

A Unified Church  
Colossians 3:11-17  
September 15, 2024

The world is EFFECTIVE & EFFICIENT at dividing people - Here is a List of Ways we divide people today in America:

**Liberal / Conservative**  
**Left / Right**  
**Blue states / Red States (Purple States)**  
**City Slickers / Red Necks**  
**Urban / Rural**  
**Hardworking / Entitled**  
**Blue Collar/ White Collar**  
**Union / Management**  
**Capitalist / Socialist**  
**Moderate / Extreme**

The Bible even has a few great dividers of people:

**Sheep / Goats**  
**Wheat / Tares**  
**Saved / Lost**  
**Narrow Gate / Broad Way**  
**Spirit / Flesh**  
**Wise / Foolish**  
**Spiritual / Carnal**  
**Circumcised / Uncircumcised**  
**Jews / Gentiles**  
**Slave / Free**

This morning we are going to EXAMINE some of these WORDS that DIVIDE - but we are also going to see how God, through Jesus Christ, IS ON A MISSION TO TEAR DOWN these walls that for so long separated people.

When God BEGAN OFFERING Salvation through the Jesus Christ and Him crucified, people responded - On the Day of Pentecost, people visiting Jerusalem from all around the world heard the words of Peter - and many embraced Jesus as Savior.

That's when something NEW & AMAZING HAPPENED - for the first time in the history of mankind, God gathered all those different people into ONE PLACE - into ONE COMMUNITY - a place we call the Church!

Every believer was invited to BECOME A PART of the Body of Christ - Jesus didn't save us to leave us out there in the world all alone - We were IMMEDIATELY INSTRUCTED to become a part of the local church!

In the Early church SOMETHING UNIQUE HAPPENED - something that had never before happened - people from every walk of life found themselves suddenly thrown together in a COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS - They gathered weekly and worship together!

**In Colossians 3:11-** Paul describes the church, those who were NEW CREATIONS in Christ, saying, **where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.**

Paul identifies all the DIFFERENT TYPES of people who would be found in those first churches - He identifies 8 DISTINCT GROUPS:

**Jews & Greeks**  
**Circumcised & Uncircumcised**  
**Barbarian & Scythian**  
**Slave & Free**

You talk about diversity! - There was NO WHERE on the face of the earth that these 8 groups of people would have ever attempted to gather together - GATHERING THIS GROUP was a receipt for a WAR, not a worship service!

Yet, there in Cities all over the Middle East & around the Mediterranean it was happening! - Let's CONSIDER THE MAKE-UP of this early church congregation for just a moment:

**Greeks & Jews - Both a Cultural & a Racial Distinctions**

**Jewish culture** - Highly Religious - steeped in traditions - No group of people were more snobbish about their nationality & morality than the Jews!

**Greek culture** - The Educated World - OPEN TO ANYTHING NEW - religiously open to anything - they also believed they were better than everyone else!

But now these two very different cultures were bound together by a HIGHER ALLEGIANCE they had found in Christ Jesus - Jesus matter more!

### **Circumcised & Uncircumcised - Religious Distinctions**

**Circumcised** - strong Jewish religious roots - this was the SINGLE GREATEST DIVIDER in the day and time - these were people who were VERY NARROW in their thoughts about how someone could approach God.

These were people who only saw 2 colors: Black and White - They were Right and everyone else was Wrong - RELIGIOUSLY SPEAKING, in their world there was no gray!

**Uncircumcised** - no religious roots at all - or from a PAGAN SOCIETY that worshipped every God imaginable - they had very few religious convictions - or their convictions were steeped in a wrong understanding of God.

They grew up in the world of **“you have your truth and I have my truth!”** - sound familiar? - Their buzz world was TOLERATION - we all just need to accept ALL WAYS to any number of gods!

Now, suddenly both of these groups found themselves worshipping together - and no doubt TRYING TO FIGURE out how to get along!

### **Barbarian & Scythian - Social Distinctions**

Barbarians - Both the Romans (Greek Culturally) and the Jews consider these people uneducated - COUNTRY FOLKS - the RED NECKS of that day.

They didn't speak the GREEK LANGUAGE - the Greeks called them BAR BAR because that is what their language sounds like to those who spoke Greek - the language of the educated!

Scythians - lower on the social scale than the Barbarians - BACKWOODS CRAZIES - totally uneducated - they were considered totally uncivilized!

These were the folks that were VIEWED AS BEYOND HELP - they lived in far away places they were thought of as SAVAGE & HOPELESS!

Now, as the GOSPEL SPREAD to distant places, both of these groups of people had been thrown into the MIX AT THE LOCAL CHURCH - in Cities like Antioch & in Ephesus & in Corinth & in Thessalonica! - Church was getting interesting!

