

Title: A New Nation
Date: August 16, 2020
Subject: Pictures of the church – nation
Scripture: Ephesians 2:11 – 19; 4:17 - 31

After WWII Germany was divided into four parts with France, Great Britain, Russia and the United States each controlling one. The same was done with the city of Berlin which lie in the Russian sector. The Allies soon merged their three into one. Between 1949 and 1961, 2.5 million East German refugees fled the deplorable conditions where the Russians exercised heavy handed control. They were mostly skilled laborers, professionals, and intellectuals. Russia decided to put an end to the exodus by building a wall to separate its communist East Berlin from free West Berlin. Construction began in 1961 with the Berlin Wall eventually reaching 103 miles in length as it wove through the divided city and around the free western part. It was made of concrete, barbed wire, electrified fence, land mines and other measures aimed at preventing escape. Guards armed with machine guns watched from towers and patrolled the wall. Over 5000 succeeded in escaping over, under or through the wall. Between 140 and 200 were killed while attempting to obtain freedom. On June 12, 1987 President Ronald Reagon called upon the Soviet leader Gorbachev to “tear down this wall.” It was torn down on 11/9/1989. Germany was reunited as a nation on October 23, 1990.

The Bible speaks of a dividing wall of hostility that had been erected to keep people separate. It also reveals how the wall was torn down and the implications of that act.

READ Ephesians 2:11 – 19.

Some Biblical history of the relationship between Jew and Gentile.

The advantages of being a Jew are noted in the book of Romans. It begins with a question: “What advantage, then, is there in being a Jew, or what value is there in circumcision? Much in every way! First of all, they have been entrusted with the very words of God” (Romans 3:1, 2). The Lord through Paul begins to unfold the answer but waits for 6 chapters before returning to a summary of the advantages. “Theirs is the adoption of sons; theirs is the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ” (Romans 9:4, 5).

The Lord God Jehovah spoke to the people of Israel. Immediately their minds would think of God speaking to Moses, the author of the first five books of the Old Testament, which they referred to as the Torah. God also spoke to prophets to deliver his message to them. They traced their ancestry back to the patriarchs – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. God had specifically chosen this people group from all the people groups of the world and adopted them as his own. That God lived among them was evident by his glory which inhabited the temple. They received the covenants, God's promises, through Abraham, Moses and David. They were the recipients of God's laws which came in dramatic fashion as God etched them on stone on the top of his mountain and gave them to Moses. They were the caretakers of the temple, the place where God chose to

reside and be worshipped. They received the promises of God of what he would do to them and what he would do through them. These included the promises made to Abraham and also about the Messiah. They were the people group through whom this special Messenger from God would come. They had a tremendous heritage of connection with God and Him working with them. They possessed a rich and vibrant history.

Let's see how Israel used and misused their advantages. They became proud and exclusionary. They felt they had every right to be. They were the specially chosen people, chosen by the Lord God Almighty. They were supposed to be God's light to the world but preferred to put their lamp under a bushel. They believed God was for them and nobody else. Even in the sacred temple, the meeting place with God, they designated areas Gentiles couldn't enter. The wall in the temple contained a warning that Gentiles dare not try to enter and if did, they'd suffer the death penalty.

The temple wall pointed to the spiritual wall they'd erected. They used the Mosaic law and the scribes' interpretation of it to maintain separation. They intended to keep Israel safe from other people groups. "Their law with its detailed ordinance of ceremonies and regulations about the clean and the unclean had the effect of imposing a barrier and of causing enmity between Jews and Gentiles" (Tyndale).

Jews bragged about their relationship with God (Romans 2:17). They felt this way because they'd been instructed by the law which embodied knowledge and truth. They were convinced they were guides for the blind, lights for those who are in the dark, instructors of the foolish, teachers of infants (Romans 2:18 - 20). This meant the others were blind, in the dark, foolish and infants. They felt they had the right to judge others (Romans 2:1 - 3). The hostility of the Jews towards Gentiles is reflected in their prayers. They'd typically thank God they weren't Gentiles.

Their attitude of spiritual superiority resulted in them not wanting to be around Gentiles. They made all sorts of rules limiting contact with those they felt were inferior, lower class, ignorant, and immoral. They viewed them as dogs and not in the way we do as cuddly pets. A case in point is the prophet Jonah who didn't want to go to those horrible Gentiles in Nineveh because they might repent and turn to God.

The Gentile response to the Jews. The attitude of the nations is summarized in this verse from Psalms: "Come, let us destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel be remembered no more" (Psalm 83:4). An example is Haman from the book of Esther. He so hated the Jews that he desired to exterminate the Jewish population from the empire. The Lord prevented it from happening.

Modern history is marked by dictators and other ruthless leaders who've endeavored to do wipe out the Jews. There were regimes like Hitler and Stalin. There are anti-Semitic groups today and nations who vow to destroy Israel.

All this to point out that Jews and Gentiles haven't exactly been on friendly terms. The sad truth is the name of God was blasphemed among the Gentiles because of those who claimed to be his people and were supposed to be his light to the Gentiles (Romans 2:24).

The ramifications of being a Gentile. V. 12 reminds us Gentiles were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel, foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. This is their condition before they placed their trust in Christ to save them. It's an extremely dire situation.

Thank the Lord we weren't left in that awful predicament. The Lord created a new nation. The border wall of separation between people groups has been torn down. The lines of demarcation are gone. The distinctions have been erased.

Creation of the new nation. It was "conceived in liberty dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." I realize this was part of President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. I think he borrowed the concept from God.

There had been distinctions about who was God's people and who weren't. This was a technical distinction because God had chosen the Jews as his special people, but he had also chosen people from the entire world to be his. God makes the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory - even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles (Romans 9:23, 24). The Jews created an artificial difference by emphasizing something that being chosen wasn't meant to be. Gentiles had been excluded from citizenship in Israel because of their ethnicity. Those things no longer matter. They're no longer foreigners and aliens but now have become part of God's nation.

