

All together now...

G R O W

Colossians



by Rev Dan Balsdon, 18th October 2020 | read online at www.revdanbalsdon.com

Before going to theological college, I spent 6 years managing a Christian bookshop. It had been something of a dream of mine for all my teenage life. I had a passion for business, for resourcing God's people in mission and ministry, and reaching out beyond the margins of church.

The place often felt like a signpost, as well as selling goods we saw a growing ministry of pastoral care - welcoming all sorts of people from many different backgrounds with many different stories to tell. We would point people to support, spiritual, physical, economic, we would offer conversation about life and faith, sometimes we would pray with people, and one of the joys of this ministry was that through it God was at work and we saw a number people begin following Jesus.

It was through this pastoral ministry that God began to reveal to me a calling to a vocation as a Methodist minister. But one of the things that surprised me most when running the bookshop was not these opportunities for mission, ministry and pastoral care with those on the margins, but the conversations I had with 'already Christians'.

Running the bookshop meant I was serving a wide and diverse range of Christian people, fellowships and churches. And I saw that as a great thing, an opportunity to learn from others, discover more about God's church and celebrate our common faith.

What surprised me, as just how un-loving God's church can be from within. I was amazed the first time I was criticised for stocking anything but the King James Bible – on one occasion I was told I was the antichrist for stocking a particular book (I can't remember what the book was now! – just the accusation!).

I don't think it's wrong to have conviction in faith, but I do think we need to as God's Spirit to watch over us that we don't get to a point where we are so convicted of our faith that we show no openness to the diversity of faith present in God's people.

In Colossians 3 we read the following verses, which come from a larger section where Paul is seeking to enable understanding of what living together as Christian community looks like.

⁸ But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹ In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

Colossians 3:8-11

As the letter to the Colossians unfolds, the message of the gospel – the **Good News** - Jesus Christ - is being unpacked and given clarity. Christ is all and in all. Human labels that divide are superfluous to the power and grace of God.

One of the things that often saddens me is that Church, and society, spend so much time and energy highlighting our differences, and allowing that to lead to division and jealousy.

If we are kingdom people, worshipping Christ who's kingdom we are welcomed into through God's love and grace – surely it is our common faith in Christ who is all and in all that we should hold our main focus on.

John Wesley, who's ministry contributed to the birthing of Methodism, was himself well aware of the way opinions led to division, and in one of his sermons argued that differing opinions need to be held in perspective with common faith, and that differing opinions should not lead to the cessation of fellowship.ⁱ

Friends there is much that has potential to divide us. Views on political and public health measures during the pandemic; contradictory convictions around communion, sexuality, gender & marriage; Brexit; immigration. The list could be endless, and these things are not things we should entirely ignore. But I think should be approached with the a recognition from all that by the love and grace of God human made division is wiped away - Christ is all and in all.

For me, these verses challenge me to hold our common faith in the un-boundaried love and grace of God at the centre of my relationships. Not focused on difference and division, but on the kingdom of God where Christ is all and in all.

ⁱ Sermon 19: Salt and Light, John Wesley's 44 Sermons. Epworth Press, 1944