### **Slave & Free - Financial & Social Distinction**

Slaves - lower class workers - some were SLAVES BY CHOICE - other because they had been SOLD INTO SLAVERY - some were slaves because they had found themselves in debt and this was their only way out!

Some had good masters who TREATED THEM WELL - some almost as family - others were TREATED LIKE PROPERTY - neither had any rights - almost all were looked down - and mistreatment was common place.

Free - Paul probably has in mind 2 groups here: OWNERS - the bosses - the wealthy - highly affluent - the people with Power!

Second - some were FORMER SLAVES who had earned their freedom - but in Paul's example they WERE BETTER OFF than anyone in slavery!

You talk about awkward - suddenly on Sunday mornings at church the SLAVE AND HIS OWNER SAT side by side worshipping a God who had made them equals at the foot of the cross!

To say the Early Church was A DIVERSE PLACE was a Huge Understatement! - for the first time in History all these BARRIERS & WALLS that had separated people for THOUSANDS of years had been torn down!

In Christ all of these DISTINCTIONS THAT DIVIDED people into groups, had suddenly been LEVELED - The idea that one group was better than another group had been ELIMINATED - Everyone was equal in Christ.

There were no longer ways to place one person CLOSER TO GOD than another - OR To assign one person MORE VALUE than another - We all come to God ONE WAY - that is through the sacrifice of Jesus on the Cross of Calvary! - **All of the ground at the foot of the cross is level ground.**

How did Sunday morning services NOT RESULT IN FIGHTS every week? - What was the secret to the early church's success IN MAINTAINING UNITY in a church that brought together such a DIVERSE AND UNIQUE group of people? - Paul tells us in the next 6 verses.

In these verses Paul will ARTICULATE 6 ATTITUDES that every follower of Christ must "Put On" - or add to their life - this phrase is a simple word for TAKING OFF & PUTTING ON clothing - and just like WE CHANGE CLOTHES, Paul tells us we are to CHANGE ATTITUDES & BEHAVIORS!

These 6 INSTRUCTIONS are the heart of Christianity - In these verses Paul describes what Jesus desires to do in your heart and in my heart.

If we can PUT ON these attitudes, they KEEP US FROM REBUILDING the walls that Christ has torn down - these attitudes are the BUILDING BLOCKS of unity in the Body of Christ - Here they are - We are to:

**V 12 Be Clothed in Compassion**

**V 13 Be Continual in Forgiveness**

**V 14 Chase after Perfecting Love**

**V 15 Follow the Call to Peace**

**V 16 Commune with and Communicate God's Word**

**V 17 Comport oneself representing Jesus**

**V 12 Be Clothed in Compassion - "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, long-suffering;"**

Again, Paul is using the analogy of CHANGING CLOTHES - Earlier in the chapter he instructs us to “Put Off” or take off, old attitudes and behaviors that are NOT APPROPRIATE for a follower of Christ.

Things like LUST & SEX before and outside of marriage - also COVETING what others have that we don't have - not letting our lives be RULED BY ANGER AND MALICE - malice is anger that seeks to HURT ANOTHER.

We are also to CLEAN UP our language - we aren't to use words that are CRUDE OR FILTHY - profanity has become so prevalent in our culture - even many in churches believe it is OK - but not according to the NT!

Lastly, we are to STOP LYING to others - If we are going to SERVE THE GOD OF TRUTH, we need to be truthful people!

These are all the OLD CLOTHING we are to take off - they STINK - they are the clothing of our OLD LIFE - We are new creations in Christ - Born again to live a different life! - We need to DRESS APPROPRIATELY in our behavior and in our attitudes!

Now that we have STRIPPED OURSELVES of these bad behaviors, what are we to PUT ON? - Paul starts our with the word we translate as TENDER MERCIES - A literal translation is **A HEART OF COMPASSION** - We are to have a heart like Jesus!

How many times do we see Jesus others with a heart of compassion - When FACING LARGE MULTITUDES of hurting people we read, He had compassion on them - When faced with the SICK & HURTING, we often read, He had compassion on them and healed them.

When he told the parable of Good Samaritan, we are told that the RIGHTEOUS SAMARITAN had compassion on the traveler who had been robbed and beaten - When Jesus told the story of the PRODIGAL SON, we read that when the Father saw the son returning, He had compassion on him!

Jesus had a heart of Compassion for others - and so should His followers - We are NEVER MORE LIKE JESUS than when we are showing compassion to a needy and hurting world - and to those around us IN CHURCH!

I must admit that compassion does not come naturally to me - I have to PUT IT ON - in other words, I HAVE TO CHOOSE to show compassion - Unlike Jesus, I am quick to judge - I am quick to cast blame - I find judgement MUCH EASIER than mercy!

