



The Fellowship of Worshippers

Series: *The Wonder of Worship*

Colossians 3:12-17

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The last few sermons that we have looked at in the Worship Series have been driving home the amazing work that God has done in Christ through the gospel, the immense grace that we have received, by which He has transformed us at the core from rebels and enemies of God to worshippers and lovers of God. We are new people, set free from the penalty and the power of sin by the grace of God, through the sin-atoning, wrath-absorbing, justifying and righteousness-bestowing death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this has all taken place for a purpose, for the supreme purpose of our lives, the very thing for which we have been created. We have been set free from the enslaving and degrading power of sin to the freedom of live-giving worship. We have been made a worshipping community, a fellowship of God-exalters and Christ-adorers and as Paul says in verse 11: **“Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.” (Colossians 3:11, ESV)** Here in the church, in us as His people, there are no distinctions, but Christ is to be our all in all. Like Israel before us, we have experienced an Exodus from sin and from slavery in order that Christ might be the center of our lives. Just as Israel camped with the tabernacle at the center of the camp, with God as the central pursuit and overwhelming presence of their lives, so we are a people for whom Christ and His Lordship are to be central reality of our own lives – both individually and corporately.

God has done an amazing work, through His Son, to create the church at an amazing cost and so as important as the life of the church is to God, it must be so for us. That is what it means to be a fellowship of God-worshippers. So what I want for us to do this morning is to look at the character and the conduct of the worshipping community. How are we to live together and worship together? Because here is the overriding truth: **How we live as the God-worshipping community of faith is a reflection of our hearts, our affection, our gratefulness, and our esteem for Jesus Christ.** First, Paul describes for us...

The Character of Worshipers (12-15) He writes, starting in verse 12: **“Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.”** (Colossians 3:12–15, ESV) Now the first thing that we need to notice here is that the context of these verses is corporate in nature. Paul has in view how we live together as the people of God, what should characterize us as a people, not just individuals. This is not a list of individual self-improvement goals to be pursued on our own. Some people read the text that way and that is not accurate at all. What Paul has in view here is the Spirit-empowered development of the character of Christ in the church as a community and what he is assuming is that living together as the church is central to God’s people. He views us as “chosen ones,” those specifically loved and pursued by God and brought into the fold of God, into His household, by His effectual calling through the preaching of His word, by the regenerating work of His Spirit, a people made holy and the prized possession of God, as a community, through personal and corporate faith in the saving death and resurrection of Christ.

And there are certain things that should characterize us as we live together as a God-worshipping fellowship. We are to have **compassionate hearts** toward one another. We are to feel deeply with one another, to have a very real concern for the spiritual, physical, and emotional well-being of one another, to enter into one another’s lives on a more than superficial level. For that to be a reality, we have to be heavily invested in one another in this pursuit of Christ. All of these words that Paul uses require this kind of vital commitment to the people of God. We are to be characterized by **kindness, humility, meekness, and patience**. We are to be thoughtful of one another, gladly laying down our perceived rights for the sake of others, living life in mutual submission to one another as we submit to the word of God and live under God’s control, dealing with one another in patient understanding, refusing to be estranged from one another.

He then gives two examples of what this looks like – **bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive**. It doesn’t get more practical than this, does it? Think about how patiently God has borne with us, how He remains so patient in His dealing with us. In the body of Christ, with so many different people at so many different places in their walk with the Lord, with so much sin that still remains, there will be ample opportunity for us to bear with one

another and to encourage one another unto greater faithfulness to Christ. And yet, no matter what the circumstances, we will never be more forbearing with one another than Christ has been with us. That doesn't mean that we ignore sin. God doesn't. He calls us to repentance, but He does it graciously and redemptively and so must we. And we must forgive. Just as Christ has forgiven us, we forgive. That's what Paul says here. In a community of saved but still flawed worshippers, there will be a multitude of opportunities to forgive and we must. Depending on someone's response that doesn't always look the same but we must forgive. That, in part, is what sets us apart from the world.

And above all these, Paul says, **put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony**. What ties all of this together, Paul says, is love – real love, enduring love, persistent love – love that Paul says **“is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”** (1 Corinthians 13:4–7, ESV) That is real love and it is not something that you can experience apart from the fellowship of God-worshippers.

