

## Sermon Outline

### “Christ Above All and in All” (*The Glue of Christian Unity – Part 1*) Colossians 3:9-15 – Joshua Harris – August 14, 2011

#### Introduction

1. The recent events in our church are forcing us to grapple with important questions: How do we disagree with each other in a way that honors Jesus? What is the real basis of our unity? And how do we maintain unity that we feel so passionately about various issues?
2. Colossians 3:9-15 ends by reminding us that we were called “in one body.” Too often we read the Bible individualistically, and forget that much of it was written to churches. Paul is doing more than simply telling individual Christians how to live their individual new lives – he’s writing to a church body and telling them how the gospel enables them to live a new life *together*.
  - a. Bible commentator R.C. Lucas points out that the main theme of this section is unity in the local church. “*Miss this,*” he writes, “*and we read the paragraph in vain.*”
3. This two part series will look at four ingredients of the “glue” that keeps unity in the local church, even when we disagree.

#### Ingredient #1: Christ is Above All and in All (verse 11)

1. In this verse, Paul is talking to the people of God. He is saying “here in the church” we are no longer defined by our ethnicity. In Paul’s day, it was the racial lines of Greek and Jew, barbarian, Scythian, slave, and free. Today we might say Black, White, Asian, Hispanic, blue collar, white collar, rich or poor.
  - a. Paul is saying that we have a new identity in Jesus Christ. In the church, our new identity as Christians is more important than any other identity. It doesn’t matter what color our skin is or where we went to school or where we work. What matters most is that we’ve believed in Jesus and are being renewed by his Holy Spirit.
2. Then verse 11 ends with this powerful statement: “but Christ is all, and in all.”
  - a. “Christ is all” means Christ is more important than anything else. Christ is more important than our ethnicity, our job, even our gender. Jesus matters more than anything else.
  - b. And in the church Christ is *in* all. In other words, the most important thing about our fellow-Christian isn’t that they look the same as us or even agree with us about everything but that Jesus is living in them just as he is living in us.

## **Sermon Outline**

3. Christian unity is destroyed when we start treating other issues as more important than Jesus who died for our sins and who was raised from the dead for our justification.
  - a. We can all so easily do this. We can do this with race and ethnicity. We can do this with socio-economic differences. We can do this with our political viewpoint, with education, or even with preferences in clothing.
  - b. What's being lost in all the noise is the recognition that Christ is above all of this. Our viewpoint – no matter how right we might each think we are – is not more important than who we are in Christ. The most important thing about that fellow-Christian who currently disagrees with us is not their opinion on such and such an issue; the most important thing about them is that Christ lives in them.

### **Ingredient #2: Gospel Identity (verse 12a)**

1. In verses 12-15, Paul begins to list the kinds of new behavior we should put on. But he does this by first rooting these new behaviors in our new gospel identity.
  - a. New behaviors must flow out of a new identity. We have to know who we are through faith in Christ before we can live new lives. We have to remember all that God has already done for us in Jesus' life, death and resurrection before our behavior will change. So what does gospel say about those who have trusted in Christ?
2. We are "chosen": God doesn't love us because of something we've done. He elected us in Christ before the world was formed (Eph. 1:4). It wasn't the result of our effort but solely his mercy and kindness. If we had earned our way in, we'd have no guarantee that we wouldn't earn our way out. But our standing before God isn't the result of our initiative. It was God's initiative. We are chosen by grace!
3. We are "holy": God has declared us righteous in Christ (2 Cor. 5:21). He has set us apart as his special children. We are no longer defined by our sin. God calls us holy. The righteousness of Jesus Christ has been given to us.
4. We are "beloved": We should be labeled enemies, rebellious, unloving, selfish, unlovable, etc. But God, in his great love, sent his Son Jesus to rescue broken and hopeless people like us. By the power of his death on the cross and glorious resurrection we have been transferred from death to life. We have been raised with Christ. We have a new identity. We have been relabeled as beloved!

## **Conclusion**

1. The glue of Christian unity is resting firmly in our gospel identity. When we are secure in of our gospel identity, we can show grace and compassion to others.

## Sermon Outline

2. In contrast, people who don't know who they are in Christ find their identity in their performance and their good works. People who aren't secure in God's love tear other people down to make themselves feel more worthy before God. If we don't see ourselves as chosen, holy and beloved, we certainly aren't going to see fellow Christians that way.
  - a. We'll say, "Oh, there's that person who disagrees with me. I don't want to be around them."
  - b. Or "There's that family who educates their kids differently than me. I don't feel comfortable around them."
  - c. Or "There's that person whose child is struggling spiritually. I don't want that label on my kid so I'm going to keep my distance."
  - d. Or "There's that person that sinned against me once...and we label them by their sin."
3. We have to *actively choose* to see one another as chosen, holy and beloved. If we don't then we'll put some other label on people and we'll divide from them over it.
4. In our current church situation with two pastors resigning, there is no getting around the fact that there is mutual disappointment and disagreement. The temptation, in a time like this when we're taking a position and disagreeing with another Christian, is to find our identity in our position – to fight and do all we can to prove them wrong so that we'll feel safe in our identity.
  - a. Yes, we disagree. Yes, we're disappointed in each other's decisions. But there's someone greater than our disagreements and disappointments. Jesus is more important. Christ is all and is in all. We all still love and worship him. So even as we disagree, we can bless one another. Even as we disagree we can say, "Christ is in you." Even if we go to different churches, we can celebrate the same glorious gospel that saves us and unites us. We can view one another not as adversaries, but as chosen, holy and beloved and continue to express love and affection.

## Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a care group to read Colossian 3:9-15.
2. How would you define Christian unity? According to Colossians 3:9-12a, what are some of the ingredients of unity in the local church?

## ***Sermon Outline***

3. What does it mean that “Christ is all, and in all” (Colossian 3:11b)? How should this truth influence the way we should view and respond to fellow-believers, particularly those with whom we might disagree?
4. Josh shared that “Christian unity is destroyed when we start treating other issues as more important than Jesus...” What issues are you tempted to make more important than Jesus living in the life of a fellow-believer?
5. According to Colossians 3:12a, what is your new identity in Christ? What is the meaning and significance of each characteristic?
6. Why does our behavior need to flow from our identity in Christ? What happens when behavior is rooted in something other than Christ?