

“All or Some?”

Who is God FOR? Who does God love? Who is acceptable to Him? Jews? Gentiles? Israelis? Palestinians? Men? Women? Adulterers? Liars? Thieves? Queers? Pedophiles? Drug addicts? Nazis? Murderers? Narcissists? Who is God FOR?

God, in His Word, says that He “shows no partiality” – but what does that mean? It means that He doesn’t favor one person over another – He doesn’t find more value or worth in certain people. When the Bible says “for God so loved the world” – that’s another way of saying He shows no partiality – He loves all people.

However, the Lord Himself makes a distinction here in our text this morning. “In every nation anyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.” In EVERY nation – it doesn’t matter which one you belong to. EVERYONE – that means this applies to all, all are eligible. And yet He says – “who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him.”

To be acceptable to God – it sounds like we should be afraid of stepping out of line – make sure we do everything right. If that’s the way you hear this text (keep the Ten Commandments and you have nothing to fear) – you will end up accused and condemned. If we’re honest, we don’t do everything right – we’re not acceptable to God.

Folks, neither our obedience to God’s law, nor our disobedience, determines whether we are acceptable to Him. To “fear Him” is the Bible’s way of speaking about faith – as in, “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”

Yes, as sinners we should fear His wrath. To “do what is right” is to know what God desires – and to confess that we have not done what He wills – and therefore, not trust in ourselves, but in Christ alone for our forgiveness, and our RIGHT standing with God.

Here in our text, St. Peter connects this with the preaching of the “good news of peace through Jesus Christ” – who is Lord of ALL.

He is directing us to Jesus who “went about doing good and healing ALL who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” Since ALL people are sinners, oppressed by the devil – let’s take a look at how Jesus “went about doing good and healing” them.

What good does Jesus do for the woman caught in adultery? While He doesn’t excuse her sin – He makes it know that He has come to forgive sinners – that with Him there is no partiality. He tells her to “go, and from now on, sin no more.”

But to those who were ready to stone her – those who thought they were superior, more acceptable to God – Jesus says, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” (John 8:7)

In the case of the Centurion who pleads with Jesus to heal his servant – the fact that he is a Gentile makes no difference – for God shows no partiality. By His Word, Jesus heals his servant – and says to the crowd, “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith.” (Luke 7:9)

With the rich young ruler who claimed to have kept the Law since he was a little boy (claiming to have done everything right) – Jesus does good by crushing him with the Law. “And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.’” (Mark 10:21)

The rich young ruler feared a life without his possession. Rather than confessing that his wealth was a false god, and turning his back on them and following Jesus – he went away from Jesus, away from eternal life, with his face downcast.

Jesus did not shy away from the Gentiles (like the woman of Tyre and Sidon) – or from the notorious sinners like the prostitutes and tax collectors. He even loved Judas, washing His feet.

But in doing good – Jesus never did anything to encourage a person’s self-righteousness or impenitence. He was always calling them to repentance – to deny themselves – to follow Him in faith. That is what God the Father desires. That is what is acceptable to Him.

God shows no partiality – there is no difference – for ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God – ALL are oppressed by the devil – ALL deserve His temporal and eternal punishment – ALL deserve to be condemned to hell --- but God has sent His Son, Jesus Christ, for the salvation of ALL.

God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. He gave Jesus up to death to atone for the sin of the whole world – so that ALL might be justified freely in Christ. In Christ, God shows no partiality. His blood is shed for ALL – and in that blood ALL sin is covered – ALL are justified in God’s sight.

But apart from faith in Christ, trusting His atoning blood to cover your sins – there is no forgiveness for sinners – no good news of peace with God. If you reject His Word – saying you don’t need His Christ – trusting in yourself --- well, that’s not good. And the good that Jesus must do is crush you, repent you, turn you.

God shows no partiality. It doesn’t matter who you are – if you reject His salvation in Christ Jesus – then there is only hell for you. That’s the word that He leaves ringing in your ears – letting it soak in for a while, like WD-40.

“But in EVERY nation ANYONE who fears Him and does what is right” receives the good news of peace through Jesus Christ. To everyone who believes in Him for the forgiveness of their sins, He declares – you are acceptable to God.

That’s His good news for you – no matter what you have done, or failed to do. That’s why He pours out His Holy Spirit on you today – so that you may believe and be saved. So that you have nothing to fear – but can rejoice, and bask in the love of God for you in Christ Jesus. May that “good news of peace through Jesus Christ” be yours this day, and always. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.