

The Universal Nature of Christianity (Colossians 3:9b-13)

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The Christian faith, and the Christian belief system, disturbs and interrupts our way of thinking, and as a consequence of hearing and obeying the truth-claims of Christianity, there ought to be a complete transformation in the life of the believer! There ought to be a behavioral change in his/her life (Rom. 12:1-2; Eph. 4:22-25; Col. 3:8-10). He/she should ‘put off’ his/her old self and ‘put on’ the new self—in Christ, just as the candidate for baptism takes off his/her old clothes and puts on the new white robe. We very often avoid the truth on which the New Testament insists, that a Christian who does not change his/her behavior is most imperfect. Furthermore, this transformation is progressive. This new creation should be in a state of continual renewal. Jesus teaches a man/woman how to live, and how to grow continually in grace and knowledge until he/she reaches what which he/she was meant to be—a man/woman made in the image of the living God and the risen and living Christ.

We have in 1 Timothy 2:1-7 a passage which shines through with profound details, that Christianity is for *all* people. This passage stresses the universality of the Christian Gospel. In this passage Paul encourages Christians to make prayer for *all* men, both the saved and the unsaved. God is the Savior who wishes *all* men to be saved, because Jesus gave His life as a *ransom* for *all*, and He is the *mediator* between God and men.

This is a truth-claim which is echoed over and over again in the New Testament. Through Christ, God was reconciling –(bringing) the lost sinners in the *world* unto Himself (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). “God so loved the *world* that He gave His only Son” (John 3:16). It was with full confidence that Christ said: “. . .if I be lifted up on the Cross, I will draw *all men* unto Me” (John 12:32). Peter tells us that God is “. . .not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The Gospel embraces *Christians and non-Christians* because no one is outside the saving grace and purpose of God, who wishes *all* men to be saved.

One of the great *effects of Christianity* is that *it destroys the barriers* between nations, and races, and people(s). In Christianity, “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, nor free man” (Col. 3:11). Paul said of the effects of the Gospel in the Galatians Epistle, “For you are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26-28). And because of the power and the effects of the Gospel on many people, Paul said to the Romans, “For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom.1:16).

The ancient world was full of barriers. It was not to be thought that the Jews were the only people who put up the barriers and shut people out. The Greeks put up barriers and walls also. Along with the barriers in the ancient world came *gaps*. There were cultural gaps, gender gaps, language gaps, educational gaps, and race gaps.

In the ancient world, Greece was a place of study, and learning; it had its language, culture, and aristocracy; historians say, her schools of grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, and philosophy, were always centered in Greece. However, the New Testament tells us that Christianity was first planted in Greece by the Apostle Paul. He also went with the Gospel message to Philippi (Acts 16:12), Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth (see Acts 17, 18).

The ancient Greek world was heavily influenced by Greek education, culture, philosophy, and the Greek gods, as are mentioned in the New Testament (the Book of Acts) by those who came to Christianity from the 'Old Greek World.' The Greek speaking, Dionysius, the Areopagite was converted through the apostle's address on Mars Hill (Acts 17:34).

Cicero, a Roman statesman and orator (106 – 43 B.C.), said of classes and barriers, "As the Greeks say, all men are divided into two classes—Greeks and barbarians." The Greeks called any man a barbarian who could not speak Greek, and they despised him and put up barriers against him.

Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), a Greek philosopher, a student of Plato; tutor of Alexander the Great; author of works on logic, philosophy, natural science, ethics, politics, and poetics, wrote about the Barbarians of his day. When Aristotle was discussing bestiality he said, "It is found most frequently among barbarians;" and by barbarians he simply meant non-Greeks. He wrote about, "the remote tribes of barbarians belonging to the bestial, brutish, class." The barbarians were looked at as foreigners, as uncivilized, as primitive, and as uncultured. The most vital forms of the Greek religions were the Mystery Religions, and from many of them the barbarians were excluded. Another Greek author wrote, "The Greeks wage a truce-less war against people of the other races, against barbarians."

Plato (427? – 347 B. C.), a student of Socrates, and a Greek philosopher, said that the barbarians are "our enemies by nature." **Socrates** (470? – 399 B. C.), was a Greek philosopher and teacher.

