

Barriers

by Matt Adams

"...you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all." (Col.3:9-11 NKJV)

How often do you and I put up barriers in our lives? How often do we read God's word, nod our heads, perhaps even audibly confirm our agreement, and then go about our days with little concern for others, choosing instead to cast off the manner and spirit of our Savior we call ourselves after? I'll admit that this has been the case in my own life, perhaps more often than I've realized before.

How often do we allow prejudices to guide our lives rather than casting down those walls which we build up? For instance, we deem someone unworthy: whether that be of our time, our courtesy, our good will and common decency, simple kindness, or most tragically we deem them unworthy of the gospel. And for what? Because of some arbitrary or subjective reservations we've created in our minds to justify our ignorant prejudices? It happens, and sadly it happens among God's people; it happens with each other within churches and it happens with our attitudes toward those in the world who need to render obedience to the gospel's call. This tragic reality happens in your life and mine.

Now, before we go any further, there is a clear difference in not keeping company with those engaging in sin and escaping temptations to sin (so as to keep ourselves unspotted from the world; Ps.1; 2Tim.2:22; Rom.13:14; 1Thess.5:22; 1Cor.10:12-13) and with us just being too stuck up, being more concerned with what other people think, or too stuck on ourselves in our own prejudice to get outside of our comfort zone. Monumental difference!

Consider for a moment the account of Jesus speaking with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4. A people whom it was reported that the Jews wouldn't even so much as buy bread from since they were considered lower than dogs. Yet, Jesus speaks with this woman when He is weak and tired and as a result of this exchange causes a whole city of Samaritans to believe in Him - interesting to note that He performed no miracles here but rather just spoke with them and at His word they believed.

How we treat those whom the world casts off, makes fun of, deems unworthy of their time says a lot about us. When someone is an outcast by the rest of the herd - in whatever circle you find yourself, whether that be at work, school, or just out in the world among other people - how do you or I treat them? Do we have compassion like our Savior (true compassion, not being patronizing) or do we join in with the rest of the herd mentality and laugh, deride, and otherwise make them seem or feel lower than dirt. Sounds a lot like what those around the cross did to our loving Savior, doesn't it

(Matt.27)? Christ calls on us to follow Him, the very source of all love and compassion, not the crowds.

Regardless of where the treatment of others takes place - be that in our hearts, in our conduct, or in our words - the offense or compassion still exists. What would our Lord think of our treatment of those He gave His life for? Oh yes, let's not forget that fact...these are exactly who these people are, we didn't get exclusive rights to the blood of Jesus Christ. He died for all sinners, you, me, those people we deem "worthy" and yes even those whom we deem "unworthy". Lest we be puffed up, let's consider and recall what many sins the Lord has forgiven us of. That's the reality, friend.

The first century Christians had the same problems we do, just in a different form. They had the issue of race/nationality relations (Jew vs Gentile), rich vs poor, slave vs free, slave vs master, heathen vs non-heathen, high-minded vs lowly. It's always been an obstacle, but it's one we, through the Lord, can break down; the Lord did, so why should we attempt to futilely build up a partition He Himself struck down?

I've been shamed through my own study of God's word, the realization of what the account of the Samaritan woman at the well teaches about that nature of my Savior, and the comparison with how I have lived my life up to this point. It's truly humbling when we measure ourselves against our Savior and see the areas where we lack. It is my prayer that others may take a lesson from John 4 and change their conduct as I have sought to do. The world and our lives will pass away, but God's word remains (Matt.24:35). That word gives life to its hearers and salvation to those who obey it, so are we going to obey it fully or will we continue on in our own prejudices stubbornly claiming we have a right to them when our Savior clearly showed us otherwise?

Follow Christ, or stubbornly put up walls to keep others from hearing the truth? Our choice. Which of these will please the Lord? Now, which are we going to actually do?