

Session 4

DON'T JUST GO TO CHURCH—BE THE CHURCH

Colossians 3:12-17

Memory Verse

Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

– COLOSSIANS 3:16, CSB



Don't Just Go to Church—Be the Church

THEOLOGICAL THEME: The book of Colossians begins with sweeping statements about the glory and sovereignty of God. Believers proclaim God's glory by living their lives committed to Him through the local church.

As with many areas of life, the COVID-19 pandemic was hard on local churches. When people were urged to avoid gathering in crowded spaces, churches wrestled with the how to best serve the Lord and their people. The challenge from COVID was not only in churches trying to manage meeting spaces. When people stopped going to church during COVID, many discovered that the church was not essential to them. The local church had become another consumer experience.

As people sat at home and watched worship services on their phones or church-hopped between podcasts and online pastors, many decided that the church was not essential to following Jesus. Even after gathering restrictions lifted, attending church became a good idea if you didn't have anything else going on, but if you had other priorities, the church could take a backseat. The church has taken a backseat to travel sports, dance, and various other extracurricular activities.

However, the Bible presents Christianity very differently. The church is not an option; the church is the very heartbeat of the Christian life. The New Testament knows nothing of a solitary Christian or of a Christian not closely connected to a local church. If the American church wants to impact American culture, the church must decide to embrace a biblical view of the church and reject consumerism.

? What are the greatest hindrances in our community to regular church engagement, even for those who claim to follow Christ?

? How can competing desires, involvements, and activities distract a family or individual from proper commitment to Christ and the local church? Why is this topic often contentious?

Session Summary

If a foreigner showed up to your worship service today, would they know quickly what was happening and where your loyalties lie? Today, we will wrestle with questions of what it looks like to be the church. As a follower of Jesus, you are part of Christ's church, and you have an important role meant to glorify God and benefit others.

1. Let Peace Rule (Colossians 3:12-15)

Throughout the New Testament, the Christian life is pictured as the putting off the old self and putting on the new self—sort of like changing from old dirty clothes to new clothes. Colossians 3:12 begins with that same image. In Galatians 5:19-23, Paul described the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, etc.) as well as the fruit of the flesh (impurity, enmity, strife, jealousy, etc.). The fruit of the Spirit comes about because of the Holy Spirit's work in your life. The fruit of the flesh is normal to the natural, unsaved person. In our passage in Colossians, Christians are essentially being commanded to put on the fruit of the Spirit.

? Read Galatians 5:19-21. What is the fruit of the flesh? Which characteristics in this list do you see as most threatening to a local church?



How does this list compare with the Paul's exhortation in Colossians 3:12-15?

Paul wrote to the Colossians (and, by extension, to us) with an urgent plea that they treat one another with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. But that is not all. Paul also asked the Colossians to bear with one another and forgive. Paul was not naive. He knew that when people from different backgrounds came together to form this new faith family, tension would exist. Part of living as a family is choosing to forgive others when they wrong you. Forgiveness is given, not earned.

Further, Christians are commanded to bear with one another. Bearing with others requires that you be patient with the weaknesses of others and approach your “weak” brothers and sisters with humility and gentleness. The idea of “bearing” evokes a mental image of carrying someone or something. That is appropriate, because when you bear with your brother or sister in Christ, you are figuratively “carrying” them when they can’t carry themselves. You are shouldering part of their load.

Sometimes you carry the load because of weakness. Other times, you may carry the load because your fellow Christian has sinned and fallen. Regardless of the reason, Paul urged us to bear with one another. But how? Colossians 3:15 explains strength to bear with others this way: “And let the peace of Christ . . . rule in your hearts.” When Christ rules in your heart, you will be governed by His peace. When Christ rules in your heart, you are reminded how He bears your burdens and how you can bear with others in the same way.



Application: What is your daily experience of the peace of Christ? How do we open ourselves up to this peace ruling in our lives? In what sense has Christ made peace for us?


2. Praise the Lord (Colossians 3:16)

The church is a family, but it is a family with a purpose. When the church gathers, it is not a social club or a civic organization. The church of Jesus Christ can and may do many things, but it must do a few things, and perhaps above all else, when the church gathers it must worship the Lord. When you hear worship, you may think about singing, but there is much more to worship than singing.

Paul urged the Colossians to let “the word of Christ dwell” in them, and then he told them how to accomplish that task:


- Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom
- Singing psalms
- Singing hymns
- Singing spiritual songs
- Giving thanks to God


Singing is worship, but so is teaching, preaching, and admonishing. Further, different kinds of songs can be sung in worship. Singing psalms is literally singing God’s Word out loud. Hymns are generally understood to be songs that communicate doctrinal truth—like “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” Spiritual songs are often thought of today as “praise and worship songs.” All these kinds of songs have a place and should have a priority in your worship services. Some of the songs should elevate the soul of singers to the Lord. Some of the songs should be used to teach and instruct. Others should be rooted deep in God’s Word as an act of praise to the Lord.

 What is your favorite song to sing in church? What about this song speaks to you? How does this song remind you of your identity in Christ and glorify God?

