

## One in Christ

### Galatians 3:23-4:7

One of the most popular movies of this year is the live-action remake of Lilo and Stitch. Although there has been some controversy over the changes from the original movie, it still has the same focus. Two sisters, orphans, rely on each other and with the help of an alien dog thing and the other people and aliens in their lives, remain a family and create a new one. They repeat the phrase, “Ohana means family, and family means no one is left behind.” In the climax, Stitch says ““This is my family. I found it, all on my own. It's little, and broken, but still good. Yeah, still good.”

Paul didn't know about the Hawaiian concept of Ohana, or about animated movies, but he knew about family, and how God was at work creating new ones. As he traveled around on his missionary journeys, he met with people of all kinds, telling them about who Jesus was and what Jesus had done for them. That's why Paul writes to the Galatians, “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27-28).

But doing so he was up against a lot of cultural inertia. Almost every culture or people group in the world does this. They have a word for themselves, and another word for everyone else. The Jews called themselves the people, and everyone else was a Gentile. The ancient Greeks had a saying, that “whoever is not Greek is a barbarian.”

Paul knew that there was division in the world. He was used to dividing the world into two different groups of people. As a Jew, Paul would have said prayers in the morning that are still said every morning by Orthodox Jewish men: “Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the universe, who has not made me a non-Jew. Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the universe, who has not made me a woman. Blessed are You, God, our Lord, King of the universe, who has not made me a servant.” Non-Jews, women, and servants couldn't be made righteous before God through the law. Paul the Pharisee knew all about divisions, knowing who he was by knowing what he was not.

The Galatians, too, knew about divisions. In their religious life, they could picture walls that separated

them. In their social lives, they could picture the walls that separated them from their neighbors. Many of them were Gentiles, non-Jewish Christians who were often still treated as outsiders by the Jewish Christians who were still trying to figure out how being a Christian was different than being a Jew. The Jews had prayed the same prayers Paul the Pharisee had prayed.

Both groups could still picture the temple in Jerusalem. It was not just a figurative wall that separated the Gentiles from the Jews and the place where God dwelled. It was an actual wall. And along with this wall had come a list of rules and regulations that also created walls between God and people. The laws separated and divided people from one another. When a group of Christians came to the Galatians after Paul had left, telling everyone that they had to become Jewish, follow the laws, before they could become Christian, even more division resulted.

Sin causes division. Sin separates us from God, and each other. Sin seeks to divide us, to make us fight among ourselves, to have us divide the world into “us” and “them.”

Paul the Pharisee may have known about divisions, but he also knew about the unity that came from Jesus. Jesus came not to divide, but to unite. Jesus came not to separate, but to join together. Jesus came to overcome the divisions caused by sin. Jesus came to end the separation between God and humanity.

The very name we use for ourselves, Christian, comes from the unity brought by Christ. The word Christian is only used three times in the Bible, and used by outsiders talking about this disruptive new religion. It first appears in the city of Antioch, a city referred to as “all the world in one city,” where you could see all the world's richness and diversity in one place. And the marketplace was its hub. Antioch was designed like most cities of that day: A circular wall on the outside, a marketplace in the center, with the interior of the city walled in way that divided different people groups from one another.

Enter Christ-followers. Enter the Gospel. The Church came to Antioch and began breaking down the dividing barriers in a way that upset the society's existing

categories. People from all parts of the city—Jews and Gentiles alike—were suddenly coming together. The Christians were redefining community in a radical and unprecedented way, so much so, that a new word was needed to categorize what in the world was happening.

Now, the average resident of Antioch wouldn't have been able to tell the difference between a Pharisee and a Sadducee, or other divisions that were only present within certain groups. But in Christians, they saw something different. The term "Christian" comes from the world's realization that something new and unheard of was happening. Divisions between Jew and Gentile, or Greek and barbarian, didn't matter. Divisions between master and slave, between employer and employee, didn't matter. Divisions between men and women didn't matter. Instead of their identity coming from any of those divisive aspects of their lives, a unified identity was found, created in Christ.

Pastor Carl Grulke ran into this same challenge, of figuring out how to get across the message of unity in Christ in the midst of divisions, in his work with Lutheran Bible Translators earlier this year. He relates the story as follows:

*We started team checking Romans with the Wayeyi team and we had an interesting discussion around Romans 1:14, "I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish." The focus of our discussion was on the word "barbarians" in this verse.*

*In Greek culture, they called themselves "Greek" or Ἕλλην and everyone else was called "barbarians" or βάρβαρος. Didn't matter where you were from; if you weren't Greek, you were barbarian and the Greeks looked down on you as uncivilized. But English has picked up this word and filled it with lots of context that probably doesn't help us understand this verse. So how should we translate it in our translation into Shiyeyi?*

*We talked about the word they use in Setswana for a non-Motswana person, mokwerekwere. But that word isn't polite and people would balk at it being in the Bible. The Wayeyi have another word for an outsider, mashazi, but that is the word that we are using for Gentiles. (Side note: Jewish culture is similar to Greek culture here. You've got Israel and everyone else is Gentiles.)*

*So, we decided to use the word mashazi there, but not capitalize it as we have done when referring to Gentiles so as to make a difference between the two. The important point is not that we use the exact equivalent word as βάρβαρος, but that it is understood to mean the "out-group". This strengthens the message here that the Gospel is for all people, those who are "insiders" and those who are "outsiders". God has called us to preach the Good News to them all, in whatever language they speak best.*

Even in our melting pot American culture, as much as we try to be one people, divisions still happen. We may talk about how one of the mottos of the United States is "E pluribus Unum," or "Out of many, one," but there are still lots of divisions. Liberals and conservatives; war hawks and peace doves; rich and poor; Republican and Democrat; liberal and conservative; men and women; Pro-Life and Pro-Choice; Urban and rural; white, black, Asian, and Hispanic. Other divisions aren't based on deep ideological issues, but continue to divide us. Do you drink soda, or pop? Are you a Cyclone fan or a Hawkeye fan, a Cubs fan or a Cardinals fan, a Blackhawk fan or a Bruins fan, a Heat fan or a Spurs fan? We find many ways to divide ourselves.

Because of Christ, God has done the impossible. Because of Christ's work, reconciling the world to God, we are no longer divided. Whatever categories the Galatians could think of to divide themselves into: Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male or female, no longer divide them. And any categories that we can think of to divide ourselves into: conservative or liberal, city people or country people, rich or poor, young or old: whatever those categories are, they no longer divide us. We are one in Christ.

That's the message for us, as well. Sin will continue to divide us, to make us treat those who are different from us in unloving ways. Jesus continues to unite us in his love for us, and our love for him. We are then sent out into the world to break down barriers, to be wrecking balls to walls that divide. In Christ, we are one.

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