

April 27, 2014

TIME OF REFLECTION

“Religious and irreligious people are not breeds apart—morally, intellectually, or psychologically. As [Boston College political scientist] Alan Wolfe observes, ‘Religions can be astonishingly different, while human beings can be astonishingly the same.’”

~Wendy Kaminer, American lawyer and writer

“Why, among all the many cults and philosophies which competed in the Graeco-Roman world and in spite of more severe opposition than was encountered by any other, did this faith outstrip them all?...Christianity’s success is to be found in its inclusiveness....Christianity...gloried in its appeal to Jew and Gentile, Greek and barbarian. The philosophies never really won the allegiance of the masses. In spite of attempts at popularization they appealed primarily to the educated. It was one of the charges against Christianity, however, that it drew the lowly and unlettered multitude. The essence of its teachings was so simple that all could understand, and in its story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus it could be comprehended by even the ignorant. Yet, Christianity also developed a philosophy, which commanded the respect of many of the learned.”

~ Kenneth Scott Latourette (1884-1968) professor at Yale University in *A History of the Expansion of Christianity: Volume 1 The First Five Centuries*

“...there must have been many converts [in Philippi]. But Luke selects only three for mention, not (it seems) because they were particularly notable in themselves, but because they demonstrate how God breaks down dividing barriers and can unite in Christ people of very different kinds.”

~John Stott (1920-2011), British theologian on Acts 16

“Ideally...the church itself is not made up of natural ‘friends.’ It is made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything of the sort. Christians come together, not because they form a natural collocation, but because they have been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance... In this light, they are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus’ sake.”

~D.A. Carson, contemporary theologian

“For every look at self, take ten looks at Christ.”

~Robert Murray M’Cheyne (1813-1843) Scottish clergyman

Worship through the Word

SERMON – “The Mission of God: Reconciliation” – *Pastor Don Willeman*

SERMON PASSAGES – *Acts 15:1-11 (ESV), Ephesians 2:11-18 (J.B. Phillips Translation)*

Acts 15:1-11 (ESV)

¹But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” ²And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. ³So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles, and brought great joy to all the brothers. ⁴When they came to Jerusalem, they were welcomed by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they declared all that God had done with them. ⁵But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”

⁶The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter. ⁷And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. ¹⁰Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? ¹¹But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.”

Ephesians 2:11-18 (J.B. Phillips Translation)

¹¹⁻¹³Do not lose sight of the fact that you were born “Gentiles”, known by those whose bodies were circumcised as “the uncircumcised”. You were without Christ, you were utter strangers to God’s chosen community, the Jews, and you had no knowledge of, or right to, the promised agreements. You had nothing to look forward to and no God to whom you could turn. But now, through the blood of Christ, you who were once outside the pale are with us inside the circle of God’s love and purpose.

¹⁴⁻¹⁸For Christ is our living peace. He has made a unity of the conflicting elements

of Jew and Gentile by breaking down the barrier which lay between us. By his sacrifice he removed the hostility of the Law, with all its commandments and rules, and made in himself out of the two, Jew and Gentile, one new man, thus producing peace. For he reconciled both to God by the sacrifice of one body on the cross, and by this act made utterly irrelevant the antagonism between them. Then he came and told both you who were far from God and us who were near that the war was over. And it is through him that both of us now can approach the Father in the one Spirit.