

Introduction >>>

Last week we saw from God's Truth that what we value, what we gaze upon and behold, is what we will worship.

The enemy's continual whisper is that created things can be your life.

And the problem is, Idols look good to us; they don't look like our superficial understanding of a false god.

- We assume no Christian sets out to worship an idol.
- And so we convince ourselves that we have none, and yet, if we take a moment to courageously examine our hearts, we'd all find something or someone that we're placing our hope, our joy, our security, and our lives in.
 - Expecting a created thing to do what only the Creator can do.
 - Searching for Shalom, fullness, completion, exhale in something that will eventually crumble, let us down, turn to dust and vapor.

Illustration: Driving at night in the rain in Vancouver

I turn, because as far as I can see, it is safe.

So then, since we cannot see all the dangers, we need help; we need encouragement.

We need Community!

And to be clear, God did not JUST create community because of the danger of sin.

For all of eternity, God has lived in perfect community in the Trinity, and that is not because of His Spiritual Blindness.

Do you remember in the Creation account, before sin, there is only one thing God said wasn't good?

- It is in **Genesis 2:18**: God said it was NOT good that man was alone.
- In more ways than one, God is saying that man cannot accomplish that which he is called to by himself.

From the beginning, humanity was meant to live in community for their protection and flourishing.

So then, with all of that setup: Let's read today's passage from God's Word about the nature of the community we call the church.

Read Colossians 3:11-17

Pray that we may trust these things together.

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Purpose Statement

We are a thankful community gathered by and held together by the love of Christ, and therefore we relate to one another in Christ for the purpose of Christ being made known to all people.

(READ TWICE)

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Today, we will look at the following:

1. Who and How Community?
2. Why Community and What it Does?
3. To What End Community?

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I. Who and How >>>

READ VERSE - [11] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

[12] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved

Who?

Where is Here?

Here is the gathered people of God in Christ Jesus.

Before Paul calls the church to what the new self looks like, he wants them and us to understand the implications of the community they are now part of.

- In this “HERE,” the dividing walls of race, religious upbringing, culture, and social differences do not separate us.
- While “HERE” may be a place of variety, it is not a place of different levels of status.
 - Paul is not saying we're all the SAME; he is saying we all belong equally.

And also, we must be clear: this doesn't mean there is no status; rather, it means that there is ONE primary status.

And that overarching, uniting status is IN CHRIST.

- There is no one more or less beloved in Christ.

NO ONE HERE made it into the family of God by the skin of their teeth, and no one cleared the bar with flying colors.

- No one needed more or less grace to be a part of the Family of God.
 - While there's no doubt that some stories seem more miraculous than others by our measurements, the reality is no one can be more or less dead.
 - Dead is Dead.
 - In the valley of Dry Bones, there were not some that were drier than others.
- No, we all were all entombed and without hope before the stone was removed and we were called out.
- God's work in drawing people out of a demon-worshipping village, or a dark alley of wickedness, is no greater than when He awakens the heart of a 12-year-old who has grown up in a Gospel home that is part of a Gospel church.

- Sometimes His grace pierces dark places in distant lands like a new vaccine to the sick, and sometimes His grace pierces dark hearts in lands that have become inoculated to their perceived need because of familiarity.

Some of us met Christ like the outcast woman at the well in midday, and others met Christ like a Pharisee with questions in the middle of the night.

- We all must equally repent, and all of us are equally grace-pardoned, grace-raised, and grace-adopted by the merit of Christ Jesus the Son.
- **There are NO boring testimonies of God's Redemption!**
 - Each story of God's grace in drawing people to Himself is a joy in the heavens.

Paul goes on to say that we are Chosen and Holy!

In Deuteronomy 7:6, we read the precursor to this passage:

[6] "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

A people "holy" to the Lord.

- Their designation as holy was not because of their merit.
- It was a comment on their "set apartness" by God.
- His divine choice of them and His setting them apart are what made them a "holy" people.
 - It goes on to say that they were small in number; that they were the fewest of all peoples!
 - God did not choose them because they were mighty.
 - He set His love on them!
 - They had no reason to boast for their status as God's treasured possession.

