

**The Sermon - In 10 Sentences or Less**  
Countercultural (Week 3): Unity, Not Polarization:



1. America is polarized: we've retreated to the extreme ends of the spectrum, abandoned the middle ground, stopped dialoguing, and entered an either/or, winner take all fight with each other.
2. This polarization is most easily seen in our politics, but also includes the sharp differences in values found among those who comes from various socioeconomic classes, generations, and locale (rural vs. urban).
3. American Christianity tends to take on this same polarization, we fragment and splinter far more quickly than other expressions of the faith around the world (in fact, most of the globe's denominations find their point of origin in America, proving that point).
4. As you might guess, the New Testament asks us as Christians to chart a very different course, one that will make us stand out to our watching, divided culture.
5. Passages like Gal. 3.28 tell us that we are Christians first, and that every other identity we might claim are a distant second.
6. Likewise, because Christ is our core identity, He becomes the lens through which we interpret or evaluate everything else in the world: for example, as disciples we don't ask first, "What does my preferred political party think about x, y, or z, but instead "What would Christ have me think about those things?"
7. Moreover, St. Paul encourages the extraordinarily-diverse first churches to focus more on what they share or have in common than what makes them different (see the repetition of the word "one" in Eph. 4.3-6).
8. Thus, as Christians we need to be wary of anything or anybody (i.e., our favorite news outlets perhaps) who might overstate our differences from others, understate our common ground with them, or in any other way dissuade us from respecting and loving our neighbors.
9. Last, Jesus Himself noted that the unity between His disciples would be a chief reason why the world would believe in Him and His divine mission (John 17.23).
10. If we take that seriously, it gives us a new, quite revealing way to understand why the American church has been in freefall for the better part of four decades: our penchant for disunity has undermined our witness and invalidated our message.

## **Quote to Remember**

From Dr. Christena Cleveland, in her book *Disunity in Christ*:

*"To embrace our identity in this new common family called church, we must engage in the difficult process of lessening our grip on the identities that we have idolized and clung to far too long, things like politics, vocation, class, race, and culture. In many ways, this process will jar our souls, wrenching us from the safe homogenous existence we so easily seek. At first, it will feel painfully unnatural because we have lived outside of our shared identity in Christ for so long. Intentional unity will feel wrong to us initially, enough so that the best of us will want to quit...However, never forget – not only is Jesus serious about crossing impossible boundaries to pursue us, but He's also equally serious about His followers crossing the same boundaries in order to be the church together. He has led the way; we follow in His footsteps."*

## **For Further Exploration**

1. Two short videos in which Dr. Christena Cleveland (cited above) delves into Christian unity and the content of her book a little more:

['Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart' by Christena Cleveland To Become One, Week 1](#)

2. A short reflection on how "church unity" has become an oxymoron in far too many instances:

[Has 'Church Unity' Become an Oxymoron? - N.T. Wright Online](#)

## **A Prayer for the Week**

Adapted from St. Cyprian of Carthage (C. 200-258 C.E.):

Lord, we pray for the unity of Your church. Help us see all Christians as rays from one sun, branches from a single tree, and streams flowing from one river.

Help us remain united to You and to each other, because You are our common source of life. May the light of Christ shine through us, and may His love flow through us to all the earth, amen.