Paul, knowing my heart, and maybe your heart, commands us to PUT ON compassion - I may have been born the first time WITHOUT A HEART of compassion - but at my second birth, when I am BORN AGAIN, I can now choose a heart of compassion.

Paul completes the picture of this person with compassion by adding **kindness, humility, meekness and long-suffering (or patience)** - these are all attitudes that will flow from a heart of compassion.

Compassion will be expressed in ACTS OF KINDNESS - it will be reflected in AN ATTITUDE of humility & meekness - it will always show patience towards those who need compassion.

Are you ready to put on a heart of compassion? - If our church, if any church is going to CONTINUE IN UNITY & GROW IN DIVERSITY, each of us will need this kind of heart towards each other.

**V 13 Be Continual in Forgiveness - bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.**

If we are going to live along side each other for any length of time, we are going to have to FORGIVE EACH OTHER - If you are around me long enough, I am positive of one thing: At some point I will hurt your feelings!

I will do something or say something that WILL OFFEND YOU! - As much as I would like to say that I wear my heart of compassion every day in every situation, I DON'T! - Sometimes I am a GRUMPY GUY - If you don't believe me, just ask my wife!

And you know what - I'm probably NOT THE ONLY PERSON in this room that has that problem! - This is why we have to live continually with a READINESS TO FORGIVE!

This phrase “bearing with one another” is an interesting thought - it has the idea of **holding yourself back from each other** - sometimes we just NEED A LITTLE SPACE from each other, don't we! - Like the brothers and sisters we grew up with, there are times when we just have to GO TO OUR ROOMS and spend some time alone!

We don't all agree on everything - people for DIFFERENT CULTURES, RACES, & FINANCIAL BACKGROUNDS see life differently - and we can get frustrated with each other - In those times, we might need a little space - a little time to REMIND OURSELVES that it is OK that we don't see the world exactly alike!

Sometimes our disagreements CAN GO TO FAR - We can have a little spat with each other - we have **a COMPLAINT against another** - and when that happens, we have to go to step 2: FORGIVING one another!

But, I don't always want to forgive you - You don't always want to forgive me! - that is why Paul follows up his command to forgive with these words: **even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.**

Do you remember the prayer the Lord gave us when teaching us how to pray? - There was this one VERY DIFFICULT PHRASE in it: **And forgive us our debts, as we FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS!**

Jesus and Paul are very consistent in this regard: If we are going to expect God to forgive us, we better forgive others! - Here is a truth: If you really understand just how much God has forgiven you, you will never have a problem forgiving others.

Most of us WHO HOLD TENACIOUSLY to the hurts others have inflicted on us, have never really understood the depth of God's forgiveness towards us!

If we are going to MAINTAIN THE UNITY God desires for us to have here at CCSM, we are going to have to learn to forgive each other - If you don't learn to forgive, you will SPEND YOUR LIFE going from church to church hoping to find something that does not exist: **A perfect church filled with perfect people!**



THERE'S NOT ONE - if there were Paul wouldn't have to give us this instruction - He would simply TELL US TO LOOK AROUND for another church - but this is never his instruction! - Paul, like Jesus, was a ADVOCATE of forgiveness.

**V 14 Chase after Perfecting Love - But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection.**

Ultimately, one thing holds the church together - it is the LOVE OF GOD - this is the love that God places into our heart when His Holy Spirit comes to live in me and you.

Yes, we need to SHOW COMPASSION to others - Yes, we MUST FORGIVE each other - but the BOND that will hold us together through it all is the SACRIFICIAL "Agape" LOVE of God.

Paul calls this love the **BOND OF PERFECTION** - quite literally "**the girdle that hold it all together!**" - don't think of a girdle like we have today - we wear our girdle UNDERNEATH OUR CLOTHING so that our outer garments will look nicer.

In the ancient world, the girdle was a OUTER GARMENT put on last to hold everything else in place - it was the bond that made the whole garment stay together - Today we would call it a WIDE BELT - but it was worn to keep everything else he is wearing in place.

This is what love does for us - It keeps everything else in my life in the RIGHT PLACE - It keeps my attitudes in the right place - it keeps my motivations in the right place - it keeps my actions in the right place!

Love is the FINAL GARMENT I put on as the thing that COMPLETES MY SPIRITUAL OUTFIT - it completes my walk with Jesus - If there is NO LOVE, everything else about my life as a Christian becomes meaningless!

Remember Paul words in **1 Corinthians 13:1-3 - Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. 2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not**

**love, I am nothing. 3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing.**

When you dress in the morning, DON'T FORGET to put on love! - The rest of our SPIRITUAL OUTFIT is useless without Love!

