

Christ-Centered Diversity Pt. 2

Various Scriptures

Reggie Sanchez, Gospel Community Church, 12/03/2017

I. Introduction

1. Intro Thoughts and Review

In order to seek a strong biblical theology of diversity we began our study last week by considering God's design of humanity, the problem of sin, and God's salvation in Christ as it is promised to the Jews as well as the Gentiles. Every person was made by God to know him, worship him, and image him forth to creation. When sin entered the world we were all cursed, we all are now distorted images of God, and we all need to be saved. God promised that he would bring salvation through the Seed of the Woman whom we saw last week is Jesus Christ, who has achieved salvation for his people through his death on the cross. So that which levels the playing field for all people, no matter how diverse, is that we all have a common design, we are all under sin and are cursed and in desperate need of salvation, and we all have one common savior to whom we must flee if we are to be saved by his grace alone. None of us is without the need of salvation, none of us can achieve it for ourselves, we can merely bow the knee in humble faith and receive it as a free gift in Jesus Christ., therefore, no person and no people group is better than another.

As the Seed Promise played out we saw that eventually a covenant was made with a descendant of Shem, namely, Abraham who was promised a multitude of descendants, who would be made into a great nation, who would dwell in the promised land of Canaan, and who would be the people of God. To confirm this covenant his heirs were given the mark of circumcision as a sign that they were the covenant people of God. Later on in the history of Abraham's descendants they eventually gained the title of the Son of God, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation, and the light of the world. God promised to dwell with them in a special way through the Temple that was built within the land of Canaan, and as he dwelt among them, the Priesthood was given to lead the people in worship, as well as mediate between sinful Israel and her holy God through a variety of sacrifices for the sins of the nation. Later on God made another covenant with King David wherein he promised to give one of his descendants who would build the House of God and who would be a son to God, an everlasting reign. These wonderful truths and more gave Israel a unique role and identity in the world and it was the duty of Israel to walk in the obedience of faith as they submitted to God's Law as a people in a holy relationship with them.

Despite Israel's unique role in the Old Testament, the Gentiles were also promised to be blessed with the knowledge of God as well. It was promised that Japheth, who represents the nations, will dwell in the tents of Shem and share in Shem's God. In the Abrahamic Covenant it was promised that the nations would be blessed through Abraham's seed, that Abraham would not only be a father to the nation Israel, but also to the nations, and from the very outset of the inauguration of circumcision, even Abraham's foreign servants were circumcised along with his physical offspring in Genesis 17. The prophet Isaiah showed us the promise that Egypt, Israel, and Assyria, who were historical bitter enemies, will one day dwell together as one people in worship of God. We also saw that the wealth of the nations contributed significantly to the building of the Tabernacle, Solomon's Temple, and the 2nd Temple and how the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah are replete with promises that the Gentiles will participate in building the future temple of God, and will worship the God of Abraham.

Tragically Israel and the nations failed with flying colors to live holy and obedient lives to God and so he had to accomplish himself what man could not accomplish, namely, bringing about God's salvation and blessing for all peoples. In order to do this he promised to inaugurate a New Covenant. To accomplish this God sent Jesus Christ into the world

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whom we saw was the long awaited offspring of Abraham who would bless Israel and the nations, and it is Christ himself who is the recipient of the Abrahamic promises (Gal. 3:16). Jesus was the Son of God, the Light of the World, the Davidic King who would rule the world and build the house of God, he was the great King-Priest, the final sacrifice for sin, he offered himself in a greater Temple which was not any earthly building, but rather, was heaven itself, and through his saving work on the cross, he became the mediator of the New Covenant. Everything Israel was called to be and do, but failed at, Christ fulfilled and accomplished on their behalf through his obedience and saving work.

