

I decided to preach a sermon just on verse 11 of Colossians 3 because it is part of the new humanity theme in Scripture which is part of the new creation theme and it will take a bit of time to make that clear. The reason that I feel that it would be edifying to take the time for this is that one of the great encouragements for putting all the do-s and don'ts into practice that surround this verse is the beautiful vision of what God is working towards in our salvation. A great part of the motivation for living the Christian life is seeing the beauty of what God is accomplishing on the basis of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. God is working towards a new creation. The new creation has already begun with the resurrection of Jesus. The new life that we have in Christ is the life of the new creation – eternal life. And part of the new creation is a new humanity. This passage is about what the new humanity looks like.

All the things that Paul tells us to put to death and all the things that he tells us to do instead, together describe the kind of life that salvation enables the new humanity of the new creation to live. And a big part of learning to live that way is to be excited about being part of something that is big and wonderful and attractive. What I want to do in this sermon is show you that the language of a new humanity comes from this passage. It is not obvious, but it is there and I want to take the time to show you where it is.

So verse 11 says, "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free, but Christ is all, and in all." An important question is, "Why is this verse even here?" Paul has been talking about putting sin to death. He is telling the Colossians to kill evil desires and idolatry and put away things like anger, wrath, and malice. He reminded them that when they turned to Jesus they had put off the old self and put on the new self. He reminded them that the new self is being renewed after the image of God. And then all of a sudden he is talking about there not being Greeks and Jews, circumcised and uncircumcised. And the question is, what does that have to do with what Paul has been talking about? It is pondering that question that helps us to see the wonder and the beauty of what Paul is talking about here.

Notice that Paul begins verse 11 with the word "here." "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised." The logical question to ask is "Where is here." Where is there not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised? Paul is saying – It's right here – its right here where the old self has been put off and where the new self has been put on. Its right here where the new self is being renewed in the image of God. This is where there the distinctions between Greeks and Jews, etc. are somehow gone. We will get to how they are gone later. The point to get now is that where the old self has been put off and where the new self has been put on and where the new self is being renewed in God's image – there "there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free but Christ is all and in all." So we know where "here" is.

We can get to the same place by substituting the word "where" for "here." That is a legitimate thing to do on the basis of the Greek. We can follow the flow of thought like this. You have put off the old self and have put on the new self which is being renewed in the image of God, **where** there is not Greek and Jew, etc. The place

where these distinctions between people no longer exist, in some sense, is where the old self has been put off and the new self has been put on – where the new self is being renewed in the image of God.

Now we will spend a little time exploring the place where the old self has been put off and the new self has been put on – where the new self is being renewed in the image of God. We looked at those terms last week, but we're going to look at them again in the light of verse 11.

Last week when we looked at the terms old self and new self, I just stuck with the ESV translation because it is good enough for the point I was drawing out in that sermon. But we're going to look at them again because they are very important for understanding verse 11 which is our focus now.

The literal translation of old self/ new self is old man/new man. I'm not sure why the translators used "self" instead of "man". I sure they had their reasons, but using the word "self" instead of "man" hides something important. The term "old man" in Paul refers to the human race in Adam. And the term "new man" in Paul refers to the renewed human race in Christ. In biblical thought corporate categories are very important. There is an interesting relationship between our individuality and our embeddedness in various groups. Both are important. But the corporate aspect is more important in the Bible than it tends to be for us in our individualistic society.

So when Paul says that the Colossians had put off the old man he is not just talking about their old individual selves although that is included. Rather he is talking about a corporate category – "the old man" which refers to the whole human race in Adam. The old man is the human race in its relationship to Adam which is dead in sin. The term "new man" refers to the new humanity in its relationship to Christ which is alive in Christ. So while it is not wrong to interpret these in terms of individual selves, it is not complete. What we turn away from in putting off the old man is the whole human race in its relationship to Adam and what we put on when we put on the new man is the new humanity in Christ.

Here are a couple of quotes from Thomas Schreiner's, *New Testament Theology*: "When Paul urges people to put off the "old self" (Eph. 4:22), he means the old Adam. Conversely, to put on the "new self" (Eph. 4:24) means that believers are to individually appropriate who they are in Christ." "The "new man" (Eph. 2:15 my translation) represents the new people of God, composed of both Jews and Gentiles, who are one in Christ. As Lincoln says, 'Christ has created this corporate new person in himself; the new humanity is embraced in his own person.' This stands in contrast to the "old self" (Rom. 6:6); the old Adam, through whom people enter the world, has been crucified." (308)

Now what is most important for our purposes this evening is the fact that the term "new man" refers to the new humanity in Christ. We will look at a few other verses that speak of this just to confirm that what I am saying is a proper interpretation of this passage. Ephesians 2:11-22 is a very important passage for this idea

that one biblical way of thinking about what God is creating in Christ is a new humanity – a new humanity for a new creation.

