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Colossians chapter 3

Introduction

I will address two main points, based from Colossians chapter 3. Firstly, that we (both Jews and Gentiles) are one body in Messiah. Second, that this body is built on His

love, which is stronger than national boundaries, ethical differences, language, and even time.

I start with some basic Israel theology, which I'm sure you all know far better than I. From there I will refer to a Norwegian Ph.D. from 2015, by Silje Kvamme Bjørndal: *The Church in a Secular Age*. Her studies show that secularization also affects the Church. I will suggest that Biblical and evangelical Israel theology is much needed to balance and give the body of Messiah a deeper understanding of Gods salvation plan for Israel and the nation.

From there I will speak about the amazing mystery of being one bode in Messiah, and that this body is a body of love. I will end my presentation addressing the issue of reconciliation work, and give an argument for why mission organizations have a great and important opportunity to serve as bridge builders among believers in Messiah. Here I refer to the story of the IFES movement in Burundi in the 1970s as a case, during the horrible massacre of Hutu people by the Tutsi army.

The Jewish way of salvation

My personal experience as the leader of NCMI (Norwegian Church Ministry to Israel) work in Norway, is that many people are not aware that the Gospel is the Jewish way of salvation. Some people think that the Jewish people are already saved due to the covenant God made with Abraham, or with the people of Israel at mount Sinai. Therefore, they do not need the gospel for salvation. We know that this sort of theology is not from God – and we need to talk against it! Once we allow a theology that says that there is an exception for one group (Jews don't need Jesus), then it's just a matter of time before this also applies for other groups as well.

Most believers in Norway do not think that the Jews don't need Jesus, at least that's my experience. They have another angle. They think that Jews are saved in the same way as us Gentiles, and that the Jewish people are just one of all the peoples of the earth. At one level this is correct, because Jews need Jesus. At the same is not correct to say that Jews are saved the same way as Gentiles. The truth is that we (Gentiles) are saved in the Jewish way – without having to become Jews.

In the Book of Romans, Paul explains the mystery of the Jewish way to salvation. The Jewish people are not saved in the same way as the Gentiles, but it's the opposite way. People from

every nation are saved in the “Jewish way”, meaning that the Gentiles are saved in the same way as the Jewish people – through the gospel and message of Jesus the Messiah.

This makes a unity. We are one in Him together. This is very far away from replacement theology. The Gentiles are invited through the gospel, to be members of God’s family, of Messiah’s body. We are saved in the same way, through the same faith as the Jewish people.

Or is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one – who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through (the same) faith. – Rome 3:29-30

Without this basic understanding, we can’t grasp the content and depth of the term “*one body*” (Col 3:15). Ujunity is not just between Churches and denominations, but the gospel brings all people together in one body through the Gospel of Jesus Messiah. Both Jew and Greek are one in Him. In Colossians Paul argues that we (both Jews and Gentiles) are a new creation, a new self in Him (3:10), part of the same family (3:11) and one body (3:15).

At the same time, we need to preach that God still has a plan for the Jewish people. They are His chosen people, among all the nations of the Earth (Am 3:15; Rome 11:1). The universal body of Messiah is not a replacement of the Jewish people. It’s an invitation to join in and take part in the blessings and sufferings for the sake of our Lord Jesus Messiah. Through the Gospel the Gentiles are drafted into God’s family, and this gives depth and roots to our faith, deep into Jewish soil.

Secular worldview – focus on the individual

We have all heard it – the Western world is becoming more and more secular. One common definition of “secular” is: *A non-religious person.*¹ It can also be a nation that has a strong distinct between State and Religion, where the religious practice is up to each individual’s own belief. In a secular mindset religion should therefore not be part of the collective understanding or life. Religion is in a secular worldview a private and personal matter.

Bjørndal writes in her Ph.D that this secular worldview has challenged us deeply: *From being unchallenged and unproblematic, belief in God has become not only one option among others; it is the least eligible option to many people.*² Secularization means that *self-sufficient humanism [is] accepted as a valid option.*³ One of Bjørndal’s arguments is that this type of secular worldview, and understanding of human beings, also affects the Church mindset and understanding.

There is a growing focus on *the self*. In many ways, this focus is not a new one. We all know Psalm 23, where David proclaims that the Lord of Israel is his (personal) shepherd. God is a personal god, and Jesus shows us this as well. He knew people by name (Luke 19 with Jesus and Zacchaeus the Tax Collector). This focus is good, and we need it. While other times, this may overshadow the collective focus the Bible teaches us. And for Bjørndal this is one of the main points. The impact of secular worldview takes away one fundamental thing about being and belonging to *the body* – we are a collective, a people – we are *one body*.

¹ <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-secular-life/201407/what-does-secular-mean>

² Bjørndal, S., (2015), page 30

³ Bjørndal, S., (2015), page 31

Bjørndal says in her Ph.D: *Church as a defining community navigates the secular detachment of the self*.⁴ Just a quick look at the most popular worship song of 2018, *Who you say I am/Hillsong* , shows us some of this impact.⁵ The chorus is:

*I am chosen
Not forsaken
I am who You say I am
You are for me
Not against me
I am who You say I am*

There are many things to say about songs like this, and songs like this are overrepresented in modern worship. Most of the lyrics are in total lack of collectivism, and the deep biblical understanding of belonging to the body of Messiah – Gods people. There are no roots, only *the self* and Gods interaction with this *self*. To sing songs about how much God loves me, cares for me, and so on, are *accepted as a valid option*.