Regular worship services must also include clear teaching, preaching, and admonition. As the Word is preached, God's people are instructed, but they are also grown by the practice of submission. Sitting under the preaching of God's Word is an invitation for the Word of God to shape and change you. Preaching is not a conversation or a debate; it is a one-sided presentation that requires the hearer to surrender his or her will and submit to the proclamation of God's Word. The preaching of the Word is as much a part of worship as singing or praying.

Finally, Paul urged believers to give thanks to the Lord. How do you give thanks in a corporate worship service? Some songs include expressions of thanks. Or a worship service might include a corporate prayer of thanksgiving. Or we give thanks to the Lord by giving tithes and offerings. When you set aside part of your finances for the Lord, you acknowledge and thank Him for the blessings you have received. Giving in the church is usually spoken of as tithes and offerings. The tithe was the prescribed ten percent offering in the Old Testament that everyone was to give to the Lord (Malachi 3:8-12). The tithe is still often spoken of in the church today. An offering is anything you choose to give over and above your tithe (2 Corinthians 9:7). When you give back to the Lord, it is an expression of thanksgiving to the Lord for all your blessings.

 As you pray over your next corporate worship service, what are some specific ways you can pray for your pastor and worship team?

 Application: How is God calling you to be an active participant in your worship service and not just a passive observer?

3. Make a Difference (Colossians 3:17)

Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of Jesus. If the church is who you are instead of simply where you go, then it makes sense that you will continually act like a follower of Jesus. You should represent Christ when you pump gas and buy groceries. You should represent Christ at school and work. We should do all things to the glory of God.


? In what areas of your life do you struggle the most to honor God? What might you need to start or stop to make a change toward godliness in this area?

How do you honor Christ in the world outside of church services? Jesus has commanded us to “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). We are called to share the good news of the gospel with people both near and far. We are also called to ministries of mercy where God has placed us. The Bible commands Christians to care for widows and orphans (Zechariah 7:10; James 1:27), the poor (Leviticus 19:10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:14), those in need (Luke 10:25-37), and those in prison (Matthew 25:31-46). Luke 6:35-36 says Christians should seek to love their enemies, do good, and lend by following the example of God who is “gracious to the ungrateful and evil” (v. 35).

In addition, you might impact the world around you by being an encourager. First Thessalonians 5:11 urges, “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing.” Encourage someone today. In a world filled with negativity, the power of a loving gesture can change someone’s day. If you aren’t sure how to encourage others, consider just being present. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 says, “Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts. For if either falls, his companion can lift him up; but pity the one who falls without another to lift him up.” Pick someone up today.


Jesus told his disciples in John 13:34-35: “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” The world will know Jesus’s followers by the way we love each other. When you love a friend, you honor Christ and make a difference in the world around you. Jesus changed the world one relationship and one action at a time—you can too.


? How is ministry to the world around you a form of worship?

 Application: Who is God calling you to love in word or deed? How will you respond?

Conclusion

Throughout the Bible, worship has always involved both the vertical (God) and the horizontal (other people) dimensions. The book of Psalms contains works of praise and adoration as well as teaching and edification. When Ezra gathered the people for a solemn assembly, the priests read and explained the Word of God (Ezra 7). Even the commandments given by Moses on Mount Sinai were vertical and horizontal in nature (Exodus 20). Further, it is important to point out that spoken words were a significant part of worship throughout the Bible. The New Testament is filled with sermons and reports of sermons, but often those passages do not mention singing (Matthew 5–7; Acts 3; 17:22-34; 18:24-28). In other words, vertical and horizontal worship may not always even involve songs. But true worship is always about the God who gives life and true worship always leaves worshipers changed.

 The book of Colossians begins with a focus on God's greatness and sovereignty. How does a proper understanding of who God is impact the way you serve the church and engage in missions outside of the church?

 As you think about the next steps you can take to be more engaged in your church, what ministry area might God be calling you to serve in?

 How does living as the church naturally lead us to seek gospel conversations with others?

Here's How to Become a Christ-Follower:

Read the following verses and ask after each one: "What does this say to me?"

- **All have sinned:** Romans 3:23 & 1 John 1:8
- **The wages of sin:** Romans 6:23 & John 3:18
- **But while we were sinners, salvation was provided:** Romans 5:8
- **Become a Christ-follower:** Romans 10:9-10 Confess and Believe

Accepting Christ is Just the Beginning:

Next Steps:

- Publicly profess your faith by being baptized (Matthew 10:32-33; Luke 3:21; Romans 6:4).
- Join a church which follows the Bible, where you can grow in your faith through prayer, Bible study and fellowship with other Christians.
- Get involved in groups for encouragement and accountability.
- Begin a daily personal worship experience with God where you study the Bible and pray.
- Share with others what Jesus has done for you. Tell your story (Romans 10:14; Matthew 28:19-20).
- Begin to live for God (Romans 12:1-2, 9-18; James 1:19-27).



FOR NEXT WEEK

Groups: Life Together

Main Passages

- 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; 3:1-9

Session Outline

1. Strong Bonds (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17; 3:1-2)
2. Strong Confidence (2 Thessalonians 3:3-6)
3. Strong Examples (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9)

Memorize

Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

- Colossians 3:16, CSB