

## THE POWER OF GOD AMONG THE NATIONS

### Colossians 1:6, Romans 1:16, John 10:16

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

#### INTRODUCTION

Consider these facts:

In the month following the death of Jesus the NT records that the total number of Christians in the world was around 500 people. All of these people were of the same nationality, Israeli, from the same racial group, Semitic, shared the same religious heritage, Judaism, and spoke the same language, Aramaic. According to the U.S. Center for World Missions there were 360 non-Christians for every Christian in the year 100 A.D. Today the professing Christian church numbers well over 2 billion people (Not all of these are true Christians, only God knows how many of these are truly his). There are fewer than 7 non-Christians for every Christian in the world. Of the 24,000 people groups in the world, at least 14,000 of them have a viable church led by their own people, not missionaries. The church of Jesus today is comprised of people from thousands of ethnic groups and languages and from scores of different religious heritages. However, there are yet 10,000 people groups who do not have an indigenous, reproducing church in them.

How do these facts strike you?

In Matthew 24: 14 Jesus says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations (read "people groups), and then the end will come." In Acts 1:8 he promises, "And you (the church) will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth." In Col. 1:6 Paul tells the church in Colossi, "All over the world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and understood God's grace in all its truth."

While there is yet much work to be done and many "nations" who have not yet heard, yet we are witnessing the fulfillment of the hundreds of promises God has made in his word that his people, the church, will be comprised of peoples from every tribe, tongue, language and nation. The presence of Christian churches among the diverse peoples of the world is the greatest display of God's power in the world. In this study we will look at three reasons why that is true.

#### STUDY

1. According to Romans 1:20, what is it that every human being knows?

*Every human being has blazing before all of their senses irrefutable evidence that there is a God of eternal power and a divine nature who created the universe. There are no exceptions.*

2. According to vv. 18-19, what is the reason a person denies the existence of an all-powerful Creator?

*Humans deny the existence of the Creator because they want to do what they want to do and do not want to submit to the God who made them. This is the definition of wickedness.*

3. What is this invisible, "eternal power", that is made visible through creation?

*We all know that we did not create ourselves. We had no part in causing ourselves to exist and it is more than obvious that nothing in all of creation decided to exist. Creation exists by the will of another. This Creator must have eternal power because every part of creation is finite. All creation has a beginning and an end, therefore the Creator must be without beginning and end. He must be eternal and he must have infinite power for he created a universe that is absolutely overwhelming in its size and power.*

4. What is this invisible, "divine nature", that is made visible through creation?

*The creation screams at us that the Creator cannot exist as matter and energy, for if he were of the same nature as his creation then he too would be created. In other words, the Creator must exist in a fashion that is completely different than matter and energy. He must have a divine nature.*

5. Verse 20 ends by saying that this display of God's power and nature in creation renders every human being to be "without excuse". When do humans make excuses?

*We make excuses when we are trying to prove that we are not wrong for not doing what we ought to have done or that we are not wrong for doing what we ought not to have done. It's the child who is trying to explain to the parent why they didn't do their homework. It's the employee giving excuses for why the project isn't done yet or has come in over budget. It's the motorist explaining to the police officer why he was going over the speed limit. It's the college student telling why it's OK for him to have sex with his girlfriend. It's the angry person explaining why it's right for them to be angry with their neighbor.*

6. According to v. 21, what is it that humans are accused of that they are trying to excuse? In other words, how do humans respond to the knowledge we have of this awe inspiring Creator God?

*Every human knows that there is a Being of infinite glory and to whom they owe everything. Yet, every human being is not impressed with this most impressive Being and every human refuses to give thanks to this generous Being for their existence and every good thing they have. Every moment of every day, based upon the fact of creation, every human being ought to be involved in worshipping this great God who created all things. Every moment of every day, every human being ought to be giving thanks to this great God for everything they have and enjoy. Our hearts ought to at every moment be brimming over with gratitude and delight in this great God. However, our hearts are not at all impressed with this God, nor do our lips give thanks to him. We are impressed with all kinds of things but we are not impressed with him. We give thanks to others but we do not thank the one to whom we owe all things. In fact, we make up false gods to whom we can give a small portion of worship and thanks in order that we can,*

*with a guilt free conscience, pursue what we really love, which is everything but God. It is this lack of appreciation for the great Creator God and our delight in everything but him that unites human beings across culture and language.*

7. According to Romans 3:10-11, how many people are there in the world who naturally seek God?

*There is no one in the world who naturally seeks God. In fact, there is no one in the world who understands what creation reveals about God. Every human being naturally turns away from what we know about God because we like to sin.*

8. Why does the reality of sin make the existence of churches so unlikely?

**The presence of churches among the diverse peoples of the world is the greatest display of God's power in the world because sin is what unites humanity.**

9. According to Ephesians 2:11-3:6 who created the church, the one new man, the household of God, the one body?

*The triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit created and creates the church.*

10. According to 3:6-11 (cf. Col. 1:6-8), how did God make this one body, made up of such diverse members as Jews and Gentiles?

