

WE WORSHIP ONLY ONE GOD

**Pastor Paulus Budiono
Lemah Putro, Sunday, April 15, 2018**

Shalom,

Have we ever pondered over our past lifestyles before we knew God in Jesus Christ? What did St. Paul say about us, the gentiles, in Ephesians 2: 11-12? This is what he said, "Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.... For through Him [Christ] we both have access by one Spirit to the Father." (Ephesians 2: 11-12, 18).

In the past, the believers in Ephesus (gentiles), did live without Christ, without promise, without hope and without God. So did we before we knew the one and only God. However, Christ brought us close to God so that we may know Him, the most holy, the most rightful, the most loving, the closest (Imanen), the omnipotent, etc.

True, many people believe that God exists, yet they do not know Him, let alone have a private relationship with Him.

Do we really believe that God exists? Do we truly know and come close to Him through Jesus, the way, the truth and the life? Because without Jesus, no one can ever come to the Father (John 14: 6).

In his letter to the Ephesian church, St. Paul expressed his hope that their knowledge of God would bring them closer and closer to Him as time went by. He was quite concerned about their spiritual lives. He could not get them off his mind even though he was shackled behind bars in Rome, having barely space to move his body around. Now that we are not locked up, enjoying all the convenient facilities at hand, St. Paul's plight should have the effect of spurring us to love Him more than ever and care for those who do not believe in the Lord (yet).

How do the gentiles who do not know God (yet) live their lives?

□ The Ephesian believers lived in Ephesus home to gods and goddesses, particularly the most worshipped goddess Artemis or Diana. They had worshipped a great many gods and goddesses since the time of their ancestors and before the Ephesian church was established (before they believed in the one and only God). As a matter of fact, when St. Paul healed a cripple, they called him Hermes and Barnabas Zeus. They were even ready to worship them both (Acts 14: 10-13).

What did St. Paul remind them of? 1 Corinthians 8: 1-6 writes, "Now concerning things offered to idols: We know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. And if anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him. Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live."

In fact, the gentiles worshipped numerous gods also known as idols.

□ After Adam and Eve fell into sin, men's relationship with God came to an end due to

their transgressions and sins (Ephesians 2: 1). Their descendants lived even farther from God. Cain lived a reckless life and became the first known murderer when he took his brother's life in his hands.

Following the death of his brother, Abel, God gave Adam and Eve a child, Seth, as a substitute for Abel. Seth had a son named Enos. At that time, men began to call upon the name of YAHWE (Genesis 4: 26) because they longed to turn back to God. Then generation after generation was born and one of their offsprings was Enoch who walked with God and was taken up alive to heaven (Genesis 5: 24). The Bible says that no one had called upon the name of God ever since. In other words, men lived even farther from God and fell deeper into sin. It consequently grieved the Lord at His heart that He had made man as every intent of man's heart was continually only evil (Genesis 6:5).

Men lived a thoughtless married life. In fact, God arranged Adam and Eve's marriage in holiness overflowing with blessings in the Garden of Eden (pleasure). This garden typifies a shelter. In a word, God protects men's marriages and the fruits of their marriages. But the relationship between men and God was distorted and so were the marriage and family relationships. Mixed marriages came to pass and God could not bear it anymore. He then planned to liquidate men except Noah and his family who got rescued because Noah walked with God (Genesis 6:9).

□ The descendants of Noah lived together in the land of Shinar and spoke the same language with the same accent. They tried to build a city with a tower reaching the sky. God saw their unified collaboration to execute their ambitious plan, but God did not give His consent to their ambition. So, He confused their language. Why did God have the heart to scatter them all over the entire world so that they had no choice but to discontinue their mega project (Genesis 11: 1-6)? Genesis 11: 4 reports the fact as follows: "And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.' "

It turned out that their city plan of Babel was their way of gaining reputation. Guard yourself against self-reputation. If we keep ourselves busy with self-reputation, whatever we do will result in nothing but ruin. Keep this mind: To only God be the glory.

Who was the dominant, influential architect behind the city construction of Babel? He was Nimrod, the descendant of Ham, a mighty figure on earth and a valiant hunter before the Lord. The beginning of his kingdom was Babel in the land of Shinar (Genesis 10: 8-10a). It was Nimrod who blueprinted the city of Babel, but his wishful plan fell flat due to his arrogance and hunger for self-reputation. That was the starting point when the "oneness" of their nation and language fell apart. On top of it, they were widely spread over the entire face of the planet Earth.

