

Title: The Christian Community

Text: Colossians 3:12-17

Introduction

What would **make** for an *ideal* Christian community?

If I were to **ask** you to **write down** on a piece of paper a description of *your* ideal Christian community – **I** wonder what it would be.

What would **such** a community look like?

Now, I'm sure **we** would all like to **have a say** as to **what** an *ideal* Christian community should **look like** – and **be like**.

After all, **I** trust that **we** have all heard – and probably **can relate to!** – this **old refrain**:

*“To dwell above with the saints we love, Oh, that will be glory!
But to dwell below with the saints we know, well, that’s another story!”*

So – in light of the **conflicts** that **we** may have had – or **might inevitably have!** – my **guess** is that **we** would all have **our own thoughts** as to **what** would **make** for an *ideal* Christian community.

But **the thing** is this:

- In a room this size – **I** think we would **get** as **diverse** a **range** of **answers** as there are people in the room.

- And **not just that** – but I have a **sneaking suspicion** that **the things** we have **written down** would have an **uncanny resemblance** to the **person** that we see in the **mirror** each morning.

After all – **don't most of us think**:

“If only **everyone** were like *me*. Then **we** would **all get along fine**. And **there** would be **no problems whatsoever**.”

Well – I'm **not sure about you** – but I'm **glad** that **God doesn't leave it up to us** to **determine what makes for an *ideal* Christian community**.

Instead – **God saw it fit to tell us explicitly** – through the **apostle Paul** just **what** such a **community** should **look like**.

And **what we are going to see from our passage** today is this:

**God wants our community to be marked by
Christlike virtues and Christ-centered priorities.**

So – **without further ado** – let's **look at the picture** that **Paul paints** – or – *more specifically* – **four portraits** that **Paul paints** – of **God's idyllic community**.

And **my aim** – as we **go through each of these portraits** – is that **we** would **aspire** to be **such a community** here at **GBC** – that **these** would be **increasingly true of us** as a **church community**.

So, the **first portrait** that **Paul paints** for us is that of **a community marked by Christ's virtues**.

1. A COMMUNITY MARKED BY CHRIST'S VIRTUES (vv.12-14)

Look with me at **verses 12-14**.

Verse 12 begins:

“Therefore ...”

Let's **stop** and ask: **What** is the *“therefore”* – there for?

Now – while **it certainly relates** to **all** that **came before** – *in particular* – that of **our new identity in Christ** – I would **argue** that **Paul also has in mind what he had just written** in the **immediately preceding verse** – *namely*, **the new community that Christ has formed**.

A community that – as we saw in **verse 11** – **transcends** all **ethnic, cultural, economic, or social boundaries**.

So – with that in mind – **I think** we can **paraphrase Paul** in this way:

*“Therefore – that is, because of **our new identity in Christ** and because of **the new community of which we are now a part of** – as **God's chosen people** – here's **what we are to do ...**”*

In other words – **verses 12-17** has **a corporate emphasis**. It is **focused**:

- On **community life**.
- On **how believers should relate to one another**.
- On **what the church should be like**.

But **before Paul tells us what we are to do** – he **once again reminds us of who we are in Christ**.

Look at **verse 12** – Paul writes:

*“Therefore, as **God’s chosen ones, holy and dearly loved** ...”*

Notice how **Paul** describes **believers**:

- **Paul describes** us as **“chosen”**. That is, we are **his ἐκλεκτοὶ**. We are **the elect of God** – **handpicked by him** before the **foundation of the world** – **not** because of **anything good in us** – but **solely by his grace and good pleasure**.
- **Paul also describes** us as **“holy”**. That is, **not only** are we **those** who have been **set apart from sin** – but we have been **set apart by God** – **to God** – and **for God** himself.
- And – *finally* – **Paul describes** us as **“dearly loved”**. That is, we are **those** whom **God** has **lavished his love** upon. We are the **objects of God’s special love**. We are the **apple of his eye**.