As he was lifted up upon the cross, he then draws all men to himself. People from every tribe, tongue and nation become believers in Jesus Christ. Believing Jews are saved, as well as believers from every possible walk of life, background, nation, and ethnicity are saved as well when they put their faith Christ's finished work at the cross to save them from their sins. Through the Gospel, the promises to the Jews in the Old Testament, as they are fulfilled in Christ, are given to every believing Jew. Jesus was a Jew, he came to the Jews first, by and large the first believers were Jews, and then through the witness of Jewish Christians, the Gospel was taken to the Gentiles. Believing Gentiles did not all of the sudden replace believing Jews in God's plans for his Kingdom, but rather, they have come to share equally in these promises along with believing Jews, and with believing Jews, they make up the one people of God (Eph. 2:18-19; 3:6). An Old Testament way of saying this is that Japheth comes into the tent of Shem and shares equally in his God. Tonight we will consider what God's Word says is true of all believers who are in Christ, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, and will then make application as it pertains to pursuing unity in Christ among different types of peoples. All of our consideration will be in summary form, and the point is not to exhaust anything we are looking at, but to survey who every believer in Christ is declared to be so that we have good theological categories in our mind when we engage the issue of unifying diverse people through the Gospel.

II. The Church's Identity in Christ

1. Sons of God in Christ

One of the most wonderful truths revealed in all of the universe is that for each person who flees to Christ, the Son of God, for salvation, trusting that his death on the cross was the sufficient payment for his sins, he not only finds forgiveness for his sins with God, but much sweeter than that, he becomes a son of the living God! 1 John 3:1, "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of the living God; and so we are." Read Romans 8:14-16. When we become Christians through faith in the Gospel we receive the Spirit of God, and all who receive that Spirit, without exception, become the children of God, and the Spirit within us, causes us in the inner man to have such a sweet sense of the fact that we have become God's children, that with all of our hearts, and with utmost authenticity we cry out from the depths of our souls, "Abba (or Daddy) Father!" What that means is we realize that we are not enemies with God, we are God's children and he is so close with us now that we know him, not as some distant and aloof father, but as our beloved Daddy!

Some people might wrongly say that it is only Jewish believers who are children of God, because it was only the Jews who were called God's Son in Exodus 4. How would you respond to that? There are a lot of ways this error could be defeated, but I think the simplest way would be to just turn to a text that couldn't be any more explicit in refuting this notion. (Read Galatians 3:26-27). In Christ we are sons of God through faith. Paul has been arguing in this chapter that it is those who have the faith of Abraham that are truly saved and justified in Christ. Those who believe that they are not saved by works of the law, but saved by the one who was cursed for us through being hanged on a tree, namely, Jesus. These ones we just read about, are Sons of God if they have faith in Christ. Again, we could ask is that for Jewish

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believers only? The explicit answer to that is given in verse 28-29 (read). It doesn't matter if you are a Jew, Gentile, man, woman, slave, or free, or any other class of person, if you are in Christ, you are one with his people, and you are a son of God, through faith in THE Son of God.

2. Children of Abraham and Heirs of Covenant Promises

At the end of that text there we see another wonderful truth about the identity of all believers, namely, that not only are they sons of God, but also they are Abraham's offspring, and heirs according to the promise. What promise? I believe with all of my heart that all believers are heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant promises as they are fulfilled in Christ. I will flesh this out much more when we go through Genesis. For now, I would simply appeal to the fact that Galatians 3:13-14 tells us that Christ was crucified so that the Gentiles could receive the promise made to Abraham. I already mentioned from verse 16 that Christ himself is first the heir of the Abrahamic promises. After becoming the heir of the Abrahamic Covenant, Jesus then he goes to the cross and removes sin so that all who come to him may share, along with Jesus, in the promises made to Abraham. So the Abrahamic promises, are not merely for Jewish believers, but rather, if you trace the Abrahamic promises and how the Bible says they are fulfilled in Christ, we see that the heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant are all of Abraham's children, which the New Testament defines as those, whether Jew or Gentile, who have the same qualitative faith as Abraham, in Jesus Christ as their savior (Gal. 3:7-9; Ro. 4:16-17).