And this is the status we have been grafted into by the work of Christ!

Chosen and set apart! Sit in that for a minute!

I think we could spend a whole day just meditating on this truth.

- What boast do we have BUT Christ! And in Christ, you are Beloved by God!

Yet there are times when we talk as if our status as a child of God is one in which we are tethered to His love.

- As if you are walking on a narrow beam over a chasm, and if you happen to stumble and fall, it's okay, because you have a tether.
- But otherwise, when you are walking well, then the tether is just a slack of rope that gives you confidence.

But Beloved by God in Christ is not a status you need a greater measure of when you sin than when you are doing good.

- It is the thing you walk on, and not the thing you only need at certain times.

And that singular, uniting, overarching bedrock TRUTH MUST not only be named, but also known.

It must not just be understood; it must be what orients our entire lives.

- This doesn't **just** change our confidence before God and men when we fall short; it changes our confidence when we do good works.
 - We no longer do good to earn love; we do good because WE ARE loved.

How?

And it is important that we consider the cost of our status.

Illustration: Free Pens vs \$500 Pens

If someone gives you a free pen and it stops working in a week, you're not surprised, and you wouldn't say, "I feel ashamed for taking that pen."

BUT if you go to a pen store and purchase a \$500 pen, you would be rightly frustrated if it stopped working in a week.

- And if you went to the store and said, hey, this stopped working, and they said, well, there was no guarantee. Your purchase was a risk. And you lost.
- You would walk out feeling shame for buying it.

And so then, when it comes to our place as the people of God, we declare that it's a free gift of God's grace in and through Christ!

- And we celebrate, BUT also in the economies of our understanding, we're a bit anxious.
- Because if it is free, it is fragile.
 - It's not sturdy.
 - Free things are disposable things, and can be easily lost and certainly can't be depended on.

So we must continually remember that our status was anything but free.

- On the contrary, it was the most UNFREE thing that there has ever been!
- It cost God everything.

The Son of God, the second person in the Trinity, existed WITH the Father (before the Face of the Father) for all of eternity, and yet, because God SO loved the world, He sent His Son.

- And the Son did not go in order to earn His place before the Father; NO, He was declared approved by the Father before His public ministry of Good Works even began.
- And in Love of the Father, and those who were His, the Son endured the Cross for a Joy set before Him.
- And the Son took our status as sinners and enemies upon Himself, so that we could, by faith in Him, have His status accounted to us.

So then!

Your position in the People of God is the most sturdy thing you can and will ever have.

There is nothing you are putting your weight on today that is more sure than your status in Christ.

Christ's purchase of you was not risky; it was sure.

And He will not be ashamed when you fall short tomorrow.

- He already wore that exact shame.
- He knew you fully before you ever were aware of Him, or tasted just how irresistible His Grace was and is, and will forever be.

God is not a fool, and His Son was not tricked by your confession.

- He did not give His life for something that would be lost.

Church - Beloved Children of God, if we do not first KNOW this truth, then what comes next, and how we function as a community, will be problematic.

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II. Why & What >>>

Why?

So then, because we are united not by our works but by the costly work of Christ, what now?

Do we simply gather each week and say, “I’m just glad to be here”?

- Not at all; we have been given purpose and calling as a people.

With our new status comes a new self.

- A new self being restored to the image it was meant to reflect.

Paul goes on to say what the new self in Christ looks like:

Read - 12b *compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] 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 let’s name an assumption in all of these things.

- You CANNOT be compassionate, kind, humble, meek, patient, longsuffering, forgiving, and loving in a vacuum.
- None of this makes sense apart from the community of the beloved.

The idea that we can look like Christ apart from His Church is nowhere to be found in the Bible.

We say, I love Christ, but not the church.

- The church is full of hypocrites, and people who just don’t get it!
- And we’ve denied how Paul began this section... *God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved*
- And in our posture of being better than, our self-righteousness is revealed, and grace is emptied, and we, not them, become the ones that God opposes.

And how will we obey Christ apart from His Church?

