



Colossians 3:11

11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Reflection

In Paul's writing, theology is always followed by a call to live it out. Take his letter to the Ephesians for example. Ephesians is balanced exactly down the middle; three chapters of theology and three chapters of

practical application with chapter 4 verse 1 the transition between the two:

4 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

In Romans, it's twelve chapters of theology, then four chapters of exhortation, beginning with chapter 12 verse 1,

12 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God – this is your true and proper worship.

Colossians too is divided down the middle, two chapters of some of the highest theology of Jesus Christ in the Bible, then

two intensely practical chapters that start with words like these:

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. Col 3:1–2

And,

5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: Col 3:5

For Paul, doctrine determines duty; creed determines conduct; facts demand acts. Because in Christianity, character transformation and obedience always follow

genuine saving faith. And so over the past couple of days we've seen Paul begin to exhort the Colossians to live consistently with their new lives in Christ, casting off the practices of their old way of life and being renewed in the image of Jesus.

In yesterday's passage Paul landed in their communal life together. He listed a long list of poison to Christian relationships and community – the kind of vices that the devil loves to use to tear Christian marriages, families and communities apart – sins like anger, rage, malice, slander and lying to each other. The kind of sins that can destroy Christian communities, tearing them apart instead of building them up and unifying them in Christ. In today's passage, Paul reminds the Colossians of the unity that characterizes their new community in

Jesus. Just one verse today, a beautiful verse, Colossians 3:11,

11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Here, in church, in your young gathering of new Christians at Colossae, you must know, says Paul, that

11 Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

Paul's words are reminiscent of a similarly famous statement he makes in his letter to the Galatians,

28 There is neither Jew nor Gentile,
neither slave nor free, nor is there
male and female, for you are all one
in Christ Jesus. Gal 3:28

Jesus Christ has torn down all the divid-
ing walls of hostility, transforming society
and culture as well as individual humans
hearts. In Christian community,

there is no Gentile or Jew, circum-
cised or uncircumcised, barbarian,
Scythian, slave or free,

In Christian community,

There is neither Jew nor Gentile,
neither slave nor free, nor is there
male and female

... all are one in Christ Jesus through our union with the one who is all, and is in all.

This is such an important, precious but difficult truth. As we all know from family life, getting on with each other can be a very difficult thing. And that's before you introduce religious and cultural differences and backgrounds, and people who, outside of church, you would have absolutely nothing in common with and whose paths you would most likely never even cross. Unity of heart and mind, though so precious, can prove to be very difficult; it can end up almost like the ideal that we can never quite attain. But as Paul has just reminded us, we don't do unity in our own strength. Paul has just said, we have

...put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

As we discussed yesterday there's a constant renewal taking place in the life of a Christian as we continually increase in true knowledge of what God is like and this knowledge is applied to our hearts by the Holy Spirit. This knowledge results in us being progressively transformed into the image and likeness of Jesus. Paul so often returns to this process (known as sanctification) in his letters. Just listen to him in his Corinthian correspondence,

16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 2 Cor 4:16

Or,

18 And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. 2 Cor 3:18

In fact, this transformation in the life of believers is so radical that even age hold barriers to human relationships like racial barriers, religious barriers and social barrier can be torn down and dissolved forever through the power of the gospel. That's what today's passage is about. Here, in Christian community,

there is no Gentile or Jew

no racial barriers any more. Here, in Christian community, there is no

circumcised or uncircumcised

There are no religious barriers anymore. Here, in Christian community, there is no

barbarian, Scythian, slave or free

There are no social barriers anymore. Because we're united to the one who is all, and who is in all; we are now all one in him. And we've begun to realise it, and act accordingly, from the inside out, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Think

Spend some time thinking over your Christian community today. Think about the people that God has gathered in your church; no doubt people from all manner of diverse backgrounds and walks of life. If it helps to focus you, think about the person that you find it most hard to get on with at church at the moment. These people are your family, to be loved through thick and thin, to lay down your life for, no matter where they are up to in their journey with the Lord. Jesus Christ is reconciling all things to himself, beginning with his people. He's tearing down all racial, religious, and cultural barriers to unite everyone who places their faith in him to himself, starting with your church. What can you do today or this weekend to help Jesus in this process? Who is it that you can speak to for the first time? Is there a con-

flict within your church in which you can act as a peacemaker? What dividing walls still exist in your community, and how can you help Jesus tear them down for good?

Pray

Pray today for your church. Pray for unity and joy together in Jesus. Pray that Jesus might be the foundation and chief cornerstone of your church and that in him, the whole building of God's people might be joined together and rise up to become a holy temple in the Lord; a temple that sings his praises in a world that for the greater part is yet to know him.

Pray also today for the inner renewal of your character. Pray that you would spur on the work of the Holy Spirit by growing

in your knowledge of God and that your doctrine would overflow into duty, your creeds would outpour in your conduct, and the facts that you know about God would result in a groundswell of acts to his glory in our world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.