Then Paul says, **And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful**. Let the peace that Christ purchased for you – peace with God and peace with one another – prevail, or rule over, your hearts. The church is to be a household of peace between the saints, not a place of contention, strife or factionalism. Be grateful, Paul says, for the rule of Christ in our midst, for the Lordship of Christ over His church.

When we pursue grace, when we seek to be compassionate and kind, to be humble, esteeming others greater than ourselves, when we bear with one another and forgive and love, we are, by our actions and our words demonstrating that the work of God to create the church is precious to us. We are declaring that life is about more than a good job, an understanding spouse, and non-delinquent kids. It is bigger than nice houses, RV's, nice vacations and American- Eagle or Hollister. If you are Christ's you are a part of something that is huge, something that began in eternity past, before you were born, and will continue after you die. God is rescuing fallen humanity, delivering people from the domain of darkness and into the kingdom of His beloved Son, progressively making a people into the image of His Son to shine with His glory, creating a redeemed humanity that will eternally offer worship and praise and glory to Jesus Christ who has redeemed them and be grateful

that He has called you to be a part of it -- to be part of a great company of other believers but particularly the local church – this local church.

This is a beautiful picture of what the church can and should be, but here's the thing – it can only happen as we are all committed to worshipping Christ together. That's where this is going. Worship is essential to the church having the corporate character of Christ and that is why it is so important that we be committed above everything else to worshipping God together. Let me show you

The Calling and Conduct of Worshippers (16) In order for what we have been talking about to be reality, Paul commands us saying: ***“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” (Colossians 3:16, ESV)*** The only way we live like this together is if we worship like this together. Here Paul gives us a concise picture of what worship together looks like. It is beautiful picture of that in which our hearts are to be united as the people of God. And the very first thing that he says is that we are to ***let the word of Christ dwell in you richly***. That is a plural “you.” It is spoken to us corporately – this must be done in the corporate fellowship of God-worshippers. And he is being very specific in what he says here. The “word of Christ” or the “word about Christ” is to be what dwells richly in our hearts. What does that mean?

The point that he is making is that the gospel of Christ, the word of Christ, should dwell in us in such a way as to master the way in which we think, how we feel, how we act, how we live. We must fervently focus our minds on the gospel, consider its riches, and contemplate the magnitude and magnificence of grace shown to us by God in Christ with a view toward the expression of gospel fruit in this fellowship as a result. The idea behind the word “richly” is the idea of hearing and receiving the Word of Christ in a fruitful way – not merely hearing it, or even acknowledging its truth, being able to affirm it or even explain it – it is the idea of the Word of Christ affecting and informing our living, mastering us. We must be constantly filling our minds with the vision of the sovereign Son of the king of the Universe enduring the death of the cross to purchase for Himself as His own His church, each one of us. We must continually be seeking to be in awe of the Lamb of God who takes away our sins and the sins of all who believe. We must give ourselves utterly to “word of Christ,” individually yes, but also as His church, as the people of God together.

The word of Christ is to richly dwell within the church. As the body corporately gathers it is to be characterized by focused attention upon Jesus Christ in all his fullness and sufficiency in the gospel. Our worship, our conversation, our prayers, and our discussions, the way we think and the way we act must be saturated with the glorious richness of the gospel. Now, think about what that means for us in worship. The Word of Christ is to be the centerpiece of our worship – no Word, no worship.

I must therefore be compelled by God to preach the word of Christ faithfully and fully. If I do not and if you do not hold me to that calling from God, the word of Christ will never dwell richly in us. We will never be filled with wonder at the grace of God in Christ, we will never be in awe of Christ as we should be. I must faithfully proclaim the word of Christ so that we will become little in our own eyes and Christ will become greater and greater in our vision -- only then that we will love Him, treasure Him, delight in Him, be consumed with thankfulness toward Him, and worship Him as we should. We will love Him with all that is in us, and live to please Him. It has to start in the pulpit though.

For the word of God to dwell in us richly and in order for us to be the worshipping community that God has designed us to be, I must be faithful to preach the Word of Christ, but that is only part of the equation.

