

Racism, Division, Sufficient Savior

Col 3.10-11

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INTRO – today we'll be in Col 3 but before that I want to play a brief clip:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gHFJk0_VqFc&feature=share

Great video of God's great vision for the world and a great visual of our text in Col 3. Colossae was in modern Turkey, Muslim lands today, but Jews, Europeans and Africans all converged in the Roman Empire in the church – and division and racism was overcome by the sufficient Savior. I love to see how our middle Eastern Messiah unites every skin shade, age, stage of life.

Look at Col 3:11 (ESV): *Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*

Context of v. 10, in Christ, NAS says we 'put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him— ¹¹ a renewal in which **there is no distinction between Greek and Jew...**

That's language like Rom 12:2 transformed by the renewing of our minds, instead of being conformed to the patterns of this world and its categories. All people groups, pride and prejudice must bow to Christ's preeminence. We're not blind to color or culture, they're just no longer barriers in Christ.

When we're renewed with true knowledge, no distinctions bring divisions.

Other translations:¹ *in that renewal there is no longer Greek... or In Christ there is not / when this happens / in this state there cannot be Greek or Jew...*

Here's a dynamic equivalent/thought-for-thought: 'In this new life, it doesn't matter if you are a Jew or [Greek], circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters and he lives in all of us.'²

Or paraphrase by J. B. Phillips: 'In this new man of God's design there is no distinction between Greek and Hebrew, Jew or Gentile, foreigner or savage, slave or free man. Christ is all that matters for Christ lives in them all.'

These phrases cover racism, religious background, reputation, and rank. Or ethnicity, externals (circumcision), education (barbarian), economics (slave). Today some still wrongly judge by education (homeschool, public, charter, etc.), or externals, religion.

Greeks may be listed first in v. 11 because they saw themselves first over others. *Barbarians* didn't speak Greek so were considered unsophisticated, while the *Scythians* were the most uncivilized.

The Jews prided themselves on *circumcision* and religion setting them apart from everyone else. Paul who's writing this was a Pharisee, and one of their daily prayers thanked God they weren't born a Gentile, a woman, or a slave.

Now he writes of **God's new family transcending slavery or ethnic partiality.**

In v. 12 he says the church is God's chosen people (not just Israel). In NIV, v. 12 calls them *dearly loved* (Gentiles who Jews used to call dogs are now called *dearly loved* in Christ). Go back to ch 1, and notice how it starts, 1:2 *To the saints and faithful brothers...* not 'to the slaves / Scythian / savages' – *to the saints* – and not 'to...the filthy barbarians' – *to the faithful brothers*

In New Testament times there was deep hostility and alienation between nations and evil deeds of racism. They saw slaves inferior, free and Greeks saw their culture as supreme, but v. 18 says **Christ has the supremacy over everything.**

Col 1:20 says **through Christ God will 'reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.'** ²¹ *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds* [those people groups in 3:11], ²² *he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death...*

Gospel reconciliation: 3:11 ... *there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.*

Last time we talked about thanksgiving verses in Col 3 as part of a national holiday of thanksgiving but we need to spend time in **v. 11** on **the national hurt of this year**, too. **Ahmoud Arberry** in February (a black jogger killed in GA by whites saying and texting racist slurs), **George Floyd** in June in MN, and in the months since, overflow of racial tensions building for decades.

Why study Col 3:11, up in the mountains, away from cities and diversity?
We need all God's Word, maybe especially subjects out of sight and mind.
This timely next text speaks to deep ethnic divisions in Paul's times that had been building for centuries, and the answer for all time: Christ as all in all.
We can't ignore this subject or this text and just move on to the next verse.
As we teach through the Bible section-by-section it speaks to our world and helps us know how to speak to our world about racism and our gospel hope

Col 3:11 isn't about politics, it **is about people, prejudice, and the power of Jesus** that healed these great tensions in the 1st century and can in the 21st.

Maybe you have no ill will to anyone based on skin color, or don't practice injustice personally, but we can all internally judge by externals. It doesn't have to be hate to hurt, it can be **indifference, ignorance or insensitive words**.

We'll look at v. 12-15 more later but notice v. 12 starts with calling God's chosen beloved people to **put on compassionate hearts** (in context that flows out of v. 11 and empathy or sympathy to people groups that faced hostility). It's one thing to listen to a conservative talk show taking apart the liberals, it's another thing to put on a compassionate heart for the hurting we talk to.

We don't have diversity in our community like the video I showed (our area is 90-some % white, 0.some % black, small % Asian, Hispanic). But there's a growing number and kids growing up in a world with a liberal worldview on this and the church needs to be a place for conversations and compassion

I've heard people in our church say they don't see racism (as majority people)

Is this needed in our community? We're in Northern CA, not Southern U.S.

