

Series: Colossians	Reference: <i>Colossians 3:12-17</i>	Title: Community Sandwich	Date: 1.24.2021
Website Writeup: Christianity is community, and community is both joy & difficulty. What values govern our community as Christians, what is the central thing which enables us to have health? We explore these questions in today's sermon.			

Christianity is community, and community is joyful & difficult. Humankind has always had issues with being in community. Hutu's/Tutsi's in Rwanda. Khmer Rouge in Cambodia. The Korean conflict. Israel/the Palestinians. Al Qaeda/the West. Iraq/Kuwait. Russia/Afghanistan. Bosnia/Serbia. The Cold War. The American Civil War. Republicans/Democrats. Race issues everywhere. Looking back in history at any particular time there were a number of conflicts going on. A friend of mine was a newspaper reporter. When he started out he was relegated to covering local politics. The fights which arose at town meetings bordered on violent. We glory in conflict. Sports reflect this. No one goes to a hockey game, but for the fights.

Conflict happens. We have personal conflicts at home. Mothers & fathers splitting up, brothers & sisters not talking. Teenagers drift away, no matter your best efforts to talk. Parents demand, put down & don't listen. Bosses or coworkers belittle, making us feel stupid, ugly, or unwanted. Maybe you're not receiving, but giving grief.

We've been verbally beaten up, or done it to others. As we grow, we learn the politics of life, an accepted norm. We learn to guard what we say around certain people, to couch certain terms in certain ways to avoid conflict. People use our words against us, twisting them to their ends...the politics of words. We've been through months of words on social media & TV. We develop a proficient edge of manipulative & coercive speech to get what we want & get through life. We verbally box, bob, jive, shuck & weave in speech.

It'd be heaven to not have to live like that. To not have to deal with anger, bitterness, destructive sinful behavior, hurtful words, selfish desires & all those other things which divide. To live in trust, never wondering if they'd use it against me. Not to have to manipulate or coerce, leaving relationships in the hands of Jesus. To live with others in community knowing you're loved & love others. Imagine the security it would bring! Insecurity, so much fear, anxiety & conflict would be eradicated. But it takes unifying around the right thing.

Last week Paul spoke of what the Christian life *does not* look like. We heard how focusing on Christ will kill off those dead things in our lives. Like an old tree with dead leaves hanging on throughout winter, spring comes & they're pushed off by new life from within. As Christ grows in us, His life pushes out those dead useless desires of the Old Self as we submit to Him as Lord.

Today, Paul speaks of community. He expressed in Chapter one who Jesus is, called us to look intently at Christ, to walk-about in Him (*to live*), to set our hearts & minds on

Jesus as central model. Paul gave us a list of personal sensual sins contrary to this new life. Then gave a list of negative social sins. Both lists tend to destroy the family of God which evidences a lack of focus on Jesus. Finally, Paul pointed out Jesus brings people together...different people. People who once hated each other. The 12 disciples are a good example coming from various backgrounds & political stances.

Now as we look at how life is together. In looking at mans relation to man we can lose sight of Jesus, who makes it happen. Let's not lose our focus on Him as we talk about life together as the Church. Paul begins in 3:12...*Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy & dearly loved...*

As I said before, *Christianity is community* arising from our vertical relationship with God (*community with Jesus*), we have a new horizontal relationship with others (*community with each other*). Paul sandwiches this passage in between who we are in Christ. Where does community come from & what does it look like?

Paul uses a transitional word, 'therefore', signifying the first piece of bread for our sandwich today. Paul could've said this differently. He could have said, *'because of all that I just wrote; who Jesus is, how you need to live in him, focus on him, allow him to kill off the remnants of that old self, how he brings people together in brotherhood. Realize who you are in Christ.'* Who are we? We are *God's chosen people, holy & dearly loved*. Three words which had once been reserved for the nation of Israel, but now the doors have been completely thrown open to all ethnic groups. God's gathering together the Barbarian, Scythian, Slave, Jew, Gentile, all into one community...unity in diversity.

