

Becoming A Part Of The Early Church

Imagine being a Gentile growing up in a city like Corinth, or Ephesus, or even Rome. Your parents grew up in the same town and worshipped the various gods of that town. As a child you were dedicated to one of those gods. If a girl you were a temple priestess or eventually offered your body in service to that god or goddess. If a male you would go to the temple to offer your sacrifices, indulge in the various feast, and used the temple prostitutes. Your trade guild required you to sacrifice to the god of their trade.

On the other hand, imagine growing up in the first century as a Jew. You might have been of the tribe of Judah or Levi or one of the other ten tribes. If a Levite you served as a priest and served at Jerusalem at your appointed time. If from one of the other tribes you would travel to Jerusalem to worship. Perhaps you traveled there to observe the Passover, or the Pentecost, or the Feast of Booths. As a Jew you knew the Covenant God had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. You grew up learning the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments, the various laws, and about the coming of the Messiah.

Now fast forward and it is thirty years later. You are now a Christian. Someone comes to you in the market place and wants to know how you converted. Why did you learn the religion of your ancestors and become one of "those people." There are similarities and differences between the Gentile and the Jewish convert.

Learning About the One True God

As a Gentile you recall the day someone preached in the market place and spoke of the one true God. There were certain men who left Jerusalem preaching about this Christ and what some called the Gospel, Mark 16.15-16. Some had miraculous powers and others did not but their message was the same about the God who made the heavens, the earth, and all of mankind, see Acts 17.22ff. As a worshipper of the gods your first reaction is one of

anger but upon hearing the teaching of this speaker and perhaps seeing a miracle you know his word to be true.

As a Jew you already knew of the one true God. The various gods of the Gentiles were nothing more than fantasies and false religion. You knew this to be the God of your people, the God of Heaven, the Great Jehovah.

Learning About the Son of God

As a Gentile you were then told this one true God had sent His Son to this world. He became Immanuel, God with us. He was born of a Virgin, taught His people for three years, performed miracles, and then was betrayed by His people and crucified. This was nothing new for you had heard stories of other great men who lived and died tragic deaths but then you heard something more. This Son of God arose from the grave. He overcame the power of death. His death was God's way of offering a sacrifice for the sins of mankind. Through His blood mankind can live with God. At first you were skeptical of this Son of God and the stories about Him but there were eyewitnesses to His death. Later on, His tomb was found empty and numerous people saw Him after He was buried. You came to realize He really is the Son of God.

As a Jew you looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. You knew the prophecies about His birth, His life, and His kingdom. You expected a great King and an earthly Kingdom. You did not expect a dead King and Savior but the preacher said the Kingdom of Heaven is spiritual and this Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and rules on the throne of David in heaven, Acts 2.29-30; John 18.36; Romans 14.17. You came to understand the eternal Kingdom and Jesus is the Son of God. You spoke of this to those around you.

Learning About Obedience

This was not a new concept because both the Gentiles and Jews knew to obey their gods but this obedience was to be heart felt obedience, Hebrews

5.8-9. In order to be a disciple of the Son of God one must to do His will. So you learned what He required of you.

Learning About Repentance

At this point it would not matter if you were a Gentile or a Jew because you learned about repentance which is leaving behind your sins and turning toward God, Luke 13.3. As a Gentile you could no longer go to worship the gods and serve them. The God of Heaven is a jealous God and a Holy God, in order to serve Him you must leave behind your gods and sins. As a Jew you had to leave behind the Law of Moses. The New Covenant is now the Law between God and mankind.

Learning About Confessing Christ

As a Gentile or Jew you believed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of God. You made that confession before men, Luke 12.18. From that time onward you confessed Christ by your manner of life.

Learning About Baptism

Finally, you would have told the one asking about your religion about baptism. You were immersed in water for the remission of your sins, Matthew 28.18ff, Mark 16.16; Acts 2.38. This was through baptism the blood of Christ washed away your sins, Acts 22.16. In your baptism you were made clean and became a part of the body of Christ, Galatians 3.27. This is of course a spiritual body made up of all the saved and often called the ekklesia or church, Acts 2.47.

As a Gentile or Jew you speak of your hope of living with God in heaven and hope this person would likewise become a Christian.

Of our imaginary conversation is based on different Biblical accounts. But is it any different today? Are there more gods today than in the first Century? Is Jesus still the Son of God? Aren't we still saved through the Gospel of Christ? Don't the commands to believe, repent, confess Him, and be baptized still apply today? The hope of heaven is just as powerful today as in the first century. We hope those who have not done so will become a member of that first century church. - - Dennis Tucker