The problem of barriers between nations, and cultures, and races is by no means confined to the ancient world. So, too, they are in our modern world. In any Godless society there can be nothing but walls of partition and barriers. There can only be the poison of polarization.

The **Jews** looked down on every ancient nation also. The Jews lived with the thought that *they* were God's chosen people and that the other nations were fit only to be fuel for the fires of hell.

Barbarian (in Greek it means *rude*) was originally the Greek epithet for people speaking any other than the Greek language. The Barbarians were of Phoenician, or Punic (of or pertaining to ancient Carthage or its people) origin. The New Testament mentioned them in Acts 28:1-4, but not reproachfully. Some Greeks, and some Barbarians obeyed the Gospel and became Christians; Paul used the phrase "Greeks and Barbarians" (Rom. 1:14), which means *all peoples*.

The **Scythian** (a member of the ancient nomadic people inhabiting Scythia, an ancient region of Asia and southeastern Europe, on the lower courses of the Don and Onieper Rivers) was notorious as the lowest of the barbarians, more barbarous (savage, inhuman, cruel, and truculent) than other barbarians, according to the Greeks. Jewish

historian, Josephus called them little short of wild beasts. They were proverbially ‘the savages’ who terrorized the civilized world with their bestial atrocities.

The **slave** was not even classified, in ancient law, as a human being; he/she was merely a living tool, with no rights of his/her own. The slave master could thrash or brand or maim or even kill him/her at his caprice; the slave had not even the right of marriage. ***There could be no fellowship, in the ancient world, between a slave and a free man.***

In Christ, all these barriers were broken down. J. B. Lightfoot reminds us that one of the greatest tributes paid to Christianity, was paid by Max Muller: Muller was a great expert on the science of languages. In the ancient world few people were interested in foreign languages, apart from Greek. The Greeks were the scholars, and they would never have desired to study a Barbarian tongue.

The science of language is a new science and the desire to know other languages, a new desire. Max Muller wrote: “Not till that word ‘Barbarian’ was struck out of the dictionary of mankind, and replaced by *brother*, not till the right of all nations of the world to be classed as members of one genus or kind was recognized, can we look even for the beginning of our science of language. . . . This change was effected by Christianity. It was Christianity which drew men together sufficiently to make them wish to know each other’s languages.” [*William Barclay, Commentary On Colossians, p. 155-156*].

T. K. Abbot points out how this passage shows, in summary fashion, the barriers which Christianity destroyed.

- (i) “It destroyed the barriers which came from birth and nationality. Different nations, who either despised or hated each other, were drawn into the one family of the Christian Church. Men of different nationalities, who would have leaped at each other’s throats, sat in peace beside each other at the Table of the Lord.
- (ii) It destroyed the barriers which came from ceremonies and rituals. Circumcised and uncircumcised were drawn together in one fellowship. To a Jew, a man of any nation was unclean; when he became a Christian, every man of every nation became a brother.
- (iii) It destroyed the barriers between the cultured and the uncultured. The Scythian was the ignorant Barbarian of the ancient world; the Greek was the aristocrat of learning. The uncultured and the cultured came together in the Christian Church. The greatest scholar in the world and the simplest son of toil can sit in perfect fellowship with Christ in His Church.
- (iv) It destroyed the barriers between the classes. The slave and the free man came together in the Church. More than that, in the Early Church it could, and did happen, that the slave was a leader in the Church and the master, the humble member. In the presence of God the social distinctions of the world became irrelevant.”

Conclusions:

*“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the Tetrarch, and Saul” (Acts 13:1).*¹

Bible Commentator, William Barclay offers the following comment on this passage:

“Barnabas was a Jew from Cyprus; Lucius came from Cyrene in North Africa; Simeon was also a Jew but his other name Niger is given and, since this is a Roman name, it shows that he must have moved in Roman circles; Manaen was a man with aristocratic connections; and Paul himself was a Jew from Tarsus in Cilicia and a trained rabbi. In this little band there is exemplified the unifying influence of Christianity.”²

¹The Holy Bible. Authorized Kings James Version (KJV).

²William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, (The Westminster Press, Philadelphia; 1976) 3rd rev. and ed., p. 98.