A NEW SOCIETY

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The church's new society doesn't come about by people trying to be nice to each other (though that's not a bad idea) but by people admitting their need of Jesus and by people from different backgrounds seeing their primary allegiance as being to him.
Category: Observations

The New Testament depicts a radical vision for human society; one where barriers between people are broken down and a new way of living is forged.

> *For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us. He did this by ending the system of law with its commandments and regulations. He made peace between Jews and Gentiles by creating in himself one new people from the two groups.Together as one body, Christ reconciled both groups to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death. (Ephesians 2:14-16)*

There are historical reasons why Paul talks about Jews and Gentiles in this passage. For our purposes, the important thing to bear in mind is that in today's language, the Jews would be described as racists. They refused to mix with non-Jews and would avoid speaking to them or eating with them. Yet, Paul says that Jesus has broken down the wall between Jew and non-Jew and formed a new community that includes both. In Galatians 3:28 he takes this further:

> *There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

The picture is of a radical society in which all people are accepted regardless of race, gender or economic status and one in which old enmities are ditched in favour of a new loyalty to Christ.

However, this society didn't just spontaneously emerge; reconciliation was hard won.

> *... and through him (Christ) God reconciledÂ everything to himself.Â He made peace with everything in heaven and on earthÂ by means of Christâ€™s blood on the cross. (Colossians 1:21 - see this post).*

It was the death of Jesus on the Cross that made it possible to break down the walls of hostility between different human groupings. Through his death Christ defeated the powers of death and hell and made it possible for individuals to be forgiven and to reorientate their lives. This is key, entrance into this new society depends on repentance and faith; that is an admission that we need to depend on Jesus and that we want to reorientate our lives on the basis of our trust in him. The church's new society doesn't come about by people trying to be nice to each other (though that's not a bad idea) but by people admitting their need of Jesus and by people from different backgrounds seeing their primary allegiance as being to him.

Contemporary society has a similar vision to the church. Acceptance, integration, tolerance and inclusion are key words in a lot of contemporary discourse. We are attempting to create a new,

united way of living. The difference between our society's vision and the New Testament is that the New Testament challenges everyone to admit their need of change; we are accepted in Christ, but only when we see our need of him and his death on the cross. Modern society says that everyone should be accepted, without a challenge to change or transformation. Essentially, it says that we don't need Jesus. The church will face a number of challenges in the years to come; whatever the presenting issues, the underlying cause will be a society that refuses to admit even their need of Christ, much less being willing to submit to his rule.

The problem for modern society is that its project is doomed to failure. It has no way of dealing with what Paul calls the "wall of hostility" between different groups. You don't have to spend long looking at twitter to see the way in which many of those who call for tolerance and acceptance demonise those who don't agree with them. For all of the warm fuzzy, accepting feelings out there, there is a huge amount of hate and anger directed at others. True acceptance and inclusion has to find a way to bridge those sorts of divides.

Of course, the church has been far from blameless in this area. We have to be prepared to admit that we haven't always lived up to our ideals, that our attitudes haven't always been those of Christ Jesus. Accepting our failure and changing direction is part of the conversion process; it's a lifetime's discipline, not a one off.

We also have to remember that it is Jesus who has broken down society's barriers and that people need to be pointed to him. It's easy to get into arguments about race, sexuality or a million other issues, but people need Jesus, not discussions about cultural norms. This is a massive challenge for Christians today; the media and wider society don't want to talk about Jesus and we are all too willing to get sidetracked into never-ending discussions of current trends. We need to learn to stop trying to win arguments and witnessing to Jesus and his work on the cross - all without sounding boring, irrelevant or "preachy".