The Land promise finds its fulfillment in the New Jerusalem, which is the capital city of Canaan, in which all believers will dwell in the presence of God forever (Rev. 21-22). The Abrahamic promise of victory over our enemies is realized by all believers, not just Jews, at Christ's coming when he conquers those who persecute us (2 Th. 1:5-10; Mt. 25:31-32, 41-46; Rev. 18:20). The promise that God will be God to Abraham and his offspring is fulfilled in all believers possessing the Spirit by faith, not just Jews (Gal. 3:14; 2 Cor. 6:16). The promise to make Abraham's offspring into a Great Nation is something all believers are a part of, not just Jews (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Finally, the sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, namely, circumcision, is something that is a reality for all believers, not just Jews. But this circumcision all genuine believers receive is not circumcision in the flesh, as it was in the Old Testament, but rather, it is the cutting off of our sin nature through the new birth, that is spiritually done by the Lord in our hearts (Col. 2:11-13). This is such a powerful reality for all believers, including Gentile believers, that Paul can tell the Philippian church, which was started with Gentile converts, that those who trust in Christ for salvation and not in their works, whether they are Jews or Gentiles, such people are, "the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh (Php. 3:3)." This is true for all believers, not just Jews.

3. All believers are part of the Temple of God.

From last time I hope you remember that one of the most glorious identity markers of Israel as God's special people was the fact that the Temple was in their midst, which is significant, because it was in the Temple that God dwelt in a special way. We also saw in John 2 last week that Christ himself declared he was the Temple and that the fullness of God dwells in Jesus bodily (Col. 1:19). Just as all believers, whether Jew or Gentile, become sons of God, sons of Abraham, and share in the Abrahamic promises in Christ, so also, all believers who come to Christ, the Temple of God, also become the Temple of God as they are united to Christ by faith.

1 Pe. 2:4-5a, "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house..." Christ is a living stone according to verse 4, and all believers who come to him, whether Jew or Gentile, become living stones in him. Each individual believer is a living stone, and as an individual living stone, we are being built up as a spiritual house, or temple. Each believing individual is one living stone, and as we are joined to other living stones, we comprise one Temple. As the people of God who are in Christ, we now become the Temple of God and the Lord himself makes his dwelling within each individual believer, and

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as we are all together and Spirit-filled, we are a corporate Temple of God (Eph. 2:19-22), and there are not certain types of bricks that are excluded from the Temple. If you would be a living stone in God's Temple, Peter makes it very clear that the requirement is merely that you come to Christ by faith. It is not that you be in Christ and be a Jew, or a Gentile, or a white American, or an Asian, or anything else. It is merely that you be in Christ. If you are a believer you belong and have a place among God's people to make your extremely significant contribution to the house of God as an individual living stone.

4. All Believers become a Priesthood to the Lord

Last time, we saw that in connection with the Temple, Israel was also given the priesthood to mediate between them and God and to lead them in worship. We also saw that Christ came as our great High-Priest who provided the ultimate mediation between God and man by dying on the cross for sinners. Just as we saw is true with other things, so also, when believers come to Christ, our great High Priest, we also become priests in him. We of course are not going to die for each other's sins, but as the priests of God we will offer sacrifices of worship and praise.

After describing believers as living stones who are built up into a spiritual house, Peter turns his attention to the workers in the Temple, namely the priesthood, and shows that all believers become priests in Christ as we can see in the 2nd half of verse 5 which says believers are to, "...be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Priests are those who offer sacrifices of worship and praise. All believers have become priests unto the Lord and among the sacrifices we are to offer is that of a transformed life through having our minds renewed by God's Gospel and his Word. Romans 12:1-2 elaborates a bit more than Peter here and tells us, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind..." Our lives are to be holy offerings that do not conform to the sins, ethics, and values of the World, but rather, are transformed into holy offerings by being renewed by God's Word.