This is made possible by Jesus Christ. He not only brings peace. He is peace. Both of are found in v. 14. He's made Jew and Gentile into one having destroyed the barrier and the dividing wall.

V. 17 adds to Christ's mission of peace. Jesus did more than negotiate a peace treaty between 2 warring factions. He is the peace treaty. This means people who are connected with him are to see other people through Jesus. Rather than seeing something that would split apart, when that issue arrives, we're to think of Jesus, the one who is peace, brings peace and gives peace .

It's all accomplished because Christ died on the cross. He reconciled people to God. Part of this was to abolish the law. This doesn't mean he got rid of God's moral law and there are no guides for how we're to live. Jesus said he didn't come to abolish the law or the prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). Paul states, "The law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12). God's moral law is a straight edge that shows how crooked we are. What's likely in view is the law, commandments and regulations relating to ritual uncleanness and being allowed into temple worship that serve to separate Jews and Gentiles.

Privileges of being in the new nation. One of the benefits of joining God's team is we become citizens. V. 13 declares that those who had been far away have been brought near. V. 19 talks about the status change of becoming citizens and have been granted full rights of being citizens.

All people have access to God the Father whether they're Jew or non-Jew. These two people groups include everybody in the world, so everyone has the ability to connect with God. This was brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Another aspect of being a citizen in God's economy is having property rights to heaven, the whole place. Everything God has in store for his people is available for his citizens.

Citizens have rights and privileges, but they also have responsibilities.

Functions of belonging to God's nation. Let's move ahead to the Scripture that was read earlier – 4:17 – 24. The connection to being a nation is established by referring to those who aren't part of God's nation. These Gentiles aren't saved. The lifestyle of the citizen of the kingdom is to be distinct from what it had been previously. We aren't to live according to the principles of the old nation.

The old lifestyle begins in the futility of the mind which is described as “intellectually frustrating, useless and meaningless” (4:17 NIV Study Bible note). The thoughts are contrary to God and his ways. They produce no hope. It's further described in v. 18 as darkening the understanding, ignorant and having hardened hearts. The inner person is anti-God. That's the fruit of futility. It's because a person thinks they know more than God. They don't realize their knowledge is limited and outside of their experience there is a likelihood of a Supreme Being as revealed in God's word.

What happens in the mind results in a person's lifestyle. Some of that works itself out in the mind or what they think about. It's also evidenced in the way they speak and act. Since they've lost all spiritual sensitivity, they indulge in every kind of impurity. It's like a drug they're hooked on. They indulge in it and its claws go deeper into them. They need more and more and more and more to attempt to satisfy their sensuality.

Kingdom citizens are not to live that way because that's not who Christ is and what he stands for. He is the truth. We're to put off the rotten, putrid clothing of being foreigners and aliens to God. Since we've been made new in our minds, we're to keep putting on the clothing of the new self. We're to live out experientially who we are positionally.

The rest of chapter 4 details some of the specifics. Get rid of lying, anger, stealing, unwholesome talk, bitterness, rage, brawling, slander and malice. The beginning of chapter 5 continues instructing about the wardrobe change – there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality or any kind of impurity or greed, obscenity, foolish talk, coarse joking.

Instead we're to live according to the standards and lifestyle of the new nation. We're to clothe ourselves in the pure garments of the kingdom citizen. Put on kindness, compassion for others, forgiveness in the way that God has forgiven us and live a life of love.

The idea of love is related to the pictures of the body. As a family -- God brought us in into it because of his love and demonstrated for us what the family dynamic is (1:4). As part of the body – we're to build the rest of it up in love (4:16).

Love is the dynamic among the citizens of the Kingdom. Here's a connected insight from the book of James: “If you really keep the Royal law found in scripture, “love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right” (James 2:8). Love as the Royal law means it's the supreme expression of the law, the source of all other law, the summary statement. Nothing is more important.

We can trace the idea of love for others back to the Old Testament book of Leviticus. I know it's not anybody's favorite Old Testament book as it intones about regulations pertaining to Temple worship, mildew, cleansing from infectious skin diseases and purification rituals, but it has some very valuable insights. The book provides moral laws regarding honesty, human relationships and gives us this summary statement in 19:18 – “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”

Jesus expanded on loving our neighbor to include loving our enemy (Matthew 5:43, 44). He stated love for others as the second great commandment (Matthew 22:39). The Lord explained the importance and depth of the command: “A new command I give you: love one another period as I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34, 35). We've seen the royal law in the book of James. Paul also cites the command (Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14). Love is everywhere and it's hard to avoid our responsibility to show it to others.

People who are born here in the good ol' U S of A are citizens from the time they take their first breath. In one sense, they're shortchanged. They supposedly learn lots of stuff about our country when they go to school, but they don't get to go through the naturalization process. This is when people born in another country decide they want to become citizens of our nation. The process consists of filling out forms, paying fees, attending classes, completing an interview, a civics test in English (which sadly many automatic citizens would fail) and pledging an Oath of Allegiance at a naturalization ceremony. *“I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen; that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.”*

When it comes to being citizens of the new nation created by Christ, no person automatically enters it. The only way in is through having a relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior. It's something to take very seriously. It might help if we had an Oath of Allegiance that would go something like this: “I hereby declare on oath that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to the prince of this world (the devil), any potentates of evil in this dark world and the heavenly realms, to whom I have heretofore been subject or a citizen; that I will support and defend the laws, commands, and moral principles of Jesus Christ and his kingdom against all enemies; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will perform works of service of kingdom importance as required by the Lord; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.”