Do we build a church or carry out any activity for the sake of our own reputation?

□ With people scattered across the globe, diverse nations, languages, cultures and beliefs came into existence. They wanted to worship God. But over time, they worshipped gods and goddesses according to their respective religions instead.

We cannot imagine how many millions of gods there are in this whole wide world - the gods and goddesses of the Indians, the Chinese, the Japanese, the Americans, the Russians, etc.

In the olden times, the gentiles lived without the living God. Instead, they worshipped a great many gods and goddesses typical of every tribe and nation. In Indonesia, there are 714 ethnic groups and over 1,100 dialects (Kompas, April 4, 2017). Each ethnic group professes its own belief. They have lots of gods to worship such as the god Batara Kala, the god Ganesha, the god Wisnu, the goddess Sri, the goddess Ratih, Nyai Roro Kidul and the list goes on.

□ How does the world-wide evangelism confront the tight-knit and massive cultures? Did the Israelites truly know God? Not really. Before Joshua died, he reminded them

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to fear and worship God. Apart from that, he told them to put away the idols of their ancestors (Tera, Abraham and others) in Mesopotamia as well as the gods and goddesses in Egypt, in the wilderness (along the Exodus route) and in Canaan.

Joshua even challenged them to make a choice, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD" (Joshua 24: 14-15).

Then the Israelites replied, "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods" (v.16). Joshua reminded them that God was a holy and jealous God and warned them that He would consume them if they turned their backs on Him (vv. 19-20). In the end, they promised that they would worship God and listen to His Word (v. 24).

Did the Israelites keep their promise? No. Throughout their 40-year journey in the wilderness, they did not worship God. Instead, they took up the tabernacle of Moloch and the star of the god Remphan, made statues to worship (Acts 7: 40-43) and sacrificed their children to Moloch by causing them to pass through fire (Jeremiah 32: 35).

In reality, they did not obey God's command. As a consequence, they were held captives and colonized by their enemies again and again. Every time they had asked God for forgiveness, they were released from their enemies. But soon they turned back to their idols. They did this over and over again. Is the same thing true of us? In church, we call upon God in Jesus Christ, but as soon as we walk out of the church, we live up to our customs. That way, the God we worship is vague or not clear.

If our God is not clear, our worship will be unclear. The truth is that we must worship in Spirit and truth (John 4: 24). How can we possibly bring the Gospel to all nations with their customs and multiple gods, not to mention various isms and doctrines claimed by respective communities to be the best ever?

We have the responsibility to raise and encourage our children to stay faithful in the Word that shepherds them so that they can withstand the sweeping streams of today's trends - worship customized to taste, ignoring the truth of God's Word.

□ We must turn back to the true knowledge of God through His only Son because no one has ever seen God whom His Son has made known (John 1: 14, 18).

We used to worship a myriad of gods and observe multifold customs and cultures because we did not have the living God to worship. Then by the grace of God, we came to know God. Honestly, we are often affected by customs and mystics that have been parts of our lives since our childhood. It stands to reason that these things are quick to play first fiddle in our lives if we do not love the Word of God that is powerful to chase those gods away.

□ When leaving Egypt and confronted by more powerful enemies, the Israelites had witnessed and experienced first-hand the marvelous miracles by God's mighty hand like no other (Deuteronomy 4: 32-40). Sadly, they dismissed His help from their minds in no time. They claimed to be a chosen people and held fast to the Old Testament. But in reality, they were quick to twist the truth and translated things at will by reason of their ancestors' customs - they dotted the i's and crossed the t's .

How about us? Do we believe in the one and only God (cf. 1 Corinthians 8: 4-6)? Do we like reading the Bible to know Him more deeply? Our hearts need sanctifying by the blood of Jesus. That way, we can keep our hearts uncontaminated by the worldly things and the binding culture all around us. Let's serve the Lord with our hearts instead of religion or church liturgy. In doing so, we will know the Lord in the right way and we will not get easily ensnared to turn back the "gods" that once grabbed a hold of us. Amen.

Scriptures taken from New King James Version