Another role of priests is that they mediate between God and man. As priests of God, we also have the priestly role of helping others come to know God through proclaiming the Gospel to them. We mediate the truth that Christ has died for them to bring them to God when we proclaim the Gospel and therefore help unbelievers come to know the Lord and thus fulfill a priestly function. In Romans 15:16 Paul calls Gospel ministry to those who do not know the Lord a, "priestly service." Belonging to the priesthood of God in Christ is something that all believers, not just Jews, Gentiles, pastors, or missionaries are a part of.

Revelation 5:9-10 tells us that the priesthood of all believers is among those from all nations when it praises Jesus by saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth." Verse 9 tells us the ransomed people are from every tribe and language and people and nation and verse 10 tells us that they are priests to our God. That is a wonderful identity and calling that every believer in Jesus has, not just a few.

5. All believers are Kings, citizens of the holy nation, and God's cherished possession

You may have also noticed that Revelation 5:10 also says that each believer is also a King, who will reign with Jesus on the new earth. Christ is our great King, and in his grace and kindness, he has made every believer royalty and co-rulers with him in his consummate Kingdom that is to come. Our original design was to rule and subdue the earth for the glory of God. That design became perverted and twisted in our sin, and human history has shown man ruling and subduing the earth for his own glory and inflicting untold horrors on others in pursuit of that. In Christ we are humbled, we are saved purely by his grace, we are made new, and we can again become authoritative beings, who like Christ use our

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authority to serve his glory and bless others, rather than lord it over people in a way that harms them and dishonors God. Becoming royalty, or kings and queens unto the Lord is something that is again true of every single believer without exception.

Returning to 1 Peter 2, I want to finish up with verse 9 of that text and see what further identifies all Christians according to God's word. Listen for all the things this verse says is true of all Christians, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession..." Where have we heard that before? That is the exact identity given to Israel in Exodus 19:5-6. Israel was God's chosen race, and God promised that if they diligently obeyed his Law, which they utterly failed to do, then they would be his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. Israel would be these things if the nation obeyed God's Law. The nation failed, but where the nation failed, Christ succeeded, and now through Christ and his Gospel, when we don't stumble over Jesus, but as verse 7 of 1 Peter 2 says, "we believe," all believers become these things in Christ. Believers are God's chosen race for salvation, all believers become God's royal priesthood, and all believers become citizens of God's holy nation through faith in Christ! We know Peter is including Gentile believers in this description because he says in verse 10 that, "Once you were not a people."

So there is not one true Christian who is not a citizen of God's holy nation, who is not a king and priest, who is not part of God's chosen people, and who are not part of God's own possession. No believer is excluded from this. We all, in Christ, equally share in these wonderful things! The theological paradigm for understanding this is that we come to Christ to share in all that he is and has. Jesus is the Son of God, in him we become sons of God. Jesus is the offspring of Abraham and heir of the Abrahamic promise, in him we are the offspring of Abraham and heirs of Abrahamic promise. Jesus is the living stone, in him we become living stones. Jesus is the Temple of God, in him we become the temple of God. Jesus is our great King-Priest, in him we become kings and priests to our God.

God in his Gospel, has joined his people together, who are from all over the world, into one people through Jesus Christ. Jesus told the Jews in John 10 that he had other sheep that were not of the Jewish sheep pen who would come from the East and West, and together with believing Jews, would make up the one flock of God. Ephesians 2:11-18 tells us that Jews and Gentiles once hated each other and were bitter enemies. But God has reconciled believing Gentiles to himself through the cross of Christ, and God has also reconciled believing Jews to himself through the Gospel as well. The human result is that all believing Gentiles and all believing Jews are so unified in Christ, that Paul calls them one new man (Eph. 2:13-18), who have peace with God, who have access to the one God by the same spirit, and who now have a wonderful peace with each other. Bitter enemies become one unified people in Christ.