The perspective in Colossians is a collective perspective, all the way. Paul is writing to the collective communion of believers and addresses them as one body – one people. In my teaching I try to proclaim the great mystery of the Gospel – the unity between Jews and Gentiles in Jesus Messiah.

The unity is not only worldwide – but is it also a unity with the past. Like a family tree, with roots that go far into the past, so is the faith. We are connected, through the Gospel, with Abraham and the people of Israel. There is no barrier or dividing wall of hostility between Jews og Gentiles – because of the blood of Jesus. In himself he made one new humanity out of the two. And this body has roots that are planted deep into Jewish soil. I believe that the Church needs this message, maybe more than ever.

Perspective one body

Paul goes on to tell the people in Colossae what this body looks like. Compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, forgiveness *and above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony: 3:14*

Once I saw a bumper sticker that said: *You know that love your neighbor like yourself stuff - well I meant it*. This simple message was quite powerful. I knew the words, and I had heard them many times before – but not like this. I start thinking, and it hit me – he meant it for real. And sometimes (maybe quite often?) we need to be reminded of this as well.

Jesus told his Apostles: *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you – Joh 14:12*. The Apostle John later wrote: *We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands – 1 Joh 2:3*.

In one way this commandment is old, and at the same time it is new (1 Joh 2:7-8). Because of the Gospel, both Jews and Gentiles are one in Jesus. A new people – not replacing anyone, because God did not reject His people (Rome 11:1), and God’s gifts and His call are

⁴ Bjørndal, S., (2015), page 221.

⁵ <https://www.praisecharts.com/blog/top-worship-songs-from-2018/>

irrevocable (Romans 11:29). The body of Messiah is an extension, an invitation to be part of God's family. In this family, we are called to love like Jesus Messiah loved us. *By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another* (John 13:35).

We love because he first loved us (John 4:19). The foundation of this love is Jesus himself. It is not something we can produce. He is the one that destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. *His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility* (Ephesians 2:15-16).

In His body, where he is the head, there are both Jews and Greek – one body in him – because of Him. His love connects us, binds us together and makes perfect unity in harmony. If we don't love the body of Messiah, we don't need to try to love more – we need more of Jesus and His love. It's about perspective.

We need to set our hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. To set our minds on things above, not on earthly things (Col 3:1-2).

For me this verse is about perspective. What kind of worldview do we have? Paul asks them to set their hearts and minds on the things above. When I read this, I'm reminded of these verses in Hebrews 12:

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorned its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Here is the collective perspective, the roots and fixing our eyes upon Jesus (things above) - *so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Example from Burundi

Let me tell you a true story. It all took place at the university campus in Burundi, and the context was the 1972 massacre of over 100,000 Hutus at the hands of the Tutsi army.

At the university there was a student movement of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students (IFES). The movement included both Hutus and Tutsi students, all believers in the God of Israel and the Jewish Messiah.

The Tutsi army started to kill well-educated Hutus, since they were considered a big threat. The killing of academics also included Hutu students at university and college.

When the Tutsi IFES students saw their Hutu friends hungry, alone and scared for their lives, their commitment to multi-ethnic community was put to the test. These were the same students they prayed with, shared the gospel with, and served alongside on

*leadership teams. They loved their friends! And they decided that they couldn't leave them out to die.*⁶

The Tutsi students began to bring food and other necessary things to their fellows' brothers and sisters, who were Hutu people. Because they were one body – one people in Messiah. This was not a task without sacrifice. Many of the Tutsi students were cut off from their families, when they saw them help the enemy. But that didn't stop them. They knew that loving their friends across ethnic lines and despite the costs was close to the heart of God and essential to their faith.

After this, the president of the University spoke to the whole campus, and said:

There are three groups of people in our country: Hutus, Tutsis, and then there are Christians. And if we want to survive as a people, we need to follow the Christians!

Reconciliation – a mission priority?

NCMI is engaged in reconciliation work among believers in Jesus, Jews, Arabs and Palestinians. I strongly believe that this is mission, and an important mission. BridgeBuilders is one of our programs, and it's all about bringing people who believe in Jesus together. Needless to say, we need to talk about our disagreements, our narrative and understanding of theology, but at the same time fix our eyes on Jesus – *in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility* (Ephesians 2).

When Jews, Arabs, Norwegians and other people stand together and preach the Gospel as one body, it is a great and strong testimony. The Gospel is stronger than earthly disagreements and hate. In the same time, I think that reconciliation without the Prince of Peace will not last. Therefore we, as mission organizations, have an important role as bridge builders, on the foundation of the Gospel, while we bring out His love standing shoulder by shoulder, as one people – one body in Messiah.

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⁶ <http://www.releasepeace.com/tutsi-hutu-genocide-prophetic-multiethnicity/#.XRszbugzbIV>