a Jew; and they made a point of it when they made their accusation, to call them Jews. And this did not hurt their attempts to get the city against them.

This was not the only time. Paul was mocked in Athens. He was called "a babbler," as it reads in the New King James; but literally they called him a "seed picker," which basically means that he picked up a bit of philosophy here and a bit of philosophy there. Then he put them all together into what he thought was a very whole philosophy of life. (They would have probably thought Herbert Armstrong was the same way. They accused him of taking this from Mormonism, and this from Jehovah Witness-ism, and this from Seventh Day Adventist-ism, and other things.) But that is what they called Paul in Athens.

In Ephesians he was dragged before the entire city and nearly lost his life because Demetrius, the silversmith, accused Paul (again) of dealing their economy a blow—meaning that no one was going to go to the temple of Diana, and no one was going to buy the silver trinkets that they sold. Paul nearly lost his life there. And of course, as I mentioned before, a Gentile Emperor (mad Nero) eventually killed Paul. So it was not just the Jews who were against all this. It was the Gentiles as well.

Now we are going to go to a strange place to find out how this all came together. Let us go to Revelation 2, and we will see Jesus' own evaluation of these people—the church as a whole, as He saw it over this whole period of time. Of course, we are going to be reading the letter that He wrote to the church of Ephesus. This will kind of give you an idea of the overall state of that church.

**Revelation 2:1-6** "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write,  
"These things says He who holds the seven stars in His right hand,

who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands: "I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary. Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent. But this you have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate."

Generally, I think that all in all this was a fairly positive evaluation. They must have begun to work together—(1) the Jews who remained converted and (2) the Gentiles that remained converted throughout this time. Jesus says here that they did works. They were patient. They were not afraid of labor for Him. They were very sensitive to evil, and they were quick to get it out of the church—especially in the form of people in authority who were teaching them the wrong way. That is, "those who say they are apostles, but are not."

They did have the problem of leaving their first love. I do not have time to go into that; but I think that, over time, they lost their focus. Even so, I think that overall they were a pretty good church. Evidently they were able to lean upon one another and to get through the tough times, because they lived through some pretty rough persecutions towards the end. They lived through the death of all the apostles, except for John (who probably outlived them all). Even so, it ended up that they were able to pass the torch on in fairly good shape, to the church in Smyrna. So, evidently they did triumph. They were able to get over the prejudices that they had, to be able to work together. And this evaluation from Jesus Christ is, like I said, fairly good.

But let us go to Ephesians 2, because I do not want to just leave this at the first century. I want to have us see it more personally. He is writing this to the church, remember, that was raised amidst that hullabaloo that I just mentioned about Demetrius the silversmith. They had a problem there in

Ephesus with the two sides coming together—Jew and Gentile. He is speaking [here] directly to the Gentiles because, evidently, the church there in Ephesus was predominantly Gentile.

**Ephesians 2:11-12** Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

This leaves them way out in utter darkness almost, as far as God is concerned.

**Ephesians 2:13-22** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation [division between us], having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted [joined] together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place [a habitation] of God in the Spirit.

Notice his argument here. He says that there were two camps. There was the camp of the circumcision, and there was the camp of the uncircumcision. Maybe, as an illustration, you could say that there were two bodies of water; but they were divided by a split of land that went between them. These waters never touched. But it was the blood of Christ that came and dissolved

that split of land between them. And the two camps—the uncircumcision and the circumcision—were designed, by that act, to float together and to become one new body of water.

He keeps repeating: *one* body, *one* spirit, *one* new man. And by taking down that split of land—that wall that separated the two of them—it was designed to produce peace. They no longer had these prejudices to keep them apart. Some of the laws that were given back in the Old Testament made Israel seem so separate from the Gentiles. And He took that away, when He took away the old covenant. The New Covenant allows everybody to mix together—let us say, in that one body of water—and become one people (not two).

He also uses the illustration of *one* temple. They were all to grow up on the same foundation into one temple. Not many temples (not all of these different sects), but one true church—which we know as an organism that makes up the Body of Christ.

**Ephesians 4:3-6** Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

He is saying, "Look, everything is unified now. There is only **one**. There are not two camps. That's gone. That's been done away with. Now there's just one—one of everything. And we all share it."

**Ephesians 4:11** And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.

What he is saying here is, "Yes, there are individuals that are given certain things to do, within the church."

**Ephesians 4:12** For the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, . . .

Now once He says that—"the Body of Christ"—He immediately goes on that track:

**Ephesians 4:13** . . . till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man [singular], to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; . . .

"Christ" and "the perfect man" are synonyms—because we are His Body (which he goes on to say).

**Ephesians 4:14-16** . . . that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting [by which they lie in wait to deceive], but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body [singular] for the edifying of itself in love.

Yes, we are all individuals; but we are all one Body. We are all *the Body of Christ*. And we are to grow "into the Head."

I almost get this feeling of like a sci-fi movie, where you have this body on the one hand that is kind of amorphous—kind of shapeless, kind of gooey and not quite in one body shape. But there is a head there, and that body is in the process of forming and shaping by the help of God the Father to grow up into the head—so that it fits the head, and the whole body resembles the head. It can be seen seamlessly, from the top of the head to the soles of the feet, that that is one "being"—because it works together, it is unified, and every part does its share. (That's kind of a gruesome illustration, but I hope it puts the point across.)