And **what’s interesting** is that **these** are the **exact same terms** that **God** uses to **describe his people** in the **Old Testament**.

Listen to what **Moses** tells the **Israelites** in **Deuteronomy 7:6-8** – he says:

*“For you are a **holy** people belonging to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has **chosen** you to be his own possession out of all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD had his heart set on you and **chose** you, not because you were more numerous than all peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But because the LORD **loved** you ...”*

Did you **catch** the **similar terms** used here?

What this means is that **we stand in continuity** with the **Old Testament people of God!** We are **the new Israel!** We are **his people!**

- We are “**chosen**”!
- We are “**holy**”!
- We are “**dearly loved**”!

Friends, **what a great and glorious description** this is – **one** that we **do well not to gloss over**!

In fact – I would **encourage you to take time to meditate upon and study each of these terms** – and **remind yourself of who you are in Christ**.

- You are “**chosen**”.
- You are “**holy**”.
- You are “**dearly loved**”.

Now – **Paul starts here** because **everything** that **he has to say** is **grounded in** – and **flows from** – this **fundamental reality**.

So – *because of* our **new identity in Christ** – and *because of* the **new community** of which we are a **part** – **Paul proceeds** to tell us **how we ought to live** in light of **those realities**.

Specifically – **he gives us a list of virtues** that **we are to put on** as we **relate to one another** in **community**.

Verse 12 – Paul writes:

*“... put on **compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience** ...”*

What is Paul doing here?

Well – **Paul is telling us to put on** – to **cultivate** – **these virtues in our lives**.

And *why* does **Paul do that**?

Well, **two things**:

- *Firstly* – **Paul knows** that **these** are the **fruit of the gospel** in **our lives**. So – *in a sense* – he is **simply asking us to be who we truly are**.
- And – *secondly* – **Paul knows** that **these virtues** are **needed** if **we** are to **exist** – and **flourish** – **together as a community**.

So – **what** are **these virtues** that **we** are to **put on** as **we relate** with **one another**?

- First, “**compassion**”. We are to have **tender hearts**. We are to have **a heart** that **cares** – that **goes out** – that is **moved** by the **plight** of **others**.
- Second, “**kindness**”. While **compassion** has to do with **our feelings** – **kindness** has to do with **our actions**. It is – *if you like* – **compassion in action**.
- Third, “**humility**”. We are to **consider** and **value others above ourselves**. We are to **put** the **needs** and **interests** of **others** **above our own**.
- Next, “**gentleness**”. Or – as **some versions** put it – “**meekness**”. This is **strength under control**. It is **not** to **exert our rights** – and even **forgo them** if need be.
- Finally, “**patience**”. We **all know** what **patience** is – **especially** if you are **a parent**! It is to be **longsuffering**. It is to be **not easily provoked**.

So – **these** are the **virtues** that **Paul** says **we** are to **put on** as **members of Christ’s body**.

Virtues that are **supremely** and **perfectly displayed** in **none other** than **Christ himself**.

Jesus is the **epitome** of **these virtues**.

There is **no one** as **compassionate, kind, humble, gentle, and patient** as **Christ** is.

And – *therefore* – in **telling us to clothe ourselves with these virtues** – **Paul** is – *in essence* – **telling us** – as he puts it in **Romans 13:14** – to “*put on the Lord Jesus Christ*”.

To put it simply – **Paul wants us to be a community**:

- That is **marked by Christ’s virtues**.
- That **reflects the character of Christ**.
- That is **Christlike**.

And in **verse 13** – **Paul** goes on to **show us the practical outworking these virtues in our lives**:

“... *bearing with one another and forgiving one another* ...”

In other words – **an evidence that we have put on these virtues** is that **we will**:

- “**Bear with one another**”
- And “**forgive one another**”.

And **trust me**: This is something we *will* have occasion to do – and *must* do.

Why? Well, **two things** at least:

Firstly, we are **all different**.