The other part is this. You must be willing to receive that word -- as what it is, the word of Christ, the truth, not a suggestion or opinion, but what it really is -- the authoritative, binding, God-magnifying, Christ-exalting, worship-generating, obedience-demanding, soul-stirring, character-transforming, life-giving word of Christ which is able to make you wise for salvation and transform you in your inner being. That is the very thing for which Paul commended the Thessalonians saying, ***And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.*** (1Th 2:13, ESV)

If the word of Christ is to dwell in us richly, there can be no casual hearing, no indifferent listening, and no combative response to the proclamation of the Word of Christ. You have to listen intensively, interactively, applying it to your life and considering its claims on you and on this body as a whole. Charles Spurgeon said of this intensive reception of the Word

of Christ: **You must really know the spiritual meaning of it; you must believe it; you must live upon it; you must drink it in; you must let it soak into your innermost being as the dew saturated the fleece of Gideon. It is not enough to have a Bible on the shelf; it is infinitely better to have its truths stored up within your soul. It is a good thing to carry your Testament in your pocket, it is far better to carry its message in your heart.** Do you see? The word of Christ should dwell “in us” individually and “among us” corporately, not haphazardly or insignificantly, but “richly!” In other words, let the truth about Jesus be taught and known and obeyed in all its glory and beauty and richness. Give it full sway. Let its very power and splendor do its work in you.

And beloved, when it does here’s what happens. When faithful proclamation of the Word of Christ in the body of Christ is met with faithful reception of the Word of Christ in the body of Christ, we will be a body that is **teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom.** We will be a people that is so rooted and so devoted to Jesus Christ and to the word of Christ that we will be teaching one another, speaking truth into one another’s lives, and encouraging one another unto worship and holiness, gladly sharing with one another the truth of the Scriptures and of Christ. We will be admonishing each other, warning one another when we see Christ slipping from the place of first importance in our lives, when we see Him being usurped as the treasure of our lives by something else -- money, self-promotion, reputation, sports, vacations, security, the pursuit of unhealthy relationships, some sin that is warring against us. We will be admonishing one another when we find that our actions and words are not matching the profession of our mouths. In that way we encourage one another, and hold one another accountable, we invest in each other’s lives for the glory of God. We live then not for ourselves and not in isolation from the body of Christ, but as a part of the new people of God who treasure Christ supremely and love one another deeply. The word of Christ must serve as the foundation of fellowship, of our community. And then, the Word of Christ must be the fuel of our worship.

Paul tells us to be **singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.** I don’t need to say much about this, really. Some commentators make a big deal over the definition of each one of these terms. **Psalms** refer to the Old Testament book of Psalms. They would sing psalms put to music, much like we do today. **Hymns** were expressions of praise to God. Some portions of Scripture were originally written as hymns in the early church (Col. 1:15-20 and Phil. 2:6-11). **Spiritual songs** emphasized testimony. They express in song what God has done for us.

The point that Paul is making is that there is a definite relationship between the indwelling of the Word and our expression of worship in song. It is a byproduct of the word of God dwelling in us richly. Real music, real singing comes from our hearts and not just our lips. It bursts forth when we are filled with the word, when the word of God dwells in us richly. When the word of Christ dwells richly in our hearts, when we grasp all that Christ has done in and for us and through us we can't help but sing our praises in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. Real worship from thankful hearts comes forth from hearts that have received the word and the grace of God. In fact, the word that is used for thankfulness implies singing that is the fruit of divine grace in our hearts. There is no intense singing, there is no intense worship from a heart that does not grasp the depth of the sacrifice of Christ and the faithfulness of God in His redemptive plan. There is no real worship if it does not come forth from a heart that loves God much because you realize that you have been forgiven much. Real worship comes forth from the understanding and embracing of the gospel truth, from a deep thanksgiving for the salvation of God.

Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be held in awe above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place. (1Ch 16:23-27)

Sing praises to the LORD, O you his saints, and give thanks to his holy name. (Psa 30:4)

True heartfelt, deep worship comes from the Word of Christ dwelling richly in the hearts of His people. Just think about this. In one congregation where the true gospel dwells richly, where Christ is continually magnified and made much of, there is a body that together grasps with thankful hearts the depth of God's love and the singing is driven not merely by the music or the choir, it comes from someplace deeper. It comes from a heart that loves the Christ the music and words point to and it is to Him and for Him that they sing, and it is a church that touches the heart of God. When the word of Christ dwells richly within us and we teach and admonish one another in the wisdom of God, real worship from thankful hearts takes place and God is pleased. In a people where the word of Christ does not richly dwell, you might sing the same songs and there may even be emotionalism over the music

or the arrangement, but there is no worship. May that never be us beloved. Let us see that how we worship and how we live together **is a reflection of our hearts, our affection, our gratefulness, and our esteem of Jesus Christ.** From this word about our calling and conduct as worshippers of God, we come to...

