

**Sermon Study Guide Based on
Celestine Olive's Message of February 22, 2009
"Can We All Just Get Along?"**

[In our fallen, imperfect world, we've proven it's impossible for all of us, by ourselves, to get along with each other. But when we become changed from the inside by the love of Jesus Christ, we can be reconciled to one another.]

[Topics: Getting Along; Disagreement; Forgiveness; Acceptance]

Excerpt: In a perfect world we all will get along, but in this fallen, imperfect world in which we live, this is not possible for mankind. We have all come from so many different backgrounds, so many ethnic mixes, so many educational levels, economic standards, there are mistrust and fears passed down through generations, geographical prejudices, etc., that the possibilities of having differences between one another are without end.

The Bible, itself, is filled with incidents of humans not getting along or having conflict, from Genesis to Revelation. No one is exempt from disagreements or conflict. Look at Adam and Eve. They were the only two people on earth. Did they disagree? Yes, they did.

Cain and Abel. Cain offered an improper offering, God rejected it, so who did he blame? He blamed his brother Abel. Jacob and Esau argued over the birthright promise. Paul and Barnabas had to part ways while on a missionary trip. Did they get along? No. Peter and Paul. Paul had to rebuke Peter publicly for what he was doing.

We do not get along as humans. Is it possible to just always get along? Of course not. Let's just have a show of hands of getting along with others. Have you ever had a disagreement or falling out with a neighbor? How about with just a friend? How about your best friend?

How about one of your sisters or brothers? How about your mother or father? How about your kids? How about you kids with your parents? How about with your co-workers? No disagreements? How about your pastor? How about another church member? How about your doctor; your postman? We do not get along.

But, as members of the Body of Christ, we have a special calling and have been given the only source of help for getting along with others, to make a difference on a daily basis and to have a positive influence in our society. And that's by being changed from the inside by the love of Jesus Christ – all for the purpose of bringing glory to God. That's why we need to get along – to bring him glory.

Discord strikes a deadly blow at God's work in and through the church. Chaos, strife, envy, anger, bitterness, dissension, and selfishness disrupt the unity of the church. They undermine the unity that Jesus paid a heavy price to establish in His church.

We read in **Psalm 133:1, Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!** And as Pastor Heber Ticas mentioned in his sermon a couple weeks during our Latino Heritage service, when anger, strife, or hatred are present, there can be no reconciliation or acceptance of one another.

And Tammy mentioned in her sermon last week about rejection. When we reject one another, there can be no reconciliation. And isn't that what we're all looking for, acceptance?

Humans were created with the need to be accepted, the need to belong, and the need to be loved. So getting in touch with our own painful issues that prevent us from accepting those who are different from us can be quite a challenge. And sometimes these very issues prevent us from even getting along with ourselves.

This reminds Celestine of an occasion when her grandson Trenton, who was about 8 years old at the time, was waiting to lead the congregation in the Pledge of Allegiance for one of our National Day of Prayer Services. It was a few minutes before the starting time and she saw Trenton fidgeting there on the front row.

Trenton got up from his seat and came to the edge of the stage, and said, "Grandma, don't announce my whole name. People may think it's funny because I'm not an Olive." You see he came into our family when he was two. Celestine only had a short time to dispel his anxiety. Trenton is Chinese and Hawaiian and his last name is spelled "F-o-o-n."

So in those few seconds she said to Trenton, "I'm going to announce you as Trenton Christopher Foon, because it's a beautiful name and you're a beautiful young man." He hesitated for a second and said, "Okay," and went and sat back down. He needed assurance that he was accepted just as he was, just as he was named. And he needed to know that yes, he did belong and his name had nothing to do with it.

This prayer in **Psalm 139:23-24** is one that we can all pray to allow for healing to occur deep within our hearts. If Celestine had let that go, Trenton would have had that same tension that he was not the same as everyone else and that he wasn't good enough.

Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the paths of everlasting life."

And rest assured, the Holy Spirit will point out and convict us of deep-seated wounds or even sins that have been suppressed that keep us from accepting ourselves and accepting one another.

Jesus said in **Mark 7:21-23, "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, 22) deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. 23) All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."**

The key passage for this message is **Romans 15:5-9** because of Paul's emphasis to the early believers on accepting one another. Paul was specifically addressing the situation in the Church that was dividing the Jewish and Gentile believers. They all wanted one another to act like the other.