- **Different backgrounds.**
- **Different personalities.**
- **Different preferences.**

And, *secondly*, we are **all sinners**.

- **Saved sinners** – *no doubt!*
- But **sinners** *nonetheless!*

And **in such a community** – it is **inevitable**:

- That we **step on each other's toes**.
- That we **offend each other**.
- That we **irritate each other**.

And **this is not a matter of *if*** – but *when*.

So – “**bear with one another**” – we must!

But **Paul doesn't stop there! He ups the ante!**

Not only must we “*bear with one another*” – but we must also “*forgive one another*”.

In fact – **this is something *expected* of us as believers**.

This is **implied in Paul's words in the last part of verse 13**.

Look there with me – **Paul** writes:

*“Just as **the Lord** has **forgiven you** – so **you** are **also to forgive**.”*

In other words – **Paul is *grounding* our forgiveness of others in God's prior forgiveness of us.**¹

¹ Cf. Col 2:13-14

- As **those** who have **received forgiveness** – so too are **we** to **extend forgiveness**.
- **God's vertical forgiveness** is the *basis* and *motivation* of **our horizontal forgiveness**.

In fact – **not to forgive** would be **unthinkable** and **inconceivable** for **those** who **received forgiveness**!

The **parable** of the **unforgiving servant** in **Matthew 18** comes to mind:²

The servant who was **forgiven** of a **huge debt** by **his master** – *somehow!* – did **not extend** the **same forgiveness** he had **received** to **his fellow servant** who **owed him** but a **little debt**.

And **Jesus' point** in **that parable** is **simple**. It is this:

Forgiven people forgive people!

An **evidence** that **we** have **truly received** and **appreciate God's amazing forgiveness** of **us** – is that **we willingly** and **freely extend forgiveness** to **those** who **may have hurt us**.

Think about it for a moment:

If an **infinitely holy God** – whose **eyes** are **too pure** to **look upon evil** – has **graciously forgiven** **unworthy** and **vile sinners** such as **us** – how can **we not** – *likewise* – **forgive fellow sinners** who **may have sinned against us**?

It **makes no sense** whatsoever – **does it**?

Now – I'm **not saying** that **forgiveness** is **always easy** – but **what I'm saying** is that **forgiveness** is *necessary*.

We need to – *by the power of the Spirit* **learn** to **forgive** – *just as* **our Lord** has **forgiven us**.

² Matt 18:21-35

Alright. Let's **stop here** and **ask ourselves**. We've seen the **five virtues** that **Paul listed**:

- Now – **if we are honest** – would we say that **these virtues characterise our lives**?
- Or **better yet**: Would **those around us** say that **these** are **true of us**?
- Do **people view us** as **compassionate and kind**? Or do **they view us** as **harsh and unkind**?

Friends – **it has been said** that:

“A **church** is a **hospital** for **sinner**s – **not** a **museum** for **saint**s.”

And **I think it is true**:

- The **church** is **filled** with **sinner**s.
- It is **filled** with **hurt people**.
- And **hurt people** – *as the saying goes* – **hurt people**.

And **the question** we **need to ask ourselves** is this:

- Are we **willing to bear with** – and **forgive** – **those who may offend us** or **rub us the wrong way**?
- Or do we **grow bitter** – and **bear grudges** – against **such ones**?

Friends – **Paul is calling us** here to a **radically high standard**:

We are to **forgive** – *just as the Lord has forgiven us*!

Verse 14 – Paul continues:

*“Above all, **put on love**, which is **the perfect bond of unity**. ”*

What Paul is saying here is that – *more than anything else* – *above and beyond* all the virtues that he has just described:

- We are to **put on love**.
- We are to **have love**.
- We are to **love one another**.

Why? Well – because **love** – Paul says – is *“the perfect bond of unity”*.