The door had always been open, but one had to become a Jew following the written code. But in Christ, the written code has been canceled, nailed to the cross (*v14*). The dividing wall of hostility between Jew & Gentile demolished, all nations free to enter into relationship with God as they are. Unity in Diversity, which brings about issues of community with different people.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book, *Life Together*, says we all hope for community, but our community's based on human love which has at its core our own desires. Spinning us off into affinity groups where you have to accept everything the group dictates to belong. He says human love has limits, it's eventually turned off to others & becomes hatred when it's not served as it desires. He says, *without Christ there's discord between God & man, as well as between man & man*. You can try & create community out of human effort & it always falls apart. Community in Christ is everlasting, constantly deepening, widening, maturing & growing as *community through Jesus & in Him*. Our community must be born of centrality of Jesus. Which means *a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. And, it means, in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time & united for eternity*.

So, as we live in community with each other it's important for us to *clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness & patience*.

Considering these virtues they're very much opposite to our experience. The ancient world maybe more so. The sick, aged, wounded & lame had nothing in the ancient world. They'd simply go place themselves on the city wall & wait to die. Mentally handicapped children were left by the wall to die. People walked by disregarding them entirely. In Indonesia very much the same (*story of old woman dying in her house*). On the Main line compassion's weakness & gentility's a vice. But Jesus wept. How unlike Christ we are.

Jews always spoke of emotions in reference to physical things. They *thought in their hearts* as opposed to the Greek who *reasoned in their minds*. They felt things in their bowels, their guts. It's true, when we feel something, love, pain, it's felt physically. So, Paul says 'Clothe' yourselves with these virtues, cover yourself up. This is what others are to see on the outside of you. The clothes you wear in front of the world, these virtues. Christians should be the greatest of philanthropists, the greatest helpers of the poor & sick.

We've seen compassion through the Church. Compassion drove some to start a hospital in Lampung a number of decades ago which serves the poorest of the poor in great ways with little to no return. Compassion drove people to move to Aceh in Sumatra & work for years to rebuild a province devastated by the Tsunami. Christians showed up, very few others did anything (*explain a bit*). We can look throughout history & see monuments erected to Christian compassion.

Let's not think so global. It's easy to do our compassion sorties in far away places. We fly in, drop supplies, get a pat on the back, leave with little to no long term community. But here, with people you see often, it becomes important. This is where your ideals of community get tested. This church is where God will see our true colors, will we run, or commit when it gets hard?

Are these virtues among us? When someone bad mouths or attacks verbally, hurts, or doesn't do as you think they should, what's your first reaction? Anger & retaliation? Gossip & avoidance? Self-pity? These wouldn't be focusing on Christ. Compassion, gentleness, humility & patience would be, they're born out of Christ. That person's heart & mind is set on Christ, knowing who they & the other person are in Christ. Without Jesus, your ideals of a loving community are shattered, since people always fail us. If your focus is on people, what they are, or not doing, you'll be disappointed.

In community focused on Christ, the arrows don't hurt as much. The anger doesn't burn since we're living in truth with a realistic view of God & people. In community focused on Christ, self-pity & insecurity don't come so easily because we're filled with Christ. When things don't seem to go as we'd like, we trust in Jesus who's before & over all things. We answer in solid faith via a solid God.

Compassion, shows itself in practical acts of selfless love. *Kindness*, a word used for wine, mellow with age losing its harshness, it can deal with the harshest of people. It's

said, the Kindness of God leads us to repentance. Do we lead others to repentance by our kindness? Or do we condemn? *Humility*, the realization, everyone's God's creation, Christ is all & in all, allows you to look at people with His eyes. The Greeks didn't have a word for 'Humility'. They valued pride so much, humility wasn't even in their vocabulary. Some claim humility's a creation of Christianity. *Gentleness*, the quality of being God controlled, allowing Him to dictate your emotions, keeping you in check. You're angry at the right & not the wrong things, and with the right amount. And finally, *Patience*, the quality reflective of understanding grace. It can endure the insults without hating or delving into cynicism, despair, or retaliation. The quality seeing what people *can be* in Christ, allowing them time, room & atmosphere to get there.

We should notice too some words, if we're honest, we don't really like. ¹³Bear with each other & forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

Hurtful things will be done to us. People will rub you the wrong way. Bearing with one another means just that, putting up with people, but not a grit your teeth bearing. In context, just like forgiveness, it comes out of your focus on Christ. Do you only see all the things they've done to you? Or do you see them as a redeemed person loved by Christ. A person in process in need of grace like you. Realizing, your sin deserved death as much as theirs. God bears your burden & extends grace to both of you.

