

All the Difference

a Bible study note from Wayne Braudrick

How Christianity Changed The World

In response to questions, let me here elaborate on the book I mentioned while teaching Psalm 122. The volume is *How Christianity Changed The World*, by Alvin Schmidt. The sales of the book are proof of how much difference packaging and cultural context make. Originally released in 2001 as *Under The Influence*, the book sold rather poorly. Eight years later, continual cultural denigration of Christianity caused the publishers to think the time was right for a re-release with the more obvious current title. The results have been stellar.

In this scholarly but very accessible book, retired University of Nebraska professor Dr. Schmidt relates how Christianity has changed all of human history. This renovation has not been accomplished via governmental controls but rather through believers in Jesus naturally living out who they are. He shows how active worshippers of Jesus led to:

- All people generally valuing human life. Except for the Hebrews, every civilization before Christianity took a restricted view on the sanctity of life. Before the influence of Christians spread, infanticide was regularly practiced (especially on little girls) in Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas.
- Freedom of speech and the press. Such concepts would have made no sense to ancient and classical peoples – just as they are restricted today in countries with low Christian influence.
- The abolition of slavery.
- The rise of true charity. Purposeful, private sacrifice in order to help others was almost unknown in antiquity.
- The establishment of child labor laws.
- The fight against alcoholism. In most pre-Christian societies, the abuse of narcotics is widespread and often encouraged by the priesthood (sometimes as a means to speak with “deity.”) Christians take seriously the sober rationale of the scriptures and fight against the personal and societal ills of addiction.
- The idea that no one is above the law. This is particularly emphasized by the Old Testament prophets. Of course, each of these blessings is founded on a base of Hebrew thought, and the truths come to Christians through both Old and New Testaments.

The book also deals fairly with those individuals who did evil under the supposed guise of Christianity. Schmidt shows how those unbiblical deviations actually hurt society, and calls for Christianity to remain true in order to achieve continued positive influence.

There are two small weaknesses in the work, each of which is ironically a-biblical:

1. His section on music is very informative, until he gets to modernity. He spends far too much time on Alan Bloom’s ideas about “beat” – an a-biblical concept that has tripped up others before him. Any time we base ideas on something outside scripture, we are prone to speculation and even nonsense, and Dr. Schmidt isn’t immune.

2. His description of women in the Greek world is spot on; however, he makes the mistake of equating those mores to Rome. The role and rights of females within the Roman Empire are completely misunderstood. Thus, he gives Christianity too much credit in the liberation of women from the straightjacket of eastern thought. A non-slave woman in the Roman Empire had property rights; no-fault divorce; freedom of trade, movement, and business-ownership; and more. Though Jesus and the Christians certainly accepted and valued females in a biblical egalitarianism, they were not as radical as Schmidt depicts because the world around them wasn't as dark as he describes it. Other authors have made this same mistake (sometimes wittingly) in order to deemphasize male and female roles in the scriptures. It doesn't appear such is the case in *How Christianity Changed The World*.

Despite these small missteps, I highly recommend the book and think you will enjoy it. The new printing even has a discussion guide for small group use.

God bless,
Wayne

Rev. Dr. Michael Wayne Braudrick | Senior Pastor | Frisco Bible Church | 972.335.8150 | www.friscobible.com

"The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith." I Timothy 1:5

All The Difference ™