The Crowning Command to Worshippers (17) Here, really, is the summary command to the fellowship of worshippers. Paul says: **“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Colossians 3:17, ESV)** Now lots of times, preachers will pluck this verse out of its immediate context – I have done this before – and apply it as a general, sort of nonspecific, command for all of life. Certainly this verse can and should be applied to all of life, but the primary application for this verse is something else. This command is given in the context of the fellowship of the saints, the community of worshippers – how we act, how we conduct ourselves in the community of faith. That is the primary focus here. Whatever you do in the worshipping community do in the name of Christ. And what we do in word or deed has to do with the glory and the name of Christ; it reflects our hearts toward Jesus Christ – that’s an important statement. Again, remember **how we live as the community of faith is a reflection of our hearts, our affection, our gratefulness, and our esteem of Jesus Christ.** The phrase “in the name of the Lord Jesus” means “for the sake of the Lord Jesus” or “in open and explicit acknowledgement of the glory and honor that He deserves as Lord and Sovereign over all” or “to the glory of the Lord Jesus” or “because of who Jesus is and all that he has accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection.” This command encompasses everything that we do as the people of God. And it assumes that we are engaged in a certain kind of life as the redeemed of God. Whatever we do as the people of God, we must do it in the name of the Lord Jesus.

It assumes that we are engaged in worship, that we are a part of and invested in the worshipping community of Christ, that we are – to use the words of Acts – devoted to **“the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42, ESV)** Devoted – that means that we are actively engaged and committed, as of first importance, to the worship of Christ and the living of life with the people of God. The name of Christ is at stake in the way that we are committed to the worship of God together.

The point of this command is that corporate worship of Christ must hold primacy in our lives – not priority – primacy. There is a big difference between the two. Priorities change – they

change with the time of year, with the season of life you might be in, what you're into at the moment – priorities can change, but what takes primacy never changes. Primacy means that it takes precedence over everything else and that that position of preeminence never changes. Whatever has primacy means that it is the one thing around which everything else must be organized. It is a non-negotiable. Now listen, if the blood of Christ has redeemed you, if you have had the sentence of spiritual death that hung over your head paid for, in full, by the sacrifice of Christ, if God has sought and bought you with ransom of Christ's blood and brought you into the worshipping community of God's people, then what ought to hold primacy in your life is the worship of God in Christ. The fundamental non-negotiable of your life is the worship of the Living God – everything else must be arranged around that fundamental, preeminent reality. You have been redeemed to be a worshipper of Christ and the name and fame and glory of Christ is at stake in your devotion to worshipping Christ in the community of worshippers. Your devotion to the worship of Christ is **a reflection of your heart, your affection, your gratefulness, and your esteem of Jesus Christ.** It is a tangible evidence of your esteem for Christ's name. Actions speak louder than words.

It speaks volumes to one another when the sanctuary is filled on a Sunday like it should be, when Wednesdays are well-attended and we sing and pray together and hear the Word, when in word and deed we magnify the name of Christ. It speaks loudly of our devotion to Christ. It speaks volumes to the world and to our kids that the non-negotiable of our lives is our devotion and faithfulness to God, that worshipping our Savior holds primacy over everything else in our lives, over everything else that clamors for our attention and commitment, that we make our schedules fit our commitment to Christ and not the other way around. The primacy of the worship of Christ, the one who has died for us, delivered us, redeemed us, and loved us should take precedence over every other aspect of our lives – that is what it means to be a worshipper of the Lord. Our worship must be done in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ – for His glory. But what else?

That “whatever we do in word and deed” includes the way that we serve, not only the Lord, but the way in which we serve the body of Christ, the worshipping community. There is an expectation in this command that we would be devoted to fellowship, to serving one another, in the name of Christ. Like Paul writes to the Galatians Galatians: ***“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.””*** (Galatians 5:13–14, ESV)