In Romans 11 Paul described God's people as 1 tree that contains two different types of branches. This tree is nourished by the root of the Christ-centered fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, which gives life to the tree, and by extension, all of the branches. One type of branches are natural branches, which represent Jewish Christians, and the other type of branches are wild branches, which represent Gentile Christians. Both types of branches become part of the 1 tree through faith in Jesus and both types of branches, regardless of race, will be cut off from the one tree if they turn from Christ. But whether one is a Jewish branch or a Gentile branch, they become part of the tree of God's people through faith in Christ. There are not two different trees. There is not a Jewish tree and a Gentile tree, instead, there is just one tree that comprise the people of God, and what makes a branch connected to the tree is not nationality, personality, riches, or geography, but faith!

In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul speaks of God's people as members of 1 body. The 1 body has many diverse members, gifts, acts of service etc. Here is how Paul describes the unity and diversity of the one body of Christ in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit." Again, a diverse people is mentioned, namely, Jews and Greeks and slaves and free, and how are

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they described? They are described as many different and diverse members of 1 common body. There are not many bodies, there is the one body of believers made up of many types of people who are in Christ.

As the church worships Christ and dwells together in unity and lives into that reality, then we are the light of the world, whose light shines before men so that our good works can be seen by others resulting in praises for God (Mt. 5:14-16). Among those good works, must be a unified, loving, oneness that we share with other believers who are different than us.

So if all those who are in Christ are sons of God, children of Abraham, heirs of Abrahamic promise, circumcised in their hearts, kings and priests unto God, are living stones that make up the Temple of God, are citizens of God's holy nation, are unique members of the one body of Christ, are branches in the 1 tree that is God's people, and are so reconciled to each other that Paul, speaking by the Spirit calls us, "one new man," how ought we to interact with each other in our cultural, ethnic, socio-economic, geographical, and any other unique differences?

III. Application

1. Folly of Discrimination in the church

The solution is not to try and make everyone like us as it pertains to these things. We are to seek oneness, unity, and agreement in our theology from the Bible, in our love, and in our pursuit of holiness and the forsaking of sin. That does not, however, mean we are to make everyone have to be culturally just like us. It does not mean that we only engage and love Christians who are from certain walks of life. Rather, people from all walks of life are to pursue oneness in Christ. There is not one time in the NT church, which was comprised of Jews and Gentiles, where Gentiles are called to culturally be like Jews or vice versa. Nor is there a time when the Gentiles and Jews in a particular congregation were seeking to live out their faith with people that were culturally different from them where the solution to those differences was to split, plant a Gentile church and plant a Jewish church so that you can fellowship with people just like you. Nevertheless, in our day you see this very thing all the time. Individual Christians will only fellowship with people who are just like them as it pertains to hobbies, special interests, a certain age group, or any other worldly criteria. I believe this grieves and offends Jesus Christ.

That is not what he died for! One of the most disappointing statements I hear is when Christians say they don't fit in at a church, or when they are told they don't fit in, or treated like they don't fit in, because when you look at all we just considered about the identity of all believers, how can that possibly be? It is an absolute contradiction of the Scriptures to exclude real Christians from fellowship for anything other than sin or heresy. If you are in Christ, you belong in Christ's church, and if someone treats you like you are lesser among God's people because of your race, culture, the neighborhood you are from, the way you talk, the way you dress, or anything else that isn't sin or false teaching, they are wrong, and they need to repent.

5 year olds should be friends with 50 year olds. Elderly ladies should feel right at home with college students if they are enjoying Christ together. Singles should not feel out of place around Christian families because we have Jesus to enjoy, explore, talk about, and worship together. Believers with a hip hop background should be able to enjoy Jesus with white farmers. Blue collar believers should be able to love and enjoy upper class businessman who love Jesus and vice versa, as they glory in Christ Jesus together. As we come together in Jesus, it would be a tragedy to try and make each other cultural clones of one another! That would demean the glory of Jesus, because it is to his glory that people from different cultures be united in Christ in all holiness!

It is so enriching if you allow Christ to be that which you focus on in relation to other people. I am not a martial artist at all, but I have enjoyed hearing Ray talk about it and share what those things are like for him, and we enjoy those things

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in a Christ-centered way. I have no idea what it is like to be a doctor, but it is enriching to me to listen to Dr. Brent talk about how he uses his medical knowledge to exalt Jesus. I have never been to Ghana, but I have really enjoyed conversations with Augustina about what Ghana church life is like. Besides my staggering and amazing singing voice, not, I am the least gifted musician in the church, and I have no idea how to come up with skits or plays. However, I have enjoyed watching the Freemans enjoy Jesus in music as well as some of their Christian dramatizations they come up with. When I went to Brazil multiple times, I was overjoyed that I could share Christ in a different continent, on the other side of the equator, in a different time zone, and with people who speak a different language. Seeing how their culture lived into holy worship for Jesus filled me with joy.

The last thing in the world I would want to see is these people forsake their cultural identity to be just like me. The only thing I want to see people forsake is sin and any unbiblical thinking. But it fills me with worship to see people praise Jesus in unique cultural settings. To be unwilling to associate with people who are culturally different from you, yet are in Christ, is a very serious sin, that if not repented of may even prove that you are not even saved at all. There is no place for it whatsoever. There may be a bunch of sociological, economic, or other worldly reasons why people may try to baptize their racist, factionalist divisions with believers who are different from them, but there isn't a biblical justification, and while you can play all the games in the world right now to try and justify it, it will not stand on the last day, Jesus will see through it all, and Jesus will find you guilty.

We have to seek to change people not in their personalities, their cultures, or their preferences, but rather, in their knowledge of God, and in their holy love for Jesus. If someone is in sin, we must confront it and labor for their repentance, or change, to align with Scripture. If someone is in error biblically in relation to truth, we must labor to help them gain a biblical understanding of the situation and change their thinking. But personalities, cultures, socio-economic statuses, and geographical locations are not sin and should not be exhorted to change. I do want to mention that even though we don't try and change people's culture, we also do not let culture get away with sin or heresy. For example, if a person says adultery, theft, or violence is just part of my culture, therefore, when I do these things you are wrong to correct me because it is part of my culture. That is not valid. Culture does not exist to justify sin. Rather, cultures exist to express worship to God in a unique way, and if there is part of a culture that is sin, then that part of the culture needs to repent. And the way that we determine if part of a culture is in sin is not by seeing if it is American, if it is accepted by a large number of people, or anything else, but rather, we evaluate the issue in light of what God's Word says about it.

2. Folly of Discrimination in Evangelism

What about dealing with unbelievers? Our mission is to proclaim Christ to all nations according to Jesus and so we must not be unwilling to engage, interact with, and proclaim Christ to any particular culture, but rather, should be eager to engage all cultures and peoples with the Gospel. When we engage other types of people we are not trying to change their culture. Despite what some might think, the true sign of a believer is not when people from a hip hop background stop wearing baggy pants, or stop wearing their hat backwards, or stop enjoying certain styles of music. Who cares about that! The sign of a true believer is when they put their faith in Christ and repent of their sins and no a backwards hat is not a sin! They don't have to be converted to khaki pants and golf shirts! What a boring mission! Why not just be a fashion designer if that's what you want to see!

Rather than seeking to make cultural clones, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9 that he seeks to fit in with different cultures so that he can proclaim Christ in ways that are more easily understandable in that culture. That means culture isn't the end all be all for Paul, rather, it is a tool to make Christ known! He doesn't care about his preferences, he cares about Christ, and about making him known to others in a wide variety of cultural contexts.

The solutions to our sin problems and divisions are in Christ. In a day with so much racial and cultural strife and tension, it is wonderful that we actually have an answer to the problems. Blacks, whites, Hispanics, Asians, Europeans,



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Australians, Latinos, and anyone else need to be saved through the Gospel. We don't exalt ourselves over others, but rather, realizing the depths of our sin, the desperate need for salvation we ourselves have, and the humbling solution to our sin that is the Gospel, we will engage anyone, at any time, with joy and kindness, laboring to see them share in the same Christ as us, so that we might become one with them, and be great friends in Christ with people who are different than us.