Our church name 'Gold Country' reminds us of the gold rush in this area that brought people from Europe, South America and Asia, but the melting pot often boiled over. Racism in CA led to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act keeping all Chinese laborers out. Only in 1943 were Chinese immigrants allowed back but just a few a year (for political reasons/relations in WW2).³

And during that war was when California led the way in forcing Japanese U.S. citizens out of their homes to internment camps just for being Japanese

Just history? June 2020 South Bay Japanese shop owner found on his door, "Go back to where you belonged. Go back to Japan you [racist animal slur] ...we are going to bomb your store if you don't listen...Here is America."⁴

Closer to home let's talk about our own county and our own community.

Until 8 years ago there were tombstones not far from here with the N-word chiseled into them when they were buried (put there in many of your lifetimes, "unknown N"—literally not to be caught dead in white cemetery)⁵

How about 4 years ago in El Dorado Hills? CCRs for a neighborhood said: "No person except those of the white Caucasian race shall use, occupy, or reside upon any residential lot or plot in this subdivision, except when employed in the household of a white Caucasian tenant or owner."⁶ Still on the books since the 1960s, but shows how few noticed till 2016 controversy. This year about 20 young black entrepreneurs toured a EDH neighborhood and social media posts said rioters are here, 2nd amendment call, get guns!⁷

In 2018 a barbershop in Placerville had a Colin Kaepernick doll hanging by its neck from the ceiling (black player who started protests against racism).

The barbershop's owner told a local TV station "I literally had no idea that I was offending people ... with the theme of 'Hangtown,' I hung him."⁸

In July of this year on Placerville main street, flyers for a website of a white nationalist group were put up on shops. In front of the county courthouse the same month I'm told there's footage of racial epithets shouted at a protest.

That's this year, this week headlines of a 14-year-old black student's family suing a local school for racist taunts verbally and by text the last 2 years.⁹

Recently, a Chinese friend of someone in our church was at local Raley's and a stranger shouted "Go back to China, I'll buy you a ticket to Wuhan!"

I've heard comments on Indian-run businesses who people don't support because of the Indian casino. People in our church have confessed a struggle as they see people in traditional Arab dress, but they don't want to. I heard black culture equated with a victim mentality and had to talk privately after a class here. I've heard people here speak negatively of Mexicans. And it goes both ways, a black sister in Christ confessed she use to hate us whites.

I had lunch with a black pastor in Sac years ago who shared growing up his dad wasn't allowed to become a member in the Presbyterian denomination. He loved the Reformed tradition as I do but couldn't take communion in it.

John Piper remembers blacks couldn't even attend a wedding at his church.

In the decade before I was born many SBC churches didn't allow blacks.

And in the denomination I grew up in, GARBC, likeminded black regular Baptists wanted to join the fellowship but weren't allowed, kept segregated.

Interracial couples weren't allowed in ministry and missions into the 1980s. In 1996 leaders confessed and fellowship began w/ black Baptist network.

A Christian college (some families in this church sent kids to) had a ban on interracial relationships into the 21th century, U.S. Supreme Court stepped in

In the 21st century at our church someone told me about a black grandchild who experienced racism at this church years ago. 'I'm allergic to your skin color' has been said by a kid on this campus (no one at our church today). Someone who used to be at our church left and a chief complaint was kids adopted from Africa, he used language about my family that I can't repeat.

So this is a real problem, and the solution to this sin is in our text, Col 3:11. Let's dig a little deeper into ***Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised...***

In the historical context before Paul, the 'superior' Greek culture was forced on the Jews by those who conquered them. Antiochus Epiphanes persecuted the Jews and "shared the Greek view that Jews were by nature the enemies of all nations (3 Macc 7:4) and therefore deserved to be punished."¹⁰

The circumcised Israelite despised the uncircumcised Greek and Gentile (all non-Jews). Jews 'refused to enter a Gentile house. They would not eat a meal cooked by Gentiles, nor buy meat prepared by Gentile butchers. When they returned to Israel, they showed their disdain for Gentiles by shaking off the Gentile dust from their clothes and sandals ... Needless to say, the Gentiles returned those sentiments. But the gospel broke down those barriers...' ¹¹

Col 2 says circumcision and Sabbath and ceremonial laws are all shadows of Christ that aren't needed now that He's come. Judaism's rules, rituals, and regulations were eclipsed by the reality of a relationship with Christ by grace alone through faith alone. Gal 5:6 says '*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.*' And Gal 6:15 '*Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation*' (NIV).

It's not about being religious or doing religious things, what matters is the regenerating work of God. The value is faith in Christ, that's what counts in salvation. It's not about being a good person, it's about believing a gracious person named Jesus. None of us are good enough to get to heaven but Jesus is good enough and lived the good life we couldn't to please God for us.