If you're doing that then you're already doing the most important thing, *loving*, as Paul says next...¹⁴*And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

Boenhoeffer also said, *He who loves his dream of a community more than the Christian community itself becomes a destroyer of the latter, even though his personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest & sacrificial.* Christian love has the highest regard for Truth in Christ. The Christian, exhibiting these qualities, loves & leads others to Christ out of an ethos of Grace. It's not wishy-washy, or weak, it's solid & strong, but understanding. It doesn't accommodate sin, but sympathizes with the struggle. Human love doesn't regard Truth in the highest, since even Truth will come between relationships. That's because Human love's self serving. It doesn't have the highest goal of glorifying Christ at its core. Spiritual love comes from & serves Jesus & will test a relationship, since it calls each person to obedience to the Living Word.

Bonhoeffer said, Spiritual love proves itself in that everything it says & does commends Christ. It won't seek to move others by all too personal, direct influence, by impure interference in the life of another. It won't take pleasure in pious, human fervor & excitement. It'll rather meet the other person with the clear Word of God & be ready to leave him alone with this Word for a long time, willing to release him again in order that Christ may deal with him. This spiritual love will speak to Christ about a brother more than to a brother about Christ.

Human love lives by uncontrolled & uncontrollable dark desires; spiritual love lives in the clear light of service ordered by the truth. Human love produces human subjection, dependence, constraint; spiritual love creates freedom of the brethren under the Word. Human love breeds hothouse flowers; spiritual love creates the fruits that grow healthily in accord with God's good will in the rain, storm & sunshine of God's outdoors.

Paul says three more things to us here, let the peace of Christ rule, let the word of God dwell & do everything in the name of Christ in v15...*15Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.* Paul's saying, literally we should allow the peace of Christ to umpire our hearts which reminds us we're at peace with God in Christ. In Christ, God called a truce bringing peace by Christ's blood. Not treating us as we ought to be, reconciling God & humankind. Peace also means learning three great words, "I don't know." I don't know, but Jesus does. In our relationships with each other, we're going to come up against hard times. There'll be a need to be a bear with & love each other, that tying up of all the virtues. Where can we go in conflict when we don't know how to solve the issue? Humanly we want to end the argument stating our position & win. Instead, let Christ win! Allow Jesus to umpire. We can say, *"Well, we're at an impasse, but I love you brother, let's go to Jesus for this."*

Conflicts don't always need to be settled right away. Christ leaves us with unanswered questions to stretch us. Sometimes we can't get the answers by intellect - we need to be pushed to go to Jesus in prayer. Waiting on the answer, letting Him mediate instead of beating each other up. Seeking the peace of Christ in your relationships with one another. When two can come together committed to peace, allowing Christ to umpire the situation the dams are loosened & living water flows...*16Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach & admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns & spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.*

Dwelling, being at home. Let the word of Christ be at home in you. It's not a guest, it's master. How's that done? One pastor (John McArthur) says it well when he said you have to feed on it while mixing it with faith. There've been times in life when I just didn't believe God's Word could be true for me, but I chose to say, *"I can't see this right now, but I choose to believe it."* *He reveals things in great ways when we do that. That Pastor also said you have to read it, study it & live it, giving us a list of four things we do with the word; heed it (Matthew 13:9), handle it (2nd Timothy 2:15), hide it (Psalm 119:11), and hold it forth (Phil 2:16).* And when you do this, gratitude flows out of you in how you teach, lead others & worship....*17And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

Paul brings us full circle again, putting the final piece of bread on our sandwich. In dealing with each other, he started out with *as God's chosen people, holy & dearly loved.* Now he reminds us, everything we do flows from this focus on Jesus Christ as our model. As if he's saying, *"I've said a lot, but in the end it's simple, whatever you do in word or deed do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, and everything falls into place."*

Christianity is community. Do everything in the name of Jesus & the peace of Christ will rule your heart & relationships & maybe we'll have a greater glimpse of heaven on earth. As it says in Ephesians 2:14 says, *He [Jesus] is our peace.*