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THE ROLE OF A GENTILE EMPLOYED BY A JEWISH CONGREGATION

With the increasing manifestations of Jewish-style congregations of believers in Yeshua (Jesus), there is an increasing issue to be faced as to the role or function of non-Jewish believers in these congregations. Are they to be considered exactly alike? Should non-Jews have equal access to all positions of leadership? How are we to understand the truth that "there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles?"

In addition to the above there is an added issue when employment is involved. How does this affect the function of a Gentile in a Jewish congregation? To address this basic issue this paper purposes to explore some of the basic issues raised by the key words of the topic and move on to make some conclusions.

"Gentile"

To be a Gentile is to not be a Jew. If this were not so, there would be no issue. At hand, then, is the question of a Gentile employed by a Jewish congregation.

A Gentile need not pretend to be a Jew or seek some human affirmation of "conversion" to gain some stamp of credibility. There is no merit in being a Jew, nor is there merit in not being a Jew.

Nonetheless there is to be understood that when a Gentile comes to believe in the Jewish Messiah, although he is not a Jew, he begins to share to a good extent in the blessings Messianic Jews enjoy and will enjoy. First, it must be understood that redeemed Gentiles are no longer ungodly pagans.

When the Lord your God shall bring you into the land where you are entering to possess it, and shall clear away many nations before you, the Hittites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Canaanites and the Perizzites and the Hivites and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and stronger than you,

and when the Lord your God shall deliver them before you, and you shall defeat them, then you shall utterly

destroy them. You shall make no covenant with them and show no favor to them.

Furthermore, you shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons.

For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you.

--Deuteronomy 7:1-4 (NAS)

So now do not give your daughters to their sons nor take their daughters to your sons, and never seek their peace or their prosperity, that you may be strong and eat the good things of the land and leave it as an inheritance to your sons forever.

--Ezra 9:12 (NAS)

Second, the Gentile who is in Messiah becomes a citizen of the commonwealth of Israel.

Therefore remember, that formerly you, the Gentiles in the flesh, who are called "Uncircumcision" by the so-called "Circumcision", which is performed in the flesh by human hands--

remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.

But now in Christ Jesus you who formerly were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

--Ephesians 2:11-13 (NAS)

Yet in the same way that male and female are one in Messiah and yet continuing on with their distinctions, so Jew and Gentile, though one in Yeshua, have their distinctions of calling. It seems conclusive, therefore, that a Gentile employed in a Jewish congregation is to see himself with a sense of calling to be part of that which is Jewish and to identify with that Jewish calling.

"Jewish"

For a Gentile to be employed in a Jewish congregation is to have a calling to Jewish things--to identification with that which is Jewish. There is to be the development (at minimum) of sufficient sensitivity so as to avoid giving offense and ideally the

development of a sense of being "a part of". To here determine that which is Jewish would be to answer a question that has been encountered by the greatest of minds without a complete and satisfactory answer. But somehow the sense of Jewishness emerges when it becomes understood that it is the total calling of a people inclusive of ethnic, nationalistic, and religious dimensions. Even there the debates are endless but somehow the reality emerges.

The Gentile employed in a Jewish congregation is therefore called to give attention to areas such as:

Shabbat--the day set aside to be remembered and kept holy

The Festivals--the times and seasons commemorating significant events in Jewish history

Kashrut--the dietary laws

The land of Israel--the homeland of the Jewish people

Jewish history--including the many persecutions

The life cycle--the practices and traditions associated with the birth, coming of age, marriage, and death of Jewish people

Worship--the modes and style associated with Jews

Social attitudes--a Jewish world view and way of looking at things

Traditions--the various aspects of culture with respect to dress, speech, customs, interests, etc.

"Congregation"

The word "congregation" is apparently the key word in this Consultation's eyes, since the companion topic is on the role of a Gentile employed in a Jewish Mission. A Congregation is indeed the main place of identification, worship, and service for a believer. It is invariably therefore the principle place for relationships. This then fosters a unique circumstance for an employee, for although employment is not to be the main area for developing relationships for a believer, when that employment is in a congregation, the development of relationships becomes an important factor, for the congregation is God's community.

For the Gentile employed in a Jewish congregation, there is, therefore, a calling to appreciation of that community, and of "fitting in" with the congregation's style. One notable issue becomes the often significant differences between the Jewish year

and the Church Year.

| <u>Jewish Year</u> | <u>Church Year</u> |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|
| Purim | Advent (Christmas) |
| Passover | Epiphany |
| First Fruits | Lent |
| Shavuot (Pentecost) | Palm Sunday |
| Rosh haShanah (New Year) | Good Friday |
| Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) | Easter |
| Succot (Tabernacles) | Pentecost |
| Chanukah | |

There is a significance also in the level of ministry for the non-Jewish employee in a Jewish congregation. There are to be increasing levels of expectation with increasing levels of ministry. Although any employee is called to sensitivity and identification, the one in a position requiring a high level of responsibility within a context of mature ministry has need of what is sometimes called a Jewish "mind" and a Jewish "heart"--to think and feel Jewish. How this is to be defined and evaluated will vary from person to person, but major lackings in this area will prove a detriment in the ministry of the individual failing to have it.

Conclusion

The principle of contextualization is clearly at hand here. The Gentile employed in a Jewish congregation has a calling to be who he is, but to identify with others with sensitivity. He is not to pretend to be something that he is not, but he is called to identify with that which is Jewish. Perhaps it will be for a time; perhaps it will be for a lifetime. Perhaps it will result in the ultimate commitment:

Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her god; return after your sister-in-law."

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God."

Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me."

When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.