Rom 3: *Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin ... there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift ... is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles...there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him.* ¹² . So the church must not make distinctions in partiality or prejudice, James 2:1, 4

Look at next phrase in Col 3:11 says there's also no '*barbarian, Scythian...*' *Barbaros* - an onomatopoeic word for any whose speech sounds to a Greek like "bar, bar, uh" - in other words a foreigner you can't understand (today we'd say "blah, blah, blah"). Remember Charlie Brown's teacher? What he said, the child heard, but it wasn't clear to the audience (blah, blah, blah).

Barbarians were uneducated in the superior Greco-Roman words and ways of life, and were thought uncultured, and uncouth (if not literally unclean). They were seen as crude, coarse, boorish, like beasts ¹³ (or some teenage boys today). They were brutish, some even brutal, ¹⁴ Aristotle called them 'bestial.' Plato said that the barbarians are "our enemies by nature." ¹⁵

Paul was compelled to minister the gospel to them as much as anyone else:
Romans 1:14 *I am under obligation **both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish** [NAB "ignorant"; NLT "uneducated"].*

Romans 1:15 “So, for my part, I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome. **For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.** [started with Jews like Paul, but then for all, Greek and barbarian]¹⁶

The **2nd century *Epistle to Diognetus*** said “Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language ... inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities ... They love all men.”¹⁷ Even *Scythians* – the unsaved saw them as the most savage, ferocious terrorists.¹⁸ Greeks saw Scythian as “the most cruel and anti-Greek people.”¹⁹ The Greek historian Herodotus said the Scythian “had the most filthy habits and never washed with water.”²⁰ The early church Father Tertullian could think of no greater insult to the heretic Marcion than to describe him as “more filthy than any Scythian.”

But in Christ’s church, Col 3:11 is saying “there is no place for any such racial, ethnic, or cultural contempt among peoples and individuals; even the wild, repulsive Scythians ...”²¹ For Christians, barbarian “was struck out of the dictionary of mankind and replaced by ‘brother,’ ... the idea of mankind as one family, as the children of one God, is an idea of Christian growth.”²²

Piper: ‘The point of Colossians 3:11 is not that cultural, ethnic, and racial differences have no significance; they do. The point is that that they are no barrier to profound, personal, intimate fellowship. Singing alto is different from singing bass. It’s a significant difference. But that difference is no barrier to being in the choir. It’s an asset.’²³ So is God-designed diversity.

The last 2 people groups in Col 3:11 ‘*slave, free...*’ we’ll talk more about in v. 22 in a few weeks where it talks about slaves and masters. That was a big division in the 1st century and slavery in American history was even worse. But what’s the hope for racism or division. v. 11b: ... *Christ is all and in all*

One writer says this ‘is really all that matters. Unity within the community is based on the fact that Christ **is in all**. He indwells **all** believers and permeates all our relationships...in the new community those distinctions don’t matter...all believers are equal; all believers are to discard any and all behaviors and attitudes which are inappropriate for our new life.’²⁴ JC Ryle:

‘These 3 words (*Christ is all*) are the essence and substance of Christianity’
The way the world talks about racial hate or wrong doesn’t seem to bring peace. There’s not a lot of goodwill to men in some conversations about this.

We sing:

in despair I bowed my head: "There is no peace on earth," I said,
 "For hate is strong and mocks the song Of peace on earth, goodwill to men."
 Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: "God is not dead: nor does He sleep;
 The wrong shall fail, the right prevail, With peace on earth, goodwill to men."²⁵

It's discouraging to watch the news but there's **good news of great joy to all**.
Christmas is about God and sinners reconciled then reconciled to each other.
Christ is sufficient over man's divisions and racism. His gospel brings peace to
 those on whom His favor rests. That grace can change strong hate to love.

To us a child is born and to us a son is given **whose name is Prince of Peace**.

- **Wise men from Orient** / East (modern Iraq or Iran or Arab lands)
- Christmas announcement **good news for all people...peace on earth**
- Message was **to uneducated and unclean shepherds**, segregated class
- **Mary and Joseph** were **poor peasants**, despised by Gentile Romans
- **Baby Jesus** in the temple was lifted up as a **light for the Gentiles**
- Jesus and His family **fled to Africa** in Mt 2, refugees in lower Egypt.
 After living in the corner of Africa till Herod died, **out of Egypt** the Son of God
 came to Israel like Israel called out of slavery in Exodus
- Jesus was oppressed and **ministered to the oppressed and outsiders**, He
 touched the unclean, welcomed Gentiles into His family by faith
- As He went to the cross, a **man from Africa** helped carry His cross. As Jesus
 died, His blood like all of ours ransomed from **every tribe**

Christ is all and in all, therefore v. 12 says to His chosen beloved people, '*put on a heart of compassion...*' Put on the compassion of Christ's heart.

