

A Community Without Barriers

Thomas Robinson, January 23, 2005

Galatians 3:21-29

²¹ Is the law then opposed to the **promises of God**?

Certainly not! For if a law had been given that **could make alive**, then righteousness would indeed come through the law.

²² But the scripture **has imprisoned all things under the power of sin**, so that what was **promised through faith in Jesus Christ** might be given to **those who believe**.

²³ Now **before faith came**, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until **faith would be revealed**. ²⁴ Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be **justified by faith**.

²⁵ But **now that faith has come**, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, ²⁶ for **in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith**. ²⁷ As many of you as were **baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ**.

²⁸ **There is no longer Jew or Greek,**
there is no longer **slave or free,**
there is no longer **male and female;**
for all of you are **one in Christ Jesus**.

²⁹ **And if you belong to Christ,**
then you are **Abraham's offspring,**
heirs according to the promise.

Acts 2:12-21

¹² All were **amazed and perplexed**, saying to one another, "*What does this mean?*" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "*They are filled with new wine.*" ¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them,

"Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, **this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:**

¹⁷ *'In the last days,' God says,*
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ *Even on my servants, both men and women,*
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

¹⁹ *I will show wonders in the heaven above*
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

²⁰ *The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood*
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

²¹ *And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.'*" [Joel 2:28-32].

Fifth Anniversary of Opening Worship Leadership to Women

Jan. 23, 2000, Garnetta Lovett began the journey. Discussion, study, and change in many Churches of Christ. Still many are unchanged.

Part of a broad vision from scripture for the church as a community that breaks down the barriers that separate people and embodies the unity Christ creates.

Why are many slow to share this vision. Many factors. Culture, tradition.

A way of reading scripture that focuses on regulations and rules, often abstracted from context and treated as though they were part of law book.

What is profoundly needed is a trust in scripture that takes seriously how God has chosen to give his revelation to us. No law books. Gospels, letters, etc.

A restoration of the NT method of applying the Gospel to life.

The problem is not new. The NT shows that the breaking down of barriers happened only because Christians lived with a strong sense of the presence of the Holy Spirit among them. The Roman society was filled with barriers.

As the church became more institutionalized, society's barriers returned.

Today we need a renewed sense of that new reality created in Christ by the Spirit. God creating a new humanity, overcoming the divisions among people.

Envisioning a New Reality

In Galatians Paul is striving to help Christians realize what has really happened in Christ. God has broken down old ways of religion by law and observance.

A new relationship with God flowing from God's grace and love and our response of faith and openness to God's transforming Spirit.

But the old ways were so familiar and comfortable, it was easy to slip back.

The particular trouble spot was the racial / ethnic / religious divide between Jew and Gentile. Did Gentiles have to become Jewish converts and keep the Law of Moses to be part of the people of God and receive God's grace?

Though accommodation to the Law was easy and attractive, Paul saw that it undermined the new reality that had come through Christ and the Spirit.

In Gal 3:23-29 Paul reveals part of the amazing new community that Faith in Christ creates. He urges the Galatians to think about their baptism, which was a physical expression of their faith in Christ and openness to the Spirit.

By Faith they had received a new Identity – the identity of Christ, their creator, redeemer and beloved. That identity created a new unity. They were one!

Overcoming Ethnic Differences and More

Everything here is profound and counter intuitive. They are not simply united, they are one. The biggest and most obviously real divisions that split people from each other simply do not exist. Christians are called to live this new reality which continually flies in the face of the realities of society.

Jew & Greek — Greek & Barbarian. All racial and ethnic and cultural differences.

This was the easy one. No legal barriers. Still profoundly difficult.

Slave & Free — All socio-economic distinctions. Enforced by law.

Male & Female — Paul consciously uses the language of creation. In God's new creation He overcomes one of the most basic dichotomies of his original creation.

Paul is giving expression to the prophetic word of Pentecost, the original vision of the meaning of the Gospel empowered by the Spirit of God.