

## Reconciliation of What Divides Us

Your race, nationality, ethnicity, family, even your neighborhood, school or workplace all carry certain cultural values. These values motivate how people treat each other, their ethics, and what behaviors are condoned or not.

As a follower of Jesus, you must identify first with Him and secondarily with your culture. You are a member of His body, a child of the Father, and a citizen of His Kingdom—which carries its own cultural values. When you yield your culture to Jesus, you permit Him to reveal the aspects of it that are aligned with His Kingdom, and aspects fueled by the sinful nature. The latter will collide with His Kingdom truths, behaviors, and values sooner or later. Wherever there's a collision point, Jesus says to “deny yourself;” disassociate yourself from your culture's self-willed values and behaviors, and align yourself with His Kingdom values and behaviors. When you yield in obedience to Jesus, practicing His character and values, your race, nationality, and ethnicity find their redeemed expression in God's glorious mosaic. Believers find unity within diversity through submission to Jesus, their King.

Read Colossians 3:5-14.

What practices of the *earthly nature* or *old self* (selfish, sinful nature) are listed here (verses 5, 8, 9)? Which ones (and others) do you see in your culture, race, age/social group, where you grew up, and so on?

What attitudes and practices of the *new self* (yielded and obedient to Jesus) are you to *clothe yourself with*? (verses 12-14)

What groups of people are listed (verse 11)? What distinguishes them from each other?

The groups are distinguished by race and religious background (Gentile and Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised), race and nationality (barbarian, Scythian), economic/social status (slave or free), and, in Galatians 3:28, sex (male and female). Each has its own culture.

What are they, and you, to primarily identify themselves as? (verses 10-12)

On what basis is the cultural and racial diversity united? (verse 11 and Galatians 3:26-28 adds... *you are all one in Christ Jesus.*)

According to this passage, how does “taking off your old self” and putting on the “new self” affect how you treat people from different cultures?

How does it affect the way you relate to or express your own culture?

*... you have taken off your old [self-ruled, sinful] self with its practices and have put on the new [Christ-ruled] self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all [the One every believer obeys], and is in all [the One who indwells every believer by the Spirit]. Colossians 3:9-11*

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith [members of His family and Kingdom], for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with [yielded to] Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one [united in a common identity] in Christ Jesus. Galatians 3:26-28*

Obedience to Jesus is the only hope for resolution and reconciliation of whatever divides us: race, economic status, gender, culture, and so on. Without Jesus as this objective focus to whom each of us submits, whoever has the loudest voice, most power, or greatest advantage will win over those with less.

The following lists contrast the values and behaviors of the sinful nature with God's Kingdom values and behaviors in six important categories. In what specific ways do you see yourself participating in the sinful, self-willed culture? What Kingdom values or behaviors must replace them?

- Regarding the use of power, position, authority, put to death (rid yourself of) intimidation, manipulation, domination, greed. Put on (replace it with) serving, empowerment, protection of the vulnerable, justice.
- Put to death rebellion and subversion to authority. Put on submission and cooperation.
- Put off the old self of relative, self-serving ethical standards—lies, theft, bribes. Put on biblical ethical standards—truth telling, generosity, impartiality, integrity.
- When wronged, put to death holding a grudge, vengeance, violence. Clothe yourself with forgiveness and acts of reconciliation.
- In response to diversity, put off prejudice, pride, dissension, division. Replace with mutual honor, unity through obedience to Jesus, celebration of diversity.
- In your sexual expression, put off self-gratification however the culture/society permits. Put on self-giving love within covenant monogamy between one man and one woman.

With His blood, Jesus purchased people from every tribe, language, and nation. Someday, all believers will stand together before His throne in a marvelous array of diversity, united in our submission and worship to Him.

*After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. Revelation 7:9*

Please take time to respond to God. Pray *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth [and in me] as it is in heaven. Matthew 6:10* Then, use these thoughts to guide you:

- Thank Him for the nationality and race in which He has created you.
- Repent of the ways you have participated in the world's self-ruled culture of values and behaviors. Tell Jesus which Kingdom values and behaviors you will adopt to replace them.
- Ask Him for grace to obey Him each step on your journey of change.