Who will we one-another? The people who always agree with us?

- Will we only love those who are like us? Even the tax collectors are capable of that love.
- Will we only gather with those who share the same stage of life?
- Will we only be patient with those who don’t make us wait?
- Will we only be compassionate with those who are lovable?
- Will we only be humble with those who recognize and thank us for our humility?

- If we are bound together by Love (vs 14), then what kind of love is it that connects us?

Is it the Love of Christ or the love of ourselves that binds our gathering together?

If we are gathered in Christ, then look to Him for how we are meant to relate.

See how Christ treated those who were not like Him.

See the patience of Christ in how he treated His disciples.

See how Christ treated those who were about to deny Him.

- This is the Truth we therefore live!
- This is the New Self we have been born unto!
- And it is this Self that we are jealous and eager to reflect to one another.

The Danger

And also, these are the last days, and we ought to walk carefully!

Church community, we are all in danger!

We need each other.

But the Western individualist declares that the only person we need is the one in the mirror.

- That we're the hero of our story, and we need no sidekicks, and so, contrary to what our Creator said, It IS Good that we are alone.

And that is right where the enemy wants us.

On an island of our own algorithms.

But lies are in the air! Lies about our need for grace.

And some we can identify by ourselves...but others, the most deadly ones, are in our blind spots. They are camouflaged. They look like good things. They are small and subtle.

Look at how the writer of Hebrews characterizes sin and our need for each other.

Hebrews 3:12–13

[12] Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. [13] But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Sin is deceitful...So Paul writes:

[16] **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.

So then - when we wake up early or press pause on our day to read and meditate on God's Word, of course we are being blessed by the ordinary means of grace that is God's Truth...but that is not the destination.

We read, pray, study, and consider God's Word because we have a commitment and calling to one another.

- We want to know God well in Truth so that we can make God known well.
- We want to help others and be helped to live in this temporary age, where the prince of the air walks around **like** a roaring lion, looking to consume someone who has isolated themselves.

Stumbling Blocks of

And I am aware of the difficulties here.

Someone, even a trusted friend, comes beside you and says, hey brother, hey sister, that thing you are in pursuit of, that thing that seems to have captured your heart, is telling you a lie.

- And immediately there is a defensive posture.
- And I get it. Because we are blind to the danger, we feel confident in our defense and justification.
- We feel we are objective arbiters.

And that's not to say there might be something that needs explaining, but it does mean we ought to receive it in humility and have a willingness to consider it!

AND none of this will be possible if we forget the word of Christ.

- If you feel like your status in the Kingdom of God is being threatened, if your status "HERE" is at stake, then you will fight tooth and nail to remain inside the walls.
 - You will fight to be beloved and belong.
 - You will not even take a moment to consider what has been brought before your eyes, because you feel the need to defend your status.
- And as the saying goes, the best defense is good offense.
 - And so we defend ourselves by picking up our sword.
 - If we are being reduced, so shall everyone else.

And instead of finding comfort in the status and forgiveness that is ours in Christ, we find comfort in the faults of others.

- And our righteousness is transferred from the imputed righteousness of Christ to the relative righteousness of those around us.

- Or to put it another way, our status before God and in this place becomes based on how we measure up to others.

The man of this age will say, “I need friends who make me feel comfortable with however I decide to live my life.”

But the man of eternity says, no! Stir me! Remind me! Challenge me!

And yes, encourage me; but GIVE me courage in Christ!

With the **Word of Christ dwelling in us richly**, we admonish and teach one another.

- What a grace that we are not alone!

If I want to go off a cliff and you encourage me to chase my truth, that doesn’t make you a good friend.

So then,

May the Word of Christ dwell among us richly, and therefore:

Tell me about Jesus. Tell me how he meets me in my anxious thoughts.

Tell me how he met you in your anxious thoughts.

Tell me about how Christ freed you from addiction.

Tell me about how Christ met you in your greed.

Tell me how Christ loves **me**.

Tell me how Christ loves **you**.

Tell me how Christ chose **me**.

Tell me how Christ chose **you**.