*He did it through the gospel. He did it and he does it through the preaching of the riches of Christ, i.e., the gospel, to Jews and Gentiles.*

11. What is it about the gospel that creates the church? Why is it only through the gospel, the good news of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and intercession for his people that forms the church? Meditate upon Ephesians 3:13.

*The fact that we exist as a community of people who may approach God with freedom and confidence is a greater evidence of God's power than the creation of the sun for two reasons.*

*First, the fact that we are a group of people who are loved by God is miraculous. The fact that we can approach him and not be burned up in the fire of his wrath is amazing. There is absolutely no reason why God should love us. Each one of us has lived our lives despising our creator and loving everything that is opposed to him. He is a just and holy God and is therefore opposed to sinners. As the Psalmist says he hates everyone who does wrong and all of us do wrong. So how is that God is able to justly love us? How is it right for God to treat us as his treasured possession when justice cries out for our destruction? It is because of the gospel of Christ. "God made him who knew no sin to become sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in him." God poured out his just anger against our sin upon his dearly loved son so that he can justly love us and make us his very own people.*

*Second, the fact that we want to be the people of God is miraculous. That we want to approach God is startling. As I've already pointed out, by nature, we hate God. We are as interested in being his friends as Osama bin Laden is interested in being the friend of President George Bush. If someone told Osama that George wanted to be his friend, what would Osama do? He would laugh and mock and try to use such an offer to insult the President and to incite more hatred of him. It is the same with us. The fact that we love Jesus Christ can only be explained by the fact that God has given us new hearts. He has in the words of the prophet Ezekiel, "taken out our hearts of stone and given us hearts of flesh. He has put his Spirit in us and caused us to walk in his ways." Or in the words of Paul in Titus 2, "(Christ) gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people of his very own, eager to do what is good." Or as Peter says it, "You have been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God." Every local church is a testimony to the infinite power of God expressed through the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

**The presence of churches among the diverse peoples of the world is the greatest display of God's power in the world because the power of the gospel is what creates the church.**

**12.** What are the two prominent characteristics of God's people, the church according to Jesus in John 13:34-35, 14:15, 23 and 15:10-12 and Paul in Ephesians 1:15-16 and Colossians 1:3-4?

*Trust in or love for Jesus Christ that produces obedience to his commands of which the chief one is to love other Christians are the chief marks of Christians and therefore the Christian church. Therefore, the chief marks of the Christian church, the thing which unites us is trust in/love for Jesus and love for those who love Jesus.*

**13.** According to Ephesians 4:13-16 what is the essence of the unity of the church?

*Our faith in and knowledge of the Son of God is the essence of the unity of the church. We will be a mature people when we are filled up to the full measure of Christ. Our unity consists of our common devotion to Jesus and our serving one another out of our common affection for Jesus.*

**14.** What ought to be our primary reason for joining and remaining a part of a particular local church?

*We ought to join a church because we love Jesus Christ and this particular church is made up of people who love Jesus Christ as evidenced by our common faith in and knowledge of the Son of God.*

**15.** How does this reason compare or contrast with the usual reasons people join and remain in churches?

*We do not join a church because we are lonely and need friends. We do not join a church because we want to contribute to a meaningful cause like caring for the poor, sharing the gospel with the world or fighting abortion. We do not join a church because we want a safe place for our children to learn moral values. We do not join a church because we are homeschoolers and are looking for support in our*

*choice. We do not join a church because we send our kids to public schools and are looking for support in that choice. There is only one reason to join a church, to show up on Sunday mornings, to spend time with other Christians during the week: it is because you have discovered that Jesus Christ is the most trustworthy and attractive person in the universe.*

**16.** What would be a reason to leave a local church other than you moved away?

*The church stops loving the Christ who is revealed in the Scriptures.*

**17.** Why are you in this church?

**The presence of churches among the diverse peoples of the world is the greatest display of God's power in the world because faith in Christ is what unites the church.**