Now, there is **debate** as to **what Paul means** by that:

- Does he mean that **love binds *the five virtues* together** in perfect harmony?
- Or does he mean that **love binds *believers* together** in perfect harmony?

Well – *in this case* – I think **we can glean** from the **wisdom** of the “Old El Paso Tacos” advertisement.

*“Why don’t we have **both**?”*

I believe that the phrase – *“the perfect bond of unity”* – is **deliberately ambiguous**:

- *On the one hand* – **love binds *the virtues* together** in perfect harmony – in that *without love* – these virtues amount to nothing. As Paul puts it in **1 Corinthians 13:3** – *“If I give away all I have, and I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing”*.
- *But – on the other hand* – **love** is also the **supreme virtue** that **binds *us* together** – *different though we may be* – as **one unified family**. It is the **glue** – *if you like* – that holds us together – that keeps us united as **God’s community**.

That’s why Paul calls us to **put on love**.

Love is the greatest – the supreme – the all-encompassing – virtue that must characterise us as a community of believers.

- It is a **virtue** – *without which* – **all the other virtues** are **empty** and **meaningless**.
- It is a **virtue** – *without which* – **we will not be able to exist together in the way God intends us to.**

Friends – just **think** of the **unfortunate schisms** and **divisions** that have **littered** the **history** of **the church** for a moment:

- Now, I'm **not talking** here about **division** over the **central issues** of **the faith** – but rather – **secondary issues**.
- **Things** such as the **colour of the carpet** – the so-called '**worship wars**' – or the more recent '**vaccine wars**'.
- **Issues** that have – *unfortunately* – **ended friendships, broken families, and split churches.**

Now – **think** of **how different things would be** if **Christians** had **put on** the **virtues** that **Paul** is **describing** here – especially **the preeminent virtue** of **love**?

I **think** that **most – if not all** – of these **divisions** could have been **avoided** – if **Christians** were **but to heed Paul's command** here.

Oh – that **God** would **help us grow** and **put on these virtues** – that **we may be the kind of community** that **he wants us to be** – a **community marked by Christlike virtues**.

And **think** about it: **How attractive** would **such a community** be to a **watching world**!

Secondly – the **second portrait** that **Paul paints** for us of **God's idyllic community** is that of **a community ruled by Christ's peace** ...

2. A COMMUNITY RULED BY CHRIST'S PEACE (v.15)

Look with me at **verse 15** – Paul writes:

*“And let **the peace of Christ**, to which **you were also called in one body**, **rule your hearts ...**”*

Friends – **the truth** is that **by virtue of Christ's death on the cross**:

- *Not only* do we have – **vertically!** – **peace with God** – **Romans 5:1**.
- But we *also* have – **horizontally!** – **peace with one another** – **Ephesians 2:14**.

And **Paul** is **commanding us** here to **let this peace** – the **peace that Christ died to achieve** – **“rule”** in our hearts.

What does Paul mean?

Now – **the word** for **“rule”** – **βραβεύω** – is **interesting**.

Paul used a **similar word** earlier in **Colossians 2:18** when **he warned the Colossians not to let the false teachers “condemn”, “disqualify”, or “pass judgment on” (καταβραβεύω)** them.

This is how the Greek lexicon BDAG defines the term. It defines it as:

“To be in control of someone's activity by making a decision”.³

The idea here is that of an **umpire or referee** – who makes **the final call** – or has **the final say** – in a **sporting contest**.

³ BDAG.

Think about it this way:

- There is a **disputed call** in a **soccer game**.
- The **players** are **pushing** and **shoving one another** – **debating** whether it is a **penalty** or **not**.
- The **referee stops the game** – **consults the VAR** – the **Video Assistant Referee** – and then **makes a final call** based on it.
- And **that settles it!**

So – **what Paul is saying** here is that:

- The **peace of Christ** is to be the **umpire** or **referee** in our **decision-making process**.
- It is to be **the governing principle** of our **choices**.
- It is **the filter** through which we **make decisions** in the **body of Christ**.

I like how **Murray Harris** paraphrases **this verse**.

I find it **practical** and **helpful**. He writes:

“In **making your decisions**, in **choosing** between **alternatives**, in **settling conflicts of will**, a **concern to preserve the inward and communal peace** that **Christ gave** and **gives** should be **your controlling principle**.”⁴

So, with **this paraphrase** in mind – let’s **ask ourselves**:

- Does that **describe us** in our **dealings** with **one another** – especially on **secondary matters of the faith**?
- Is our **concern to preserve** the “**inward and communal peace**” that **Christ died to achieve**?
- Is **the peace of Christ** our **ruling, governing, controlling principle** as we **relate** with **one another** as a **community of believers**?

⁴ Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, EGGNT (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 165.

Friends – **think of how much unnecessary pain, tension, and division we could avoid if we were but to put this command into practice.**

Instead of **fighting tooth and nail over every single issue** – we would **ask ourselves what would preserve and promote peace in the body** – and we would **pursue that path.**

For **the thing** is this:

- **Not every hill is worth dying on!**
- **We could be right in our law – but wrong in our love.**

And – **for what it is worth** – I recommend **Gavin Ortlund’s book, *Finding the Right Hills to Die On*** – especially if you are **one** who is **given to fight tooth and nail over every single issue.**

So – friends – **Paul’s point in verse 15 is simple.**

He is saying that as God’s people:

- **We should – by *God’s grace* – strive to live at peace with one another.**
- **We should let the peace of Christ act as the umpire – the arbiter – when differences arise in our midst.**
- **We should – as Paul puts it in *Ephesians 4:3* – make “every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” – and in *Romans 14:19* – “Pursue what promotes peace and what builds up one another”.**

After all – **that’s what we have been called to as believers in “one body”.**

So, friends, can I **encourage us – myself** included?

Each time *before* we do or say something – and this includes **posting comments** on **social media!** – let’s **make it a point** to **stop** and **ask ourselves**:

“Is what I’m about to say or do – is it **going** to **promote peace** – or is it **going** to **cause division?**”

And let’s choose the **path** that **preserves** – and **promotes** – **peace** in the **body of Christ**.

Let’s **not allow non-essentials** to **disrupt** the **peace** and **unity** that **Christ died** to **achieve**.

Verse 15 ends with **another injunction**:

“And be thankful.”

Now – **this seems** to be **somewhat random** and **sporadic** – even **incidental**.

Only that it isn’t – I don’t think!

The **note** of **thankfulness** is a **constant theme** throughout **Colossians**⁵ – in fact – it **appears twice more** in the next two verses.

So – *why* does **Paul call us** to **be thankful** in the **midst** of his **call** to **peace**?

Well, here’s **my take**:

- Perhaps **Paul sees an integral relationship** between **thankfulness to God** and **peace with men**.
- Perhaps **Paul knows** that a **heart** that is **filled** with **gratitude to God** will **lend itself** naturally to a **heart** that **seeks, pursues, and promotes peace** in the **body of Christ**.

⁵ See Col 1:12; 2:7; 3:16, 17; 4:2.

Douglas Moo puts it this way:

“Believers who are full of gratitude to God for his gracious calling (v.15a) will find it easier to extend to fellow believers the grace of love and forgiveness and to put aside petty issues that might inhabit the expression of peace in the community.”⁶

So, friends – let me ask:

- **Have we done – or said – things that have disrupted the peace that Christ died to achieve in the community?**
- **If so – could it be because we have lost sight of the wonder of God’s grace in our lives?**
- **Are we willing to lay down our rights – put aside our pride – and reconcile – for the greater good of the body?**

Let’s strive – by *God’s grace* – to be a community ruled by Christ’s peace.

And what a wonderful testimony we will be to a watching world – especially in such fractured times!

The third portrait that Paul paints for us of God’s idyllic community is that of *a community saturated by Christ’s Word ...*

3. A COMMUNITY SATURATED BY CHRIST’S WORD (v.16)

Look with me at **verse 16**:

⁶ Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 285.

*“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.**”*

Paul is saying that – as a body of believers – we are to “let the word of Christ dwell richly among [us]”.

In other words – **God’s community** is to be **one** that is **marked** by a **saturation** – a **permeation** – a **suffusion** – with the **Word of God** *in general* – and the **gospel** *in particular*.

I think that’s what the phrase “the word of Christ” – similar to what we had seen earlier in **Colossians 1:5** regarding “the word of truth” – specifically refers to.

Our **community** – our **gatherings** – our **corporate experience**:

- Is to be about **the Word of God**.
- It is to be **centered** upon the **message of the cross**.
- It is to be **saturated** with the **gospel**.

That’s what is to **characterise** – and **infuse** – all our **gatherings**.

The word of Christ – Paul says – should “**dwell richly**” among us.

The **word** for “**dwell**” – ἐνοικέω – has the **idea**:

- Of “**inhabiting**”.
- Of “**residing**”.
- Of “**making a home**”.

It is **used elsewhere**:

- In **Romans 8:11** of the **Holy Spirit** “**living**” in **believers**.
- And in **2 Corinthians 6:16** of **God** “**dwelling**” among **his people**.

So – **the idea** that **Paul** is conveying here is that **the Word of God** *in general* – and **the gospel** *in particular* – is to “**make its home**” – is to “**take up permanent residence**” – in **the Christian community**.

It is to have a **prominent place** – a **preeminent place** – in **our gatherings**.

And – **here** – at **GBC** – we **can be thankful** that **this** – *indeed!* – is **the case!**

In fact – **one of my friends** once **remarked** about **our church name**. He asked – **half-jokingly** – and **half-condescendingly**:

“**Who on earth** would **put the word ‘Bible’** in the church name?!”

Well – **I** – for one – am **not complaining!**

In fact – **I thank God** that we are a:

- **Bible-based**
- **Bible-centered**
- **Bible-saturated church**

I am thankful that we **not only** have the word “**Bible**” in **name only** – but that we are **actually serious** about **the Word**:

- **We value the Word.**
- **We are hungry for the Word.**
- **We faithfully preach the Word.**

And **my prayer** is that **this will never change** – that **this will never die down** – and that **the Word** will **continually** be at **the forefront** – and **the centrepiece** – of **our gatherings**.

For it is in **the Word** that we:

- *See* Christ.
- *Hear* about Christ.
- And *become* like Christ.

So – we must **let God’s Word “dwell richly”** among us!

But *how*? *How* are we to **do so**?

Well – **Paul gives us** – what I believe are – **three *means*** by which **the word of Christ** is to **dwell among us**.

If you **notice in your Bible** – there are **three participles in verse 16**:

- “teaching”
- “admonishing”
- “singing”

These are **participles of *means*** – that is:

- We are to **let the word of Christ dwell richly among us**.

And *how* is that to happen?

- Well – *by means of* – “teaching”, “admonishing”, and “singing”.

So, **what Paul is saying** here is that **the Word of God dwells among us** as we “teach” and “admonish” one another with **the Word** – and as we “sing” with **gratitude in our hearts to God**.

In other words – it is *by means* of **mutual instruction** (that is, “**teaching**” and “**admonishing**”) – and **corporate worship** (that is, “**singing**”) – that **the Word of God** makes **its home** among us.

Now – for **those** of you who are **sharp-eyed** – the words “**teaching**” and “**admonishing**” – probably **rings a bell**.

And **you’re right!**

For – if you remember – the **same words** are **used** – albeit in **reverse order** – in **Colossians 1:28** – where Paul writes:

*“We proclaim him, **warning** and **teaching** everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”*

And – as we saw last time – whereas **the focus there** is on **the ministry of the pastor** – the **focus here in chapter 3** is on **the ministry of all believers**.

In other words – **this is *not* just the job of pastors and teachers**.

This is what we are *all* to do. We *all* have a part to play.

- We are to **teach** and **admonish one another**.
- We are to **speak God’s Word** to **one another**.

And **all this** with the **goal of building one another up in the Lord**.

So, friends:

- Let’s **get into the lives of one another**.
- And **speak the Word** to **one another**.

- Perhaps we can **discuss** the **sermon** – or **share what we have learnt** from our **Bible reading** that week.

Now – **if you look** at **our passage** – you will **notice** that **Paul spells out** for us **one** of the *means* by which this “**teaching**” and “**admonishing**” of **one another** can be **done**.

Verse 16:

“... through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs ...”

In other words – the **songs** that **we sing** in **corporate worship** is **one** of the **means**:

- By which **we** can “**teach**” and “**admonish**” **one another**.
- By which **we** can **instruct one another**.
- By which **we** can **remind one another** of the **glorious gospel** of our **Lord**.

Now – **I don’t think we need to go** into the **differences** between “**psalms**”, “**hymns**”, and “**spiritual songs**”.

But – *at the very least!* – **what this tells us** is that **there is** a repertoire – a variety – a diversity – of **songs** and **music** that **we can utilise** to **worship** our **great God** and **King!**

The **key** is **not** so much on *style* – as it is on *content*.

For **the songs** that **we sing** in **our corporate gatherings** – Paul says – are *a means* by which **we instruct** and **build one another up** in the **faith**.

Friends, **do we realise this?**

- **Do we realise** that **when we come together** to **sing songs** of **worship** unto **God** – we are **also** – through **the songs** – **instructing** and **admonishing one another** in the **faith?**

- **Do we realise that our corporate singing is a form of corporate discipleship?**
- **Do we realise that when we sing – *not only* are we glorifying God – but we *also* edifying one another?**

In fact – listen to this quote from Warren Wiersbe:

“I am convinced that congregations learn more theology (good and bad) from the songs they sing than from the sermons they hear. Many sermons are doctrinally sound and contain a fair amount of biblical information, but they lack that necessary emotional content that gets hold of the listener’s heart. Music, however, reaches the mind and the heart at the same time. It has power to touch and move the emotions, and for that reason can become a wonderful tool in the hands of the Spirit or a terrible weapon in the hands of the Adversary.”⁷

With this in mind – let me just say this:

- Because worship songs are *a means* of instruction in the things of God – it is important that churches put careful thought into their song choices.
- For the lyrics of a song can teach *truths* – or *untruths*! – about God and the things of God.
- And I’m sure that we have all heard *good* songs – and – *well!* – *not so good* songs.

Thus – it is imperative that we vet through the songs that we sing in church – for – according to Paul – it is *a means* of corporate instruction and mutual edification.

And – *once again!* – I’m thankful that most – if not all – of the songs that we sing here are:

- Biblically-rich
- Theologically-robust
- Gospel-saturated
- Christ-centered

⁷ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Real Worship: Playground, Battleground, or Holy Ground?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 136.

- **God-exalting songs**

Songs that **allow us** to – as **Paul** puts it – “*sing to God with gratitude in our hearts*”.

So, let’s **strive** – *by God’s grace* – to be a **community** that is **saturated by the Word**.

And – *finally* – the **final portrait** that **Paul paints** for us of **God’s idyllic community** is that of *a community consumed by Christ’s glory* ...

4. A COMMUNITY CONSUMED BY CHRIST’S GLORY (v.17)

Look with me at **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.”

Now – **this** – *in a sense* – is a **summary verse**.

It is a **fitting conclusion** to **all that has been said**.

Paul is here **reminding us** of the **lordship** of **Christ** over **absolutely everything**.

Notice the **all-encompassing** – **all-inclusive** – **nature** of **Paul’s exhortation** – **Paul** writes:

“And whatever you do – in word or deