

Pursuing Harmony
Colossians 3:11-17; May 5, 2019

Introduction:

- Last week Tanner kicked off this new sermon series called: “Symphony: A Diverse Unity.”
 - Do you realize that a full-sized symphony orchestra can have up to 100 musicians playing in four different sections (strings, brass, woodwind and percussion) with over 25 different instruments in total.
 - It’s all of these different sections working together to create something spectacular that makes a symphony orchestra so great. It wouldn’t be the same if everyone played the same instrument and the same notes. Rather, they are all different and yet they all play in tune and play together. They know when to lead and when to accompany. The balance of volume and tone in each section is astounding.
- The church is supposed to be like this:
 - One of the most compelling dynamics of the church is how there can be unity amidst great diversity.
 - As Tanner showed last week, this unity is all made possible by the death of Christ.
 - This is our motivation when you hear us say we want our church to be a thumbprint of Medford and Greater Boston. Everyone is welcome here.
 - The gospel brings diversity because the gospel is for everyone without distinction.
 - Think about the diversity in this orchestra that is called the church:
 - Ethnic, generational (young and old), single and married, educational, thinking styles and personalities, socioeconomic, workforce
 - Differences can be a **tool** to display the beauty and greatness of God or they become a **barrier** to the unity and harmony that God desires in his church.
 - Today, my primary focus is how we can pursue harmony and live in unity amidst all our diversity.
 - What unifies a symphony orchestra? A conductor and the musical score.

Transition: Jesus is what unifies us in the church and we will see this clearly in our passage today.

Context:

- Chapter 3 in Colossians marks the beginning of a new section where Paul appeals to the Colossians to live in a manner pleasing to the Lord. The foundation of his appeals are rooted in the gospel (cf. 1:13-14, 19-22; 2:13-14)

Read Col. 3:1-17

Do you see the preeminence of Christ in all all things?

- “Seek the things that are above, where Christ is” (3:1, 3, 4).

- “But Christ is all, and in all” (3:11).
- “Peace of Christ” (3:15).
- “Word of Christ” (3:16).
- “Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus” (3:17).

What is Paul doing?

- Paul is calling them (and us) to pursue a deeper knowledge of Christ.

Why is the preeminence of Christ and going deeper with him so important?

- If we don’t grow deeper with Christ, we won’t grow deeper in unity with each other.
- The emphasis on “one another” (3:9, 13)
- The mention of the “one body” (3:15).
- The explicit reference to the diversity within the church (3:11).
 - *Greek and Jew, Circumcised and Uncircumcised*
 - This describes the whole of humanity. Since there is no longer the distinction between Jew and Gentile, circumcision has lost its meaning.
 - *Barbarian, Scythian*
 - There are Greeks and “barbarians,” those who don’t speak Greek (cf. Rom. 1:14).
 - They Scythian represented the lowest kind of barbarian. Josephus said: “they are little better than wild beasts.”
 - *Slave, Free*
 - Paul’s point: the barriers that once divided people from one another (racial, religious, cultural and social) are abolished by the gospel (cf. Gal. 3:28; 1 Cor. 12:13).

Paul has one only one hope: Christ and his reconciling power!

The Point: Pursue harmony by pursuing Christ in all of life.

Transition: this passage highlights four specific ways we should do this:

I. Pursue harmony by putting on the character of Christ (12-14).

Explain “putting off” and “putting on” language:

- Paul uses a clothing metaphor here for what it looks like for us to bring our behavior in line with our new identity (cf. Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22-24).
- As we are increasingly transformed, people should see in the local church a glimpse of the new self (cf. 3:10) and of God whose image we reflect.

Don’t forget the context:

- Paul’s concern is for unity in the local church. Stott says, “Miss this, and we read the paragraph in vain.”

- All of these exhortations relate to how we should behave with others and in particular fellow believers.
- All of these virtues are listed elsewhere as describing the graces and actions of God or Christ.

1. Compassionate Hearts (12).

- Cf. Exod. 34:6; Rom. 12:1
- Compassion: a deep concern for the brokenness of others along with a strong desire to alleviate the suffering (ie. Foster Care).

2. Kindness (12).

- This word in the OT expressed the abundance of God's goodness to his people (cf. Ps. 31:19). In the NT see Rom. 11:22; Eph. 2:7; Tit. 3:4.
- It's a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22) and a direct outworking of love (1 Cor. 13:4).
- The opposite is described in 3:8

3. Humility (12).

- Humility relates to how much I think of my own significance.
- Jesus is our model for humility (cf. Phil. 2:3-11).

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Phil. 2:3-4 ESV)

4. Meekness (12).

- It's similar to gentleness and is also a fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal. 5:23).
- Meekness and gentleness should not be confused with weakness. I like to think of it as power under control.

5. Patience (12).

- Another way to think of patience is "long suffering." We endure rather than flipping out into a rage or vengeance (cf. 3:8).
- God's kindness and patience leads us to repentance (cf. Rom. 2:4).

6. Forbearance and Forgiveness (13).

- Notice how these all connect together. As we grow in patience, we are better able to forbear with others.
- The present tense of the verb points to the continual practice of it.
- The ground and motivation is the gospel (cf. Matt. 18:21-35; Eph. 4:32).
 - To forgive means we choose not to seek revenge.
 - To forgive means we determine to do good rather than evil.
 - To forgive means we pursue relationships and restoration. True forgiveness "longs to love again" (Storms).

7. Love (14).

- Love takes the initiative towards another person. Love sacrifices. Love gives. Jesus displays the ultimate love by laying down his life.
- There's no denying the preeminence of love when compared to other attributes (cf. 1 Cor. 13:13; Rom. 13:9-10) but the point here is that love is what binds together, not the other virtues, but the Christian community itself. Only this love is strong enough to hold together such a diverse congregation.

II. Pursue harmony by letting the peace of Christ rule (15).

What is the “peace of Christ”?

- What it's not:
 - It's not referring to an inner sense of peace that we often talk about (cf. Phil. 4:4-7). For example, “God has given me peace about...” This doesn't fit the context.
- Rather, given that the church is a collection of such a diversity of people with opportunity for dissension, he calls for the rule of Christ to rule in peace amidst the diversity.
- Stott puts describes it this way: “It is inconceivable that those who share with one another the benefits of that great peace-making work of the cross (1:20) should live with any hatred or contempt for each other in their hearts. The Christian congregation should be a realm of peace just because every Christian is totally committed to the rule of peace. When Christ rules in the heart, his peace will rule in the fellowship” (Stott).

What does it mean to let it “rule”?

- It means to let Christ's peace hold sway in their lives as they related to one another (so O'Brien).

Why the note on thanksgiving?

- It's a theme in the entire letter (cf. 1:3, 12; 2:7; 3:17; 4:2). Christians should be characterized by thankfulness (in contrast to “ungrateful” people in the last days - 2 Tim. 3:2).

III. Pursue harmony by letting the Word of Christ dwell (16).

What is the “word of Christ”?

- Paul could just have easily said “Word of God” but he didn't... given his focus on the preeminence of Christ.
- Paul is referring to the message about Christ; the message that centers on Christ; namely, the gospel.

What does “dwelling” look like?

- Dwell richly:
 - A parallel passage is Eph. 5:18 where Paul says, “Be filled with the Spirit.” In the same way as the Spirit indwells us, the “Word of Christ” should dwell in and

- among us in abundance.
- Sam Storms says this, “The truth about Jesus should be “taught and known and obeyed in all its glory and beauty and richness....Let its intrinsic power and splendor do its work in and for you.”
- There’s no way we will grow in unity and harmony as a church a part from the “Word of Christ” being in rich abundance in us (as individual Christians) and among us (as a Christian community).
- Individually:
 - It should have its way in our lives.
 - It should be read, meditated on and memorized (that’s why we provide a monthly Bible Reading Plan).
- Corporately:
 - Teaching and admonishing:
 - The significant part here is that this wasn’t just Paul’s work (cf. Col. 1:28) but the work of the entire congregation.
 - Singing:
 - This is one of the means of teaching and admonishing. When we think about our Sunday morning experience, we want to sing the Word, pray the Word, read the Word, preach the Word, respond to the Word. It’s about the Word.
 - The Word should shape what we sing.
- Thankfulness:
 - The word here is from the Greek word meaning “grace.” One translation even interprets it as, “all with grace in your hearts to God” (NET).
 - “A gospel of grace (1:6) must be echoed by songs of gratitude for grace” (Stott).

IV. Pursue harmony by living all of life all for Christ (17):

What should be clear by now is that following Jesus isn’t just a Sunday thing. Jesus wants your whole life. Everything you *say* and everything you *do*. This is as comprehensive as it gets in the Bible (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). Our entire lives are to be lived for the name of Christ (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

Our speech:

- Is what I’m about to say a reflection that I’m a follower of Jesus. That Christ died for me and he is worthy of glory and honor?

Our actions:

- Is what I’m about to do consistent with what Jesus would have me do?
- Does this action show that I’m a follower of Jesus?
- Will this action honor my Savior?

If we really asked these questions, how might it affect what we actually end up saying and doing?

Jesus wants all of you!!!

Conclusion

The Point: Pursue harmony by pursuing Christ in all of life.

“Regeneration does not erase individuality, personality or character, but sanctifies it and puts it at the service of God’s name. The community of believers is the new humanity that bears within itself a wide range of variety and distinction and manifests the richest diversity in unity” (Herman Bavinck).

When Christ is all and in all, our differences and diversity are sanctified and the result is a glorious and harmonious symphony.