Each of us needs to be asking ourselves, “How am I serving the body of Christ in the name of Jesus? How am I serving with thankfulness?” Now listen, it’s not serving the body to attend worship services or give faithfully and sacrificially to the Lord, to attend Bible study or something like that. Those are means of grace by which we receive the truth from the Lord and offer praise to the Lord and experience fellowship with the Lord, acts of worship before the Lord, but that’s not serving the body of Christ. Serving the body of Christ takes place when we take the gifts and means of grace that we have received – the teaching of the Word of God, the presence of the Lord, the conviction of the Spirit – and you use those gifts to serve others, you lay down your life and sacrifice and serve for the sake of Christ – when we act in the same way for the sake of others, for their blessing and for their joy as Christ did for us. Like we saw last week in Hebrews 10 – when we stir one another up to love a good works and do not neglect the meeting of the saints together – that is an essential aspect of worship. The evidence that the Word of God is dwelling richly in you is when it causes you to live and to act – in word and deed – in a way that pleases God and reflects your love for Him in the way that you serve and love others. True worship involves service to God and service to others – from the heart, not from duty or out of guilt, but from the heart. Do it in the Body in the name of the Lord Jesus.

I was so encouraged yesterday to see Adam Puckett and Ian Duncan taking time to prepare and deliver two vital messages to the students at Renown – they did that in the name of the Lord Jesus. That’s worship. I was encouraged to see Brittney and the students leading in worship, to see Kelsey Bower and Kendall Cannon, and Trevor Woodson and Austin Ertel and Julia Wells serving the students as leaders – am I missing anyone Brett? That’s worship. I was encouraged to see Joe Cziekowski’s small group serving lunch to the kids. That’s worship. What an encouragement it is, for instance, what a confirmation of the primacy of love for Christ in your souls when Brett doesn’t have to beg or labor for help in the youth ministry, when Erin or Katelyn don’t have to juggle schedules and cajole and plead with people to serve in extended session, when Gretch can count on a full choir loft, when Linda and the Care Ministry has to look for areas in which people can serve because there are so many that want to, when all of the necessary positions in children’s ministry and youth ministry, in ministry to adults – when those needs are covered because of an overwhelming outpouring of service in the body. It’s not that way, many times, but it could be. It should be. There are some who serve diligently and faithfully, who show their love for Christ by their service, but all of us could do more in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. How you

serve the body of Christ is *a reflection of your heart, your affection, your gratefulness, and your esteem of Jesus Christ.*

Each of us need to ask ourselves, “What am I doing?” Not your husband, or your wife, or your children, not anyone else – “What am I doing to serve the body of Christ in the name of Christ, in word and in deed, expressing a heart of thankfulness and love to Christ for saving me, by serving His body? What am I doing and what do I need to be doing in word or deed? This is something that all of us need to consider. Our worship is not complete until we are serving.

Last, “whatever we do in word and deed” includes how we testify to Christ’s worth among unbelievers. When they see us faithfully committed to Christ, to the body of Christ, orienting all of our lives around the truth that Christ deserves our ultimate allegiance and worship, and causes us to live in a manner, and have values and priorities, a love for Christ and for His church that transcends all other loves – it speaks volumes to them about the reality and the worth of Christ. Jesus said: **“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”** (John 13:35, ESV)

So what do we see in these verses? The emphasis is clearly upon the worth of the church as the fellowship of worshippers. You just cannot worship without being invested in and faithful to the local church, to this church. After all that we have been through in this last year, I hope we see how vital it is to be faithful and invested and committed to this worshipping community of believers. I want to close this sermon in a way I never have before. I want to close with three quotes about the worth of the worshipping community and I want you to think about them as we come to a close

In his book, *The Local Church*, Thabiti Anyabwile writes: **“We desperately need the church for love, for maturity and preparedness, for spiritual care. It is arrogant, rebellious, self-reliant, God-indicting pride to conclude that the church is an optional extra to the Christian life. We need everything God designs for us. Everything. To reject what God designs for His glory and our good is spiritual suicide. To reject the church is to take your own spiritual life.”**

Josh Harris says, **“The church community is where we learn to love God and others; where we are strengthened and transformed by truth from the Word; where we’re taught to pray, to worship and to serve; where we can be most certain that we’re investing our time and our abilities for eternity; where we can grow in our roles as friends, fathers, and mothers. The church is earth’s single best place -- God’s specially designed place--to start over (through regeneration and salvation), to grow and to change for the glory of God.”**

And then, last, what I said earlier: **“How we worship and how we live together is a reflection of our hearts, our affection, our gratefulness, and our esteem of Jesus Christ.”**

Think on these things and on all I have said this morning, and then respond in your heart in the way that the Spirit of God leads you.

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