Ephesians 2:11-22 is about how God in the gospel united Jews and Gentiles in the new humanity, which is clearly also a major concern in our text. The uniting of Jews and Gentiles in the church through the gospel is a major topic in the NT and in the prophecies of salvation in the OT. The uniting of Jews and Gentiles is a major part of what salvation is all about in the biblical account of salvation. Ephesians 2:11-22 is a key passage.

Obviously there was a great division between Jew and Gentile in the OT. God chose the offspring of Abraham to be his people and he did not choose any of the other nations to be his people. So in Ephesians 2:12 Paul says to the Ephesians, who were Gentiles, “[R]emember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.” There was a huge barrier between Jew and Gentile. There was separation. There was alienation.

But, Paul goes on to say, Jesus’ death on the cross was about removing that barrier. “Verse 13 “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.” Notice the language of removing separation and bringing unity. You Gentiles were once far off, but you have been brought near by the blood of Christ. He continues in verse 14, “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ... [verse 15] by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances....” Many of the laws and ordinances of the OT were about maintaining the separation between Jews and Gentiles. That separation was a necessary part of God’s plan of salvation, but with the coming of Christ, it was time for that separation to be removed and so all the OT laws that enforced the separation between Jew and Gentile separation were abolished.

And then Paul goes on to describe what God was working towards by removing the separation between the Jews and Gentiles. Verse 15b-16, “that he might create in himself one new man in the place of two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility....” Here we have the language of creating a new humanity and removing separation and division between people. The reason that the Bible is so interested in the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in Christ is that a huge part of what salvation is all about is that God is creating a new humanity in Christ. God removed the separation between Jews and Gentiles “that he might create in himself one new man in the place of two ....” That is the meaning of the term “new man” in Colossians 3:10. The term “new man” is this “one new man” in the place of two that God is creating on the basis of the blood of Christ.

This one new man is Christ and the new humanity that is in him. God was reconciling both Jew and Gentile to himself “in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” The new man is the new humanity that God is creating which belongs to the new creation language of Scripture.

Now back to Colossians 3. We are laying out the background for understanding and appreciating our text, “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.” Where is here? Where the old man has been put off and the new man has been put on – where the new humanity in Christ has been put on. And where the new humanity is being renewed after the image of its creator. Here there is more new creation language. In the original creation God made man in his image. One of the great results of the fall of Adam into sin is that the image of God was damaged and distorted in the whole human race. One of the results of the broken image of God is separation. Separation between God and man and separation between people. And so we have Cain killing Abel. We have the tower of Babel. We have conflict and hatred and animosity.

But in the new creation, God is renewing his image in the new humanity and one of the great results of that is that divisions are removed and unity is established. The renewing of the image of God in the new humanity is new creation language and one of the great themes associated with that is the removal of barriers – the overcoming of separation – the new humanity is one in Christ.

This is how our text fits in with the context. This is why I have sought to relay in a deeper way the meaning of the terms “old man” and “new man” and “image of God” in terms of the new humanity and the new creation. What is so significant about the new humanity in Christ is unity – reconciliation between God and man, but also reconciliation between people. The new man is one in Christ. And where the old man has been put off and the new man has been put on “there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian slave, free; but Christ is all and in all.”

What this means is that these categories are no longer cause for division. There were still Jews and Greeks in the new humanity. But that distinction no longer had a divisive significance. The most significant category was no longer Jewishness or Greekness, but the unity in Christ. The same is the case with the other categories mentioned in the text. Circumcised or uncircumcised – that’s just another way of referring to Jews and Greeks. That was the major division to be overcome in the early church and so it is prominent in these passages. But Paul also mentions barbarians and Scythians. These were both terms of dishonor. Barbarians were considered uncultured – uncivilized – ignorant. And Scythians were an extreme form of barbarian. In the words of one scholar, “[T]he Scythian was generally thought to be the ‘epitome of unrefinement and savagery’ (Moo, 271).

Slave and free is another pair of contrasting categories. That distinction was certainly an important one in general society, but in the new humanity whether you were a slave or a free person made no difference in terms of acceptance or status. A slave and a free person were equal in Christ. A good example of this in the NT is the way in which Paul speaks of Onesimus in his letter to Philemon. Onesimus was the slave. Philemon was the master. Paul writes to Philemon concerning Onesimus, “So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me.” Paul is asking a master to consider his slave in the same way that he thought of Paul.

Now the issue of slavery in the Bible is complicated and I will deal with it when we get to chapter 4 which deals with the relationship between masters and slaves. In order to understand and apply this verse, all we need to know that in the early church, where slavery was a reality, when it came to the relationships between Christians, free people and slaves were equals and the distinction between them in society was not to be carried into the church.

So let's now think of this in our time and in our experience. The categories of the text are not part of our experience, but they are not hard to translate to the categories of our time. There is not to be division on the basis of otherness – on the basis of any of the kinds of distinctions that cause separation and division in our world. But we are not talking about the world here. We are talking about the new humanity – the church. The kinds of differences and distinctions which cause separation and division in the world are not to cause separation and division in the church because the church is God's new humanity which belongs to the new creation.