Paul was stressing that Christ is both Savior of the Jews and the Gentiles. He was telling them that God's saving acts in Christ ought to result in unity among those for whom Christ is Savior.

Romans 15:5-9 (NIV), "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6) so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7) Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

8) For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs 9) so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.'"

And we can come together today with all the colors of the rainbow represented almost, and that's what God has done. And none of us have to be ashamed. That was his choosing. But we've not always been proud of that.

The New Living Translation: "May God, who gives this patience and encouragement, help you live in complete harmony with each other, as is fitting for followers of Christ Jesus. 6) Then all of you can join together with one voice, giving praise and glory to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7) Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory. 8) Remember that Christ came as a servant to the Jews to show that God is true to the promises he made to their ancestors. 9) He also came so that the Gentiles might give glory to God for his mercies to them. That is what the psalmist meant when he wrote: 'For this, I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing praises to your name.'"

A couple definitions of "accept" are: to receive willingly; to give admittance or approval to; to receive or treat with favor. Does this mean that we have to have the same opinion on every subject all the time? Does it mean we need to dress alike, talk alike, or have the same skin color? No, this is not the unity that Paul speaks of.

Paul's message to the Romans was an attempt to eliminate the quarrels that they had over controversial subjects in the Church. That is the same message to the modern church today – we need to accept our brothers and sisters despite disagreements over disputable matters and personal differences.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s speech, *I Have a Dream*, which we just heard read by Franklin Guice, takes us back to a time that we don't really like to remember. But we study the past so we won't repeat the same mistakes in the future.

We have come a long way in America in promoting that all men are indeed created equal, and to say that blacks, or people of color, in America have definitely come a long way has got to be the understatement of the decade. Most of us would never have dreamed that America would elect an African-American as President.

And will having a black president negate the need for Reconciliation Month or even Black History Month next year, or in the following years? We don't know just yet. But judging from some of the comments made in the news lately, on talk shows, by comedians, in newspaper articles, etc., we are probably in for some very ugly days ahead as Americans once again settle into their normal routine of racial slurs and jokes and disrespectful comments.

We have lost our respect for leaders. We have lost our respect for one another. We will throw comments out there that will hurt and wound. We need to deal with those issues, because it should not be so among us.

As Celestine was going down memory lane preparing for this message, she thought she would share a couple of things that she went through as a young person. She said that she really doesn't like to remember them. They're rather awkward and rather embarrassing. But it has given her a deeper understanding of Paul's instruction to us to "accept one another."

So why do we visit the past anyway?? Just in case you haven't discovered, healing does not occur by wishing it away or ignoring our emotional pain. Because of Celestine's journey with Jesus and His acceptance and grace, she can now forgive those who caused her that pain, simply because of what Jesus went through for her. Jesus has also forgiven her when she has caused others pain.

This is her personal story. "So growing up in an all-black neighborhood, we attended all-black schools, and not really having to interact very much with other nationalities in our younger years. It created a rather safe haven and gave us a chance to develop a strong sense of identity as an African-Americans. And if you notice we use the terms Negro, Black and African-American interchangeably. That's because people keep changing our names. But it's OK. We answer to all of them.

"Also we had parents who never put down other races in our presence. We had regular Bible Studies with our family and that helped us to develop a deep sense of closeness to God at an early age.

"At about age 7 we began attending a church, which didn't have those same values. So of course when we went to church we had to be seated separately. So the blacks were on the one side and the whites were on the other. We could not mix in socials. We could not mix in dating. We did nothing together, except sit separately in church.

"So that was the kind of beginning of my association with a God who accepted that. If that's what he wanted, then that's what we would do. But as the years went by and societal pressures began to mount, changes were made to limit the discriminatory practices that were so prevalent in my early years.

"But due to the many civil rights accomplishments of Dr. Martin Luther King and others, many doors were opened for Blacks in the US and laid the current groundwork for us to have a black president. His election symbolizes an attempt at racial reconciliation here in America, and I'm sure we all welcome that change whether we welcome him or not.

"And for those of us who saw the inaugural address, we saw those on the mall especially the older African-Americans who were shedding tears. I didn't experience the time when I couldn't vote, or when my children had to do certain things. I've been free a long time, but they have not. And so maybe some of us poopoo the fact the President Obama is not the savior. But, boy, is that a big change for them, because they had no idea that they would live to see it.

"And so during my senior year in high school, two of my best friends and I were given a chance to work at the NASA Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston, TX. They selected us

based on grade point average, conduct grades, and school attendance. We went to school in the mornings for four hours, were bused during the lunch hour out to NASA, and then we worked four hours. We were just ecstatic to have been selected into the program, but as in many situations at that time, and sometimes even now, we became the “tokens” of the school.

“I’ve been a lot of “tokens.” And that is not fun. And you want so much for others to rejoice with you, but that is not always the case. And that’s another reason we can’t all get along.

“Another painful experience was upon graduating from high school and being offered an administrative position at NASA. I can remember being very nervous walking down this long hallway with the representative of Human Resources to meet my new boss. Upon arriving at his office and being introduced to him, he simply nodded his head. He did not extend his hand, and he did not smile.

“Here I am, an 18 year old with high hopes, but it was not to be. I can remember standing there, looking so silly and saying to myself, “This cannot be good. I don’t know where it’s going to lead.” One of the other gentlemen, who worked in the office as well, told me to follow him and he showed me my desk.

“My boss never said a word directly to me, unless it was absolutely necessary. He put instructions in my inbox, and he took my work out of the outbox. And that was the nature of our relationship.

“I can remember praying without ceasing that God would remove me from that office, because I was not going to quit. People had worked too hard to get us involved in those programs. Thankfully, after about six months, God moved me on as they did offer me another position there at NASA.

“When the term ‘Affirmative Action’ was first used by President John Kennedy in 1961 to counter discrimination in the workplace and educational institutions, it was a much needed program to give people of color an opportunity to work. But everybody didn’t like ‘Affirmative Action.’ They say we should earn it on our own. But if your application is in the trash, you’re not going to get a job. So they have to be forced to at least consider those who have the aptitude and the ability to do the job.”

And so we find that nothing humans devise can really solve the dilemma of ‘accepting one another.’ We can only come up with rules, procedures, and programs to attempt to promote fairness, but unless the heart is changed, they just remain rules, laws, and procedures.

And the same goes for us as Christ. Unless we allow Christ to change our hearts, we cannot accept one another. There will always be a difference that makes you say no, I cannot accept that.

This slide is a painting of 7-yr-old Ruby Bridges – entitled *The Problem We All Live With* by Norman Rockwell, depicting Ruby as she goes to school. Ruby Bridges Hall moved with her parents to New Orleans, Louisiana at the age of 4. When she was 6 years old, her parents responded to a call from the NAACP and volunteered her to participate in the integration of the New Orleans School system. She is known as the first African-American child to attend

William Frantz Elementary School, and the first African-American child to attend an all-white school in the South.

But as soon as Ruby got into the school, white parents went in and brought their own children out; all but one white teacher left the school. Only Barbara Henry, from Boston, Massachusetts, was willing to teach Ruby, and for over a year Mrs. Henry taught her alone, "as if she were teaching a whole class."

Forty-eight years later, here's a picture of Sasha Obama, a little 7-year old black girl, being escorted to school by her mother, First Lady-elect Michelle Obama, and the Secret Service because Sasha's daddy is now President-elect of the United States.

Yes, we've come a long way, and if we're not too impatient with one another, we will continue to make progress in accepting one another as Jesus has accepted us, dying for us when we were all yet sinners. Let's be willing to recognize that offenses will come and that they will come regularly, and that we won't just "automatically" get along. But we must be willing to search our own hearts to see if there be anything in there that offends our Lord.

And so Paul admonishes all of us in **Ephesians 4:1-6**, "**As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2) Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3) Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4) There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called – 5) one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6) one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**"

Let us pray.

Key Scripture: Romans 15:5-9, "**May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6) so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7) Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8) For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs 9) so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.'**"

General Group Question: What was one of the biggest falling out or disagreement you've had with a family member? Briefly explain the situation and consequences.

Additional questions for the entire group or in groups of two or three of the same gender (15-20 minutes). If appropriate, please pray for each other's needs afterwards.

1. What are some of the root causes that fuel disagreements between various ethnic groups?
2. What changes do we need to seek that will help us to be reconciled with each other?

3. What is it that allows Christians to live in unity and harmony with one another even though we are a diverse group of people?
4. In order to have acceptance and unity, does it mean that everyone must have the same opinion on every subject? Briefly explain why or why not.
5. How is a person able to forgive those who have caused him or her emotional pain of rejection or racism?
6. Will rules, laws and/or procedures solve the dilemma of having people accept one another? Briefly explain your answer.
7. What character traits described in **Ephesians 4:1-6** do you believe would be most helpful to you in dealing with a difficult relationship?