Tell me how Christ gave himself for both of us.

Please, don’t deny or overlook my sin because you have sin.

Please don’t diminish my need to repent, for the sake of my comfort and our relationship.

Don’t give me cheap grace.

• Calling me to repent is not death; it is the prologue to Life.

- I want to celebrate His costly Grace upon me!
 - Never presuming in entitlement, only a crescendoing thanksgiving for His infinite mercies.

I don’t care if it’s awkward. I want to be like Christ!

- Awkward is temporary, and we’re pursuing an eternal Joy!
- And we thank God for these gracious acts of Community Care and Love!
- We thank God for the grace of tough conversations with those who love us, and for the sake of the One who has loved us all.

And we all say, yeah, but - I am not perfect; therefore, how can I stir someone toward something I am not?

I don't want to be a hypocrite.

Then don't. That word means an actor with a mask.

To be a hypocrite is to say you don't struggle, that you don't need to be admonished and encouraged. To only teach righteousness and not pursue it.

Illustration - coach and player.

Saw the coach play and her form denied. But that doesn't make her a hypocrite it makes her human.

Christ is in the Air

And maybe you're here today and say, BUT I am crippled.

- I am lame. I am enslaved, I am being consumed, and I am not sure if I can ever walk again.
- I have even stopped dreaming of limping.
- I am resigned to the chains I am tethered to, and I'm just trying to make the best of it.
- I may be forgiven, but I am not welcomed.
- I may be His, but I am not loved.
- The scar tissue has numbed my heart.
- How can I possibly be community to others when I am so undone by my past?

Beloved, here is the Word of Christ.

- He did not come for the healthy.
- He did not come for those who have life in themselves.
- He makes the lame walk, the blind to see, the dead to rise; He releases the captive, and meets them in their need.
- We must not let what feels like humility, empty the cross of Christ.
- We must not resign ourselves to the grave clothes of our tombs.
- He has called us to pick up our mats and walk.

We need that Word dwelling richly in and around us.

- I need that Word of Christ preached every day to my heart that is continually in danger of seeing that which was as that which will be.

May the Word of Christ be spilling out into the hallways and parking lot.

May that be what's in the air of the beloved in Christ, and be thankful!

[change slide]

III. To What End >>>

READ VERSE - [17] 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.

What You Do and Say Matters!

Paul ends this section to the community of Christ by saying that everything you do is meant to be done in the name of the Lord Jesus.

- Remember, you are a Holy People. A People chosen and set apart by God for a purpose.
- A Royal Priesthood that represents God.

Therefore, if that is who we are, then our purpose is to do everything in the name of the Lord.

But what does it mean to do everything in the name of the Lord?

Does it mean that when I say or do something I should add that it is in the name of Jesus?

No.

The Name of the Lord is the person and character of the Lord.

- In the context of this passage, it is saying that whatever we say or do ought to be done in consideration of the sovereign presence of Christ.

So, if in response to legalism, we have grown to believe that the Bible, or the NT, does not care about our conduct and behavior, then the pendulum has swung in the wrong direction!

- We are meant to walk in a continual awareness of those who have been redeemed and are being restored.

We are to walk in the Fear, that is, the awe and awareness of the person of the Lord.

And it is in that awareness that shapes how we relate to one another.

Everything we say and do is meant to align with the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Paul puts it another way in **Philippians 1:27**: **Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,**

To live a life worthy of the Gospel, that is the Word of Christ, does NOT mean that we live a life that deserves or merits the Gospel, but rather a life that declares the worth of what we have received.

- It is to live a life that sings the goodness and beauty of Christ in His compassion, patience, and love for us!

While the heresy of the Therapeutic Gospel declares that whatever you do in word or deed, do it in the name of your own emotional well-being, come as you are, stay and find comfort as you are; we are reminded here that the true Gospel is that we have been set apart by grace, and then given resurrection grace to walk, to DO OUR LIVES in the name of the Lord.

- To walk not in Self-Absorption, but in Self-Denial, because that shows Christ!
- And that's not a burden; it's for our joy and His glory!