When you see a minority or any ethnicity being mistreated, think of v. 10, the image of the Creator.

All men are image-bearers, that's key in racism.

Image of the creator – v. 10 – **all men** are image-bearers, that's the key issue –and *renewal* in v. 10, transformed by renewal of mind, not pattern of world

Put on **compassionate hearts** means sympathize, empathize with sufferer.
 As in Heaven podcasts (Ligon Duncan, black brethren, Shai Linne article).²⁶
 Compassion is bearing one another's burdens, mourn with those who mourn

Forgiveness based on gospel is the power – v. 13b – as the Lord forgives us.
 Love is what binds together in perfect harmony and unity – v. 14. We need to let peace
 of Christ reign as one body – v. 15 – see also 2:19 for how we're connected to each
 other (if one suffers, 1 Cor 12). T4G 2008 message

Think of those whose language you don't understand? Unreached peoples? What about people struggling with English who came from other countries? Think about those in the body of Christ who are struggling due to racism.

1 Cor 12:13 *'we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit...'*¹⁴ *Now the body is not made up of one part but of many...'*²¹ *The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!"...'*²² *On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable,*²³ *and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor... God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it,*²⁵ **so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other.**²⁶ **If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.**

WE NEED THEM IN OUR BODY. WE NEED TO FEEL THEIR PAIN

This week there was a vivid illustration of compassion on a physical body. Monday in Sac, Jewish doctor, black and Asian saving a Nazi supremacist
https://www.newsbreak.me/n/0XqtNjE1?pd=07iT9B8f&lang=en_US&s=i4

CLOSING ILLUSTRATION OF **COMMUNION SERVICE IN 1865**

"Negro Communed at St. Paul's Church," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, April 16, 1905, p. 5. "Colonel T. L. Broun ... said: ... It was communion day ... amongst those who first arose and advanced to the communion table was a tall, well dressed negro man; very black ... This was a great surprise and shock to the communicants and others present, who frequented that most noted of ... Churches in Virginia. Its effect upon the communicants was startling, and for several moments they retained their seats in solemn silence, and did not move, being deeply chagrined ... General Robert E. Lee was present, and he, ignoring the action and very presence of the negro, immediately arose, in his usual dignified and self-possessed manner, walked up the aisle of the church to the chancel rail, and reverently knelt down to partake of the communion, and not far from where the negro was. This lofty conception of duty by General Lee under such provoking and irritating circumstances, had a magic effect upon the other communicants, who immediately went forward to the communion table. I, being one of the number, did likewise.

Footnotes:

¹ NRSV, HCSB, ISV, Wuest's Translation of Greek NT.

² New Living Translation.

³ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Chinese-Exclusion-Act>

⁴ <https://www.nbclosangeles.com/news/local/torrance-japanese-store-note-threat-hate-crime/2381222/>

⁵ <https://www.mercurynews.com/2012/02/28/el-dorado-county-buries-racial-slur/>

⁶ <https://abc7news.com/el-dorado-hills-whites-only-sacramento/1485040/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3YkXiv9GreA&list=PLdb1v0XZtitYHMTZVwr34nimJAA369Bhl&index=14>

⁷ https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8411007/Young-black-entrepreneurs-touring-upscale-Sacramento-suburbs-accused-protesters.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490

⁸ <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-08-03/noose-placerville-logo-hangtown-gold-rush-california-black-lives-matter>

⁹ "Northern California school sued — 14-year-old alleges classmates used racist taunts," *Sacramento Bee* 12/2/2020:

¹⁰ Colin G. Kruse, "Persecution," in *Dictionary of New Testament Background: A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 775.

¹¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *Colossians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 151–152.

¹² Romans 3:9, 22-24, 29; 10:12.

¹³ Paul J. Achtemeier, "Barbarian," in *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 93.

¹⁴ In the LXX, "brutal men" in Ezekiel 21:21 ["brutish" in ESV] and "savage beast" in 2 Maccabees 4:25

¹⁵ *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, ed. William Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000), 113.

¹⁶ NASB.

¹⁷ *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted ed. 1973), 27.

¹⁸ Dunn, 225.

¹⁹ Craig S. Keener and John H. Walton, eds., *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 2087.

²⁰ As cited by MacArthur, 152, and William Hendriksen, *Colossians*, 154.

²¹ Dunn, 226.

²² Joseph Barber Lightfoot, *Colossians and Philemon*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1997), 110

²³ John Piper, *Sermons from John Piper (2000–2014)* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God, 2014).

²⁴ Max Anders, *Galatians-Colossians*, vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 330.

²⁵ Henry W. Longfellow, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day."

²⁶ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/george-floyd-and-me/>