

Episode: Other Letters Series No. 13

Narrator: Scythian slave

Primary Scriptures: Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 3:5-14

Story Summary: A wide assortment of individuals had to be molded into the Church

Location: Israel

Time: 30-70 AD

Suggested Memory Scriptures: Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11

For almost two decades, the early church existed primarily among the Jews in Israel. Although there were certainly some differences in social and wealth standings, the society was homogeneous in many respects. In the 50's AD, Christianity started spreading throughout the Roman Empire among people of different ethnic groups and countries. Although this was the intention of Jesus, it created numerous practical problems for church leaders.

Roman society was stratified in many ways: Roman citizen or not; wealthy or poor; government official or not; patrician or not; slave or free; and, ethnicity or country of origin. The list seemed to have no end. Society not only recognized these stratifications, but seemed to encourage them.

Imagine the challenge facing church leaders. Followers of Jesus accepted society's norms even when those norms conflicted with Christian norms. In James 2:1-7, James taught Christians should quit discriminating on the basis of wealth. In 1 Corinthians 11:34, Paul seems to be admitting that the rich people ate a full communion meal while not sharing with poor people who did not have enough to do so.

Ephesians 4-6 is an example of a passage teaching the early Christians how to live in unity instead of with discrimination. The early Christians struggled with this concept, and that struggle has continued to modern times.

Galatians 3:38 and Colossians 3:11 are similar passages. They urge Christians to behave without discrimination. It is worthwhile to notice that Galatians 3:28 was written in the late 40's AD, while Colossians was written in the early 60's AD. Apparently discrimination was a long-term, recurring problem.

Colossians 3:11 was not meant to be a list, but an example showing there shouldn't be discrimination among God's people for any reason. Imagine the shock on people's faces when they first heard this teaching: "Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and is in all."

The stage was set for Christians of that time, and all times, to struggle with not discriminating, while recognizing there are differences and while not being accepting of sinful behavior among fellow Christians.