**V 15 Follow the Call to Peace - And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.**

In the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:9, Jesus said, **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.** - For unity to exist in the Body of Christ, there must be PEACEMAKERS - Men and women who are willing to let peace be a HIGH PRIORITY when it comes to making decisions.

It is easy for me to do what is BEST FOR ME - I think we will all find that to be true - But to experience peace with those around me, I have to do what is best for them as well - and sometimes those two things can be in opposition to one another.

When I let the PEACE OF GOD RULE in my decision making, I am asking a different question - I not asking what is best for me, or what is best for you - I am asking, **What will bring peace to this situation?** - I'm letting the answer to THAT QUESTION RULE in my situation.

Most often peace comes through COMPROMISE - I'm not talking about compromising the truth - No, I'm talking about compromising what I might want and what you might want for what WILL BRING A PEACEABLE solution.

In seeking to maintain peace in a church where we don't all THINK JUST ALIKE, we all have to be willing to GIVE UP our own desires in order to find a PLACE OF PEACE where everyone will benefit!

Paul says that PEACE IS TO RULE - it is to be the umpire - the deciding factor - I look at the conflict two people might be having, and I ask the question, **Where can peace be found?**

Paul reminds us that there is ONLY ONE BODY - One Church - And we need to be people who are seeking peace in their relationships with each other - rather than prioritizing what they want!

We need to do this in our marriages - in our families - at our places of employment - and mostly in our Church!

Paul finishes the thought by reminding us to BE THANKFUL - when you PRIORITIZE PEACE, you may not get what you want - But Paul is reminding us to be thankful for the PEACE THAT HAS BEEN CREATED!

Certainly nothing is more disturbing in life than to live in a constant STATE OF CONFLICT - Can we all agree on that?

So if you are experiencing conflict with someone in your life this morning, why don't you start trying to find THE PATH TO PEACE - After you find it, you will be thankful that the conflict has come to an end!

**V 16 Commune with and Communicate God's Word - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.**

Remember this truth: **You can't teach or share that which you do not possess!** - Here Paul reminds us that Christ's Word must FIRST DWELL IN US before we can impart wisdom - teach others - or correct others.

And those are three things we should be doing every day! - As Christian we have been given a Book containing God's Wisdom for life - We should be sharing with young believers the WISDOM & TRUTH of that Book.

We should be teaching - Once we have invested time and energy in study of God's Word, we should be MENTORING AND DISCIPLINING others!

Lastly, once we have grown confident in our understanding of the Scriptures, we should be LOVINGLY CORRECTING those are going the wrong direction spiritually - We should be ENCOURAGING & MOTIVATING others to continue in their pursuit of Jesus.

Paul mention one PRIMARY WAY of doing this - It is by inviting others into worship with us - Psalms, Hymns and spiritual songs are all pathways of worship - this is singing & quoting scripture - it is inviting other believers to come along side you to experience God's Grace in worship & praise!

The reason you are here this morning is to LEARN GOD'S WORD - You are a DEDICATED LEARNER! - Are you also dedicated to sharing? - to teaching? - to encouraging others?

Our Unity as a church grows as we worship together - and as we come along side each other with wisdom - with teaching - and with encouragement - and correction.

You will know you have become PART OF A CHURCH not just when you are learning God's Word, but when you start passing along to others what you HAVE LEARNED!

**V 17 Comport oneself representing Jesus - And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.**

Paul concludes his thoughts on the unity of Christ by reminding us that we are HIS REPRESENTATIVES here on earth - We are to conduct our lives so that our WORDS AND OUR ACTIONS are represent the HEART OF JESUS!

To do something in someone's name is to act in such a way that RIGHTLY REPRESENTS that person - As Christians, we bear His Name - thus He is counting on us to wear that name appropriately.

A good question to ask when I begin to do something is this: **Can I do this or say in Jesus' Name? Will my choice reflect well on Jesus?**

That simple question will PROVIDE MUCH GUIDANCE in making decisions each day - Sometimes we are uncertain what to do - Asking this question often makes the answer much more clear!

Paul says, whatever you do in WORD OR DEED - Ask this question about what your are about to say - it will stop a lot of gossip & crude comments - and ask yourself this question before you do something - It will stop many activities that will only take you to places you don't want to go!

In closing, are you struggling to get along with others - these 6 ACTIONS & ATTITUDES will change everything about your life - 6 things that will be REQUIRED OF US if we are going to be the church God has called us to be - One where the WALLS OF DIVISION are broken down!

**Be Clothed in Compassion**

**Be Continual in Forgiveness**

**Chase after Perfecting Love**

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