I want to see Jesus

**All of humanity wants the same thing, whether we know it or not.
We all want to see Jesus.**

And that's what the Community in Christ is meant to do for one another.

We show each other His Compassion, His kindness, His humility, and His patience!

We forgive one another, because in doing so, others see what we have been given in Christ.

And we must be careful, because there's a grave danger in being a part of a community that is compassionate and kind.

We can exchange the Truth for a lie, and worship the church and not the One who gathered us.

- And this is a deadly lie, because when we worship the church, we'll eventually be let down.
- We'll be confused and angry when the church fails to live up to our expectations.
 - **Expectations that are only able to be met by Christ.**
- And in our disillusionment, we run away from the very thing that God has ordained to bring us home.
 - And we grow in self-righteous resentment of the idol our hearts put its hope in.

So in fear and trembling, in this place, may we be jealous for the Name of Jesus.

- The best churches are those that refuse to point to themselves.
- The best churches know that a full parking lot is a vain metric if it's aimed inward.
- The best churches are aimed upward.
- The best churches lead one another to Christ, because that's who we all really want to see.
- He is the community we want to join, and He has given us one-another to help us walk in the Name of the Lord.
- To teach, admonish, encourage, and sing songs that exalt the Word of Christ!

Who or what are the people around you moving you towards?

- I'm not saying we shouldn't have community outside the body, but I am saying we'd better have it within.
- I want to be surrounded by people who are stirring my affections toward Christ.
Admonishing, teaching, encouraging...
- I want some guys around me who are convinced that they are going to stand before their King one day.

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Conclusion >>>

Gathered by our Need

And for a minute, consider how crazy this place Paul calls “HERE” is!

Consider how countercultural this gathering is.

- We are a people gathered by a confession that we are not able to save ourselves from all that was our past, and also, we are not able to save ourselves from all that we will do tomorrow.
- And we are not presumptuous, flippant, or cavalier about this unmerited, undeserved grace!
- We are instead a people of great thanksgiving.

Illustration: Diplomas vs Birth Certificates

We are not here with our chests puffed out, declaring our worth.

Graciously Chosen and Born-again into a New Life.

- This is not a club of well-behaved do-gooders.
- This is not a team that we tried out for and made.
- This is not a group of intellectuals who studied hard and discovered a hidden truth.
- This is a place, and we are a people who have been graciously gathered by a scandalous love, from the unchanging God of all Creation.
 - A God whom we did not desire, a God whose logic, whose Word we were unable to unravel apart from His Spirit.

We are a people who have no resume that commends ourselves.

- We are a people whose merit is not declared by a diploma.

The symbol of our status is not a car we earned; it is a cross we deserved.

- We are a people whose place was, is, and forever will be secured by the work of Jesus Christ.
- A work that we take hold of by the grace of Faith.
- And so our lives point to what He has done for us, and not for what we have done for Him.
- And He has graciously given us one another, that we might one another in the name of Christ.

In a moment we are going to take communion together, and the thing I am always struck by in this time is the testimony of confession.

A variety of people, from a variety of places, with a variety of stories, all declaring one status.

A status that says, I am in need of grace. I am in need of compassion. I am in need of forgiveness. I am in need of kindness. I am in need of patience.
I need a Savior to rescue and restore me from myself.
So we come to remember what we have received in Him!

Prayer

Time of Consideration

As we prepare our hearts for a time of Communion.

We are going to take a moment to consider.

Communion is a time in which the Community of God, the Chosen, Holy, Beloved people in Christ come to HIS Table, and declare, we need Christ, and We Need His People.

And Church Family, remember who God opposes: the proud, the unrepentant.
Our sin cannot separate us from God and His people; our unwillingness to confess is what keeps us apart.

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So then, here are some Questions to consider during this time:

As we come to the Lord's Table as the Beloved Family of God...

How am I treating others in this body?

What is my attitude towards others in this body?

And then, after we take a moment to consider these things, to confess, repent, to thank God... we will be led in song, and during that time, if you have placed your trust in Jesus Christ our Lord, we invite you to come as one to His Table.