We are in this process of becoming Christ. He is the Head. We are the Body.

**Ephesians 4:17-24** This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in

the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God [That's interesting.], because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness [licentiousness], to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put off the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

That is what we are doing! That is how we become Christ. By putting off all that is wrong and by putting on all that is right and holy. As we do that, we become more and more and more like Jesus Christ, the Head.

You can go to Colossians if you like. Colossians very similar to the book of Ephesians. They are kind of "sister books," if you want to put it that way. Many of the same themes that are in Colossians have already been shown in Ephesians. There are some differences there, but that is generally true. Indeed, I think I will go there, because there is one phrase in there that we need to see.

**Colossians 3:9-10** Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him. . .

This says that *the new man is the image of Christ*. Listen to this. This is the Body of Christ that we are talking about.

**Colossians 3:11** . . . where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all in all.

What is Paul saying? It is the same thing that he said in Ephesians. We put away all these distinctions that we call each other. "I'm a Jew. You're a Greek." What does it mean? Nothing! What is important? Christ! "I'm a

slave. You're a freeman." What does it mean? Nothing! We are both part of the Body of Christ. We both are an appendage, a cell, or whatever you want to call it—in the Body of Christ. Those outward distinctions no longer matter. Or, *should* no longer matter. We allow them to, because of our human nature. But we are all the Body of Christ; and we have to begin to see each other not as Jew, or Greek, slave, or free, barbarian, or Scythian, or whatever it happens to be. We have to see each other as Christians. That is, as the same—with the same goal, having learned the same things, and growing into the same God.

In the movie "Remember the Titans," the white assistant head coach had been, in his own way, quietly resisting everything that the black head coach was trying to get across—specifically the system that he was trying to get the boys to understand and put into practice. Near the end of the movie, there was the big game; and he wants to win (just like the black head coach wants to win). And so he finally puts off his pride. He had been the head coach the year before, and he had been demoted to assistant head coach—so this black fellow could be the head coach.

So he finally puts off his pride, and his self-serving attitude; and he submits to the black coach. And he says—not only to the black coach but also to the rest of the kids (who are about half and half, black and white)—something like this: "We've made it through this season because we've learned to see, not each other's skin color, but each other's soul." What he does here is that he admits that their unity came from recognizing that they were all of *one* kind, with *one* goal, and *one* system of achieving that goal. Everything else was a distraction. Everything else held them back from achieving the goal that they were all looking to accomplish.

Paul tries to get the same thing across to the Galatians. He says:

**Galatians 3:26-29** For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Everything else is a distraction. Paul is trying to cut off the head of the monster here that was the prejudice between the Jews and the Gentiles. He does it very effectively in this book of Galatians. Notice how many times there, in this four verse series, that he mentions the name "Christ" or "Christ's." That was the focus! You are Christ's. You have been baptized into Christ. You have put on Christ. You are going to be heirs along with Christ.

In this analogy of "Remember the Titans," what Paul is saying is that Christ is "the Coach." We are running His system. Everything else is a distraction.

So let us conclude in John 17 and see where that [same] Christ, our Savior, says something very similar. This is Jesus' prayer with His disciples before He was arrested. He says:

**John 17:20-21** "I do not pray for these alone [meaning the disciples that were around Him], but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

There is an interesting point. If we are not unified with the Father (or each other, or Christ)—is the world going to believe that we have anything to do with the true God? I do not think so.

**John 17:22-26** And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: [We have no excuses, folks.] I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which you have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."



That does not need much explaining, does it? The thrust of His final thoughts about the church of God is that we be *unified in Him*. How do we do this? He mentioned that *the love that He has* [should] be in us. Do you know what that tells me? It tells me that our greatest efforts to produce unity happen inside us. They are internal.

The way we blend in with this divine unity is by being one with Christ ourselves personally. If we are personally unified with Christ (who is personally unified with the Father) and Christ is in us, then we are going to be unified with everyone else who is doing the same thing. There will be unity in the church, of those who are *putting off the old man* and *putting on the new*. And it happens, not because we get in a hug-fest with each other, but because each one of us is putting off the old man and putting on the new. That is where unity comes from. We are all living by the Coach's system. The emotions will come later. The first thing to do is to live the gospel of Jesus Christ, and we will be unified with everyone else who is also *living the gospel of Jesus Christ*.

**Romans 8:28** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

That's the start. God calls us, and we begin to love Him. Now look at what verse 29 says:

**Romans 8:29** For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. . .

Is that not what Ephesians 4 said? We are all to grow up into the Head. That is our job. We are not here to be linebackers, or quarterbacks. We are not here to be offensive linemen or running backs like in "Remember the Titans." We are here to be conformers to the image of His Son. That is our purpose. He predestined us to do that.

**Romans 8:29** . . . that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

That Christ is like he is, is only the beginning. Christ wants many brothers and sisters.

**Romans 8:30** Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, [Look where it ends up.] these He also glorified.

That is the point of all this. If we do this thing of becoming unified with Christ by living His gospel, then we will be unified with all those others who are living His gospel; and we will end up where Christ ended up—in glory.