So what are the kinds of differences that cause people in the world to hate each other or look down on others or maintain separation from others. A big one is race or nationality or ethnicity. There is a lot of talk about racism right now and it is obviously a problem in our world regardless of how we think that problem should be addressed. From the biblical perspective we are talking about how God addresses the problem of hatred and division between races and that is through salvation in Jesus Christ – through creating one new humanity in Christ.

The gospel is God's answer to racism. That is not to say that Christians have nothing to contribute to dealing with racism in the world, but that is not what this text is about – at least in the first place. In the one new humanity in Christ there are no races in the sense that race is not a category of division. There are races in the sense that we can appreciate each other in the ways that we are different, but races are not to be a factor when it comes to belonging, respect, honor or status. Our status of belonging to the new humanity in Christ is what is to determine how we relate to one another. And as far as the world is concerned, the greatest contribution we can make to the problem of racism in the world is demonstrate to the world the reality of the new humanity that God is creating in Christ.

Here is one way of expressing this thought written by E. Ferguson in his book *The Church of Christ*. "The church presents an "alternative society." Within the disciplined community of believers the new humanity begins to be realized. The church offers an example to society, a vision of a better way. The church is not called to enter the secular arena in order to make a sick world well. She is called to act well and so to serve as a reconciling witness to society. The church does not have a social strategy; the church is a social strategy. Within the church there is created a fellowship that shatters society's categories. The Christian gospel and manner of life change persons, and thus society indirectly. But this is not simply the individualism of evangelical

Protestantism. The individuals are incorporated into a new social organism (the church), and this offers to the larger society an alternative to its social evils.” (p. 398).

This shattering of society’s categories is what our text is about and it includes more than divisions caused by race. Here is another quote from the same author. “There are false (and potentially sinful) principles of unity around which people organize themselves. Persons find their sense of identity from citizenship in a nation, being of the same race, sharing a certain occupation or economic status, adhering to a particular political doctrine, participating in a certain social class, sharing the same level of educational attainment. The church is intended to transcend all of these bases of unity. True peoplehood is to be found in God through Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11).” Ferguson is expressing the point of our text in terms of contemporary categories.

What Paul is doing in our text is present a vision of how the divisions that tend to separate people from each other are no longer negatively relevant in the new humanity in Christ. What is the most important thing about us is who we are in Christ. And in Christ we are one. The distinctions that cause so much division in the world belong to the old man which has been put off. There is a positive role for many of them, but there is no place for them causing division. Instead the new humanity has been put on. That new humanity is being renewed. And there “there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free but Christ is all and in all.”

In the new humanity “Christ is all.” That refers to the centrality of Christ to the new humanity. Christ is our saviour. Christ is our Lord. Our life comes from Christ. Our life is for Christ. We are saved by him and we are saved to live for him. And where that is the case, there is the desire to be like him in counting others more significant than ourselves as Paul puts it in Philippians 2. And Christ is in all. Christ through his Spirit dwells in the new humanity and he is at work in the new humanity that he is creating.

That is the vision. And it comes right in the middle of all these exhortations about putting sin to death and putting away anger and slander and lying. And it comes right before a whole list of exhortations about compassion and kindness and humility. When we put away sin and when we put on loving and caring we are seeking to be the new humanity that God has begun and which he is perfecting.

So let us see the beauty of what God is doing in Christ to renew the human race as part of renewing the whole creation. Think of the beauty of a community where every member is respected and loved. Think of the contrast between that picture and the hatred and division that is such a prominent feature of the human race outside of Christ. We are not there yet. God is not done with us yet. We can be thankful for the love and unity that we do experience and we can be inspired by the vision of what God is working towards. May that vision draw us to consider our own attitudes towards those who are different and seek to grow towards what God is working towards as he renews us in Christ.

## Table Meditation

The connection of what we have been dwelling on with the Lord's Supper is obvious. The Lord's Supper is among other things a reminder and a celebration of our unity in Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 is a key text. "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (1 Corinthians 10:16–17)

The Lord's Supper is a celebration and a confirmation of the fact that by us all eating the same bread and together drinking the wine/juice which represents the blood of Christ, we participate in Christ as one. "We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

It is interesting too that in Ephesians 2 where Paul speaks of the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in Christ to form one new humanity, the blood and the cross of Christ is the means for that union. Ephesians 2:15b-16, "that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross...." The reconciliation to God and the reconciliation to one another happen together. God reconciles us both to God in one body through the cross. The cross is the foundation for both. The cross reconciles us both to God and to one another. The two are inseparable. They are both parts of one salvation and the cross is the foundation.

And that reality is a feature of the Lord's Supper as well. We remember that Jesus died to reconcile us to God. But we also remember that he died to make us one new man – to make us one new humanity – to make us one body in Christ. And so also here the vision is to encourage us to make it more and more a reality in our corporate existence as the people of God. One of the points of the Lord's Supper is that it is a reality. And that reality calls us to make what is objectively true of us as believers who are one in Christ more and more a reality in our experience as believers dwelling together in unity and love.