

# THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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## Equality

Louis Garbi

YouTube's algorithm recently presented a post from [The Ask Project](#), "Israelis: Do you see non-Jews as equal to you?" It was interesting to observe the various responses taken from a wide swath of Israeli culture. The spectrum ranged from the Haredi community to secular Jews. Some answers were tentative; some were immediate and clear. These also displayed a wide variety of viewpoints. The opinions went from people being completely equal with no reservations to equal but with political reservations to not equal. From an Ultra-Orthodox Jew, this latter viewpoint was in the sense of belonging to God contrasted with those who are outside of God's chosen. After viewing this exposé, I felt like I was standing on the edge of a bottomless chasm. With so many variables, how can equality be measured in an all-encompassing absolute?

Humanity shares the reality of being both physical and spiritual.

*But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he who is spiritual judges all things, yet he himself is rightly judged by no one (1 Corinthians 2:14-25).*

This scripture demonstrates the two parts, the natural man (the body) and the spirit. The "natural man" has to do with eating, drinking, and survival. It is doltish when it comes to matters of the spirit. Our spirit has the capacity to prize such things as truth, compassion, and love. It is that part that can consider and receive the things of the Spirit of God. Also, it enables us to have a conscience. We are spirit, and we are flesh. All people share this. Which one we live by is up to the individual. If the flesh dominates, our spirit is sullied by ignoble motives and thoughts. If the spirit prevails, we apply ourselves to righteousness. Therefore, the significant differences come from the choices we make to satisfy a carnal desire or pursue

righteousness.

From the standpoint of being on earth, we are equal. We are from the same ancestor, Noah. Noah came from Adam, who was created in the image of God. We have the same potential to be received by God. We have the same requirements for life in the body: air, water, food, clothing, and shelter. We have the same needs of the spirit: to be loved and to practice love. All have the same weakness of sinning and the same responsibility to repent. Within the scope of repentance, the same capacities exist: to evaluate our behavior by the standard God has set forth, regret, and turn to God for mercy.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved (John 3:16-17).*

God loves us regardless of time, place, shape, or whether we are barely formed in our mother's womb or decrepit with age, healthy and handsome, or wracked with deformity. The thing that matters to God is the disposition of our spirit. Are we using our spirit toward God? Consider this example from the book of Luke.

*Then they also brought infants to Him that He might touch them; but when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them to Him and said, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it" (Luke 18:15-17).*

"As a little child," let our spirit take hold of this. We must come to God *without* setting up conditions ("If you are God, then. . ." or, "I will do this for you if. . ."). This is the key to being accepted by God. He is God, and no approach is possible but unquestioning submission. It is as a baby receives what is needed without questioning the love of mother and father. The potential to be as a little child is given to us all. We can take no baggage within this mindset, such as Diotrefes, who loved to have preeminence (3 John 9-11), or Cain, who had his terms for approaching God. We are all equal, to be as a little child if that

*continued on the next page...*

is what we want.

There are many differences in our bodies. We are not cookie-cutter cutouts. So, we make comparisons of superficial things. Before us spreads various shapes, sizes, locations, abilities, skin tones, bone structures, hair, health, etc. Thus we see, experience, and compare. But are these the true measure of who we are? Solomon had something to say about this type of comparison:

*Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, But the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived That the same event happens to them all. So I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, It also happens to me, And why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also is vanity" (Ecclesiastes 2:13-15).*

Solomon was at the pinnacle of mankind. However, he had no more power over death than the fool. There are extremes, and there is a spectrum between extremes in all facets of bodily existence. But earthly advantages and impediments are trumped by one stark reality – death. Our bodies, with their vain talents, beauty, deformity, and decay, are temporal, subject to this equalizer, death. Conceit preens foolishly before the abyss.

*"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). "God...now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). "For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men" (Titus 2:11). We have no exemption from these truths because of our level of wealth, health, origin, or social status. John, through the Holy Spirit, gave us the big picture:*

*Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).*

Social justice is not the issue. God's justice is what really

matters.

*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences (2 Corinthians 5:10-11).*

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## What Lies Ahead

Wade Stanley

One of the easily overlooked historical details found in the New Testament is the presence of several Roman colonies: Corinth, Antioch of Pisidia, Troas, and Philippi are a few examples (see Acts 16:12). Roman colonies were important for many reasons, among which was the function they served in securing the peace of Rome. The Empire situated its colonies at strategic points in its sophisticated road system. Retired Roman soldiers settled in the colonies and were available to secure the roads from threats quickly. Because of their strategic importance, Roman Colonies were in the most privileged position in the Empire. They were, for all intents and purposes, miniature Romes:

Wherever they were, these colonies were little fragments of Rome, and their pride in their Roman citizenship was their dominating characteristic. The Roman language was spoken; Roman dress was worn; Roman customs were observed; their magistrates had Roman titles and carried out the same ceremonies as were carried out in Rome itself. They were stubbornly and unalterably Roman and would never have dreamt of becoming assimilated to the people amidst whom they were set (William Barclay, *Introduction to the Book of Philippians*, p. 4).

Do you remember what happened when Paul cast a demon from a young woman whose Philippian masters profited from her divination skills? The slave-owners hauled Paul and Silas before the local Roman magistrates. Consider their words (and remember Philippi is a Roman colony): *"These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe" (Acts 16:20-21).* Do you hear their pride? Do you hear their

patriotism? Do you hear the condescension and prejudice seeping from their words? “We are Romans. These men are Jews.” Like all other Roman colonies, Philippi was a Rome away from Rome.

The Philippian magistrates command Paul and Silas to be beaten and thrown in jail. The next day, when the magistrates sent for Paul and Silas, Paul accused them of unlawfully beating two Roman citizens. In Paul’s day, Roman citizenship was a precious distinction: citizenship could be conferred as a reward for service to Rome, it could be purchased, or one could be born into a family of Roman citizens (Paul was born a Roman citizen). Rome went to great lengths to guarantee its citizens certain rights and protections. For example, Roman Law explicitly forbade any degrading form of punishment such as beating with rods, scourging, or crucifixion. To have treated Paul and Silas in this way, the magistrates were guilty of a crime worthy of death under Roman Law. Roman citizenship had its privileges, and Paul took advantage of those privileges on more than one occasion.

Is it possible that Philippi’s distinction as a Roman colony, along with Paul’s experiences during the formative days of the Philippian church, were on his mind when he wrote **Philippians 3:20-21**?

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*

In a city like Philippi -- with its deep sense of Roman nationalism, its patriotism, its identity as a “Rome away from Rome,” with, perhaps, former soldiers of the Roman legions numbered among the saints -- remembering to Whom you belong could be a challenge.

Paul could certainly relate. His distinguished pedigree as a Jew “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews,” made him susceptible to fleshly feelings of nationalistic pride (**Philippians 3:5**). He goes on,

*But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I*

*may gain Christ, (**Philippians 3:7-8**).*

Paul sacrificed his lineage and national identity so that he could “know (Christ) and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (**Philippians 3:10-11**). And so the apostle urges the Philippians to mature in Christ by “forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead,” to aspire to Christian maturity, to set their minds on things above not “on earthly things” (**Philippians 3:13, 15-17, 19**). And yes, part of that meant remembering, “our citizenship is in heaven.”

What a challenge this must have been for patriotic Philippian citizens who had spilled their blood for the glory of Rome, or who sat at dinner tables with empty chairs where fathers or sons or husbands should be, or who grew up with the pageantry and pride of the national festivals. How might one feel if he had fought valiantly for Rome in the past, but in the present, he must decide, “Shall I serve Caesar or Christ?” Imagine how natural feelings of patriotism, fraternity, and national identity might complicate matters when the local magistrate took notice of the Christian assembly and applied passive or aggressive pressure. If you were a Christian and a Roman citizen of Philippi, you might well feel your allegiance torn in two.

Jesus warned, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other” (**Matthew 6:24**). Though Jesus warned against attempts to serve God and money, the principle rings true in multiple respects. No earthly kingdom is the kingdom of God, therefore we do not owe our ultimate allegiance to anyone but God. We pray “that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence” (**1 Timothy 2:2**). But should the day come when we must choose between God and man, there really is no choice (**Acts 5:29**). The kingdom of God is not of this world, our citizenship is in heaven, we cannot obey men rather than God, and we cannot serve two masters. I pray that such a day with such choices lies far off in our future. But should it come sooner rather than later, I pray we all can forget those things which are behind and press forward to those things which are ahead.



*Please check your expiration date!*

## An Olive Tree in the House of God

*Brad Tutterow*

Olive trees are slow starters. They are grown from shoots taken from mature trees. New olive trees grown from shoots can take as long as ten years before producing fruit. But with the right environment, they can live hundreds or thousands of years and give fruit every year.

There is an olive tree on the island of Crete in the small village of Ano Vouves that is at least 2,000 years old. Some estimates place the tree at 4,000 years old. Traditional methods of dating the tree don't work because the tree is hollow. The tree still produces good olives each year.

It's common for olive trees to become gnarled, a little misshapen, and hollow as they grow older. But this does not affect their ability to produce fruit that is good to eat and suitable for making olive oil.

Like olive trees, Christians are grown from shoots taken from mature Christians. And like olive trees, old (and sometimes a little gnarled) Christians can produce fruit that is good for the Church and pleasant to the Lord. Don't be discouraged if your inner strength is fading or you don't stand as tall as you once did. We can all produce good fruit for the Lord.

*But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever (Psalm 52:8).*

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## Glory to God!

The church which meets on **South Fairfax, Bakersfield, CA** received **Don and Donna Sigrist** as members of the church on May 9.

The church which meets on **Prince Road, Alton, IL** rejoiced

when **Corbin Tutterow** was baptized into Christ on June 12.

The church in **Pleasant Hill, IA** praised God when **Chamille Laymon** was buried with Christ on June 13.

The **Chapel Glen Church of Christ, Indianapolis, IN**, gladly received Levi Owens as a brother in Christ on June 20.

The church in **Lone Jack, MO** rejoiced when **Grace Sanderfer** was baptized for the remission of her sins on June 26.

The church in **Carrollton, MO** joined the heavenly chorus when **Kaitlyn Smith** was baptized on July 11.

## Special Meetings

### 2021 Meetings

August 22.....White Oak (rural Ethel, MO)

September 4-5.....Labor Day Meeting, Pleasant Hill, IA

September 18-19.....Brookfield, MO

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