

**Don't blame Jesus Christ:** The destruction of the beauty of Christianity by socio/economic/politico forces— a look at the antebellum American “Greco-Roman” South



In previous articles, I have noted how a prevailing culture can hijack and thus pervert Christian thinking in socio-economic-politico (SEP) areas—often without the Christian realizing how he has absorbed pernicious cultural influences that adversely infect his view of biblical truth, fellow man, and the nature of government.

In previous articles, I have outline ten socio-economic-politico (SEP) hijackings of Christianity: (1) by Rome/Constantine (313), (2) by the crusades (1100-1300), (3) by the inquisitions (1231-1834), (4) by colonialism (1400-1800), (5) by antebellum America (1650-1863), (6) by reconstruction (1863-1877), (7) by Jim Crow South (1877-1960), (8) by Nazi Germany (1930-1940), (9) by consumer/prosperity Gospel (1950-2018), and (10) by modern political Christianity on the Right/conservatives and the Left/liberals (1950-2018).

In this article, I would like to touch on the Greek/Roman influence on Christians in the antebellum South. Before I do, I would like to note my goal and intention. My goal is to help purify Christianity from cultural corruptions. I have zero desire to stir up racial friction or make anyone feel guilty. My intent is to provide some illumination on how the grace, love, and beauty of Jesus Christ can be neutralized in His self-professed followers. How could Christian men in antebellum South who spoke so proudly about honor and integrity, studied the Bible daily, and openly confessed their commitment to Jesus Christ enslave, mistreat, dehumanize other human beings simply because of the color of their skin?

It should be noted from the outset that antebellum South was one of the most Bible-saturated societies that have ever existed. It was a highly literate society, filled with Christians who read their Bibles daily and were very faithful in church attendance. Yet, the South was one of the last

societies on Earth to prohibit the practice of racial slavery. A comparison between the Christians in antebellum South and Christians in Sweden is very revealing. While Christians in Sweden outlawed serfdom and all slavery by 1350, over 500 years later in the South slavery was still practiced (and which cost about 700,000 dead in the Civil War, and federal intervention into the Southern states to "resolve" this issue). What explains the difference between the Christians in Sweden (in 1350) and Christians in antebellum South (1650-1865)? Didn't they have the same Bible? There is little doubt that those in antebellum South had a much better knowledge of the Bible. Were they not both followers of the same Lord Jesus Christ and His mandates to love all human beings?

While no one can deny that the profit motive was the key factor in slavery in antebellum South, there was another powerful factor: the adoption of Greek/Roman culture as a backdrop for and hermeneutic of Christianity. We see evidence of this influence all over the South in the Doric columns of Greek Revival architecture adorning the porticos that stand guard in the old antebellum mansions, government buildings, schools, colleges, and even churches. Consider the names of towns like Corinth, Athens, Philadelphia, and Sparta in rural South. When one went to college, he would likely find himself in a fraternity emblazoned with Greek letters. It is not an accident that statues of Greco-Roman gods and goddesses are represented abundantly in the pantheon of Southern monuments and memorials.

One cannot travel far in the South without seeing Greek influence throughout Southern history. Part of this is due to the heritage of the Enlightenment with its revival of Greek thought, Rationalism, and deism. Part of it was due to preferences for Greek/Roman ideas of honor, nobility, and virtue over the Christian ideals of love, humility, and compassion. No matter how much Southerners studied the Bible, without a foundation of philosophical realism, they (and we) always adopt our prevailing culture to guide us in interpreting the Bible and Christianity.

The sad fact is that antebellum Southern culture, no matter how many times Jesus Christ might be invoked, was never fully Christian because of preference of Greek and Roman Stoic ethics. Greek and Roman ideals had hijacked the faith. This does not mean that they did not have a strong and loving vertical relationship with Jesus Christ. It does mean, however, that their horizontal relationship with fellow human beings was unchristian—which they often justified by citing support for slavery in the Bible, apparently unaware that the Bible in no way supports racial slavery because all men are created equal. Why was it illegal to enslave a White person?

The sad fact is that the vast majority of Christians in the antebellum South were more Greek than Christian, more Stoic than scriptural. Southerners adhered to a set of values and social mores that would be more at home amongst Homer and the Greek philosophers than Jesus Christ, the apostles, or the Christians of the first few centuries. The Southern pride of the South, like the greatness of the English squirearchy, always had a stronger Greek flavor than it ever had a Christian. Its nobility and graciousness was the nobility and graciousness of the Old Stoa. The South's virtues were the broadsword virtues of the clan, as were her vices. In the Greek and Roman world, it was taught that some people were made for slavery, an idea that the South would promote with the backing of "science" (Darwinianism). The idea that all men are equal in every way was practically rejected by many Christians even though they claimed to follow the teachings of the Bible (see Gal. 3:28).

Under the influence of Roman and Greek influences, a whole race of people was dehumanized in antebellum South. Moreover, anyone who challenged the status quo was maligned and vilified. We have similar problems today as many Christians continue to malign and demonize those do not agree with their socio-economic-politico views. The Christianity of the South was entrenched in Greek and Roman thought. Much of Christianity today is entrenched in pagan political thought on the Right and the Left.

In sum, we cannot blame Christ or Christianity for the activity of the South—which was full of churches—for slavery, racism, and brutality toward an entire race of people. Moreover, we cannot blame Christ or Christianity for the many hateful comments by Christian conservatives and Christian liberals today who continue to follow the world's way of thinking and acting (animosity, slander, demonization) instead of following the Lord's better way of being salt and light in our wonderful Republic. Why would any Christian follow a political commentator who demonizes his opponent than the better way of Jesus Christ? I can understand a non-Christian vilifying others, but a Christian? A follower of Christ?

Matthew 5:43-48, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 "And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

So, anytime a Christian on the Right or the Left dehumanizes, vilifies, or demonizes his opponent (be he Obama or Trump) on a personal level, don't blame Christ or Christianity. God tells us that the source is demonic (see James 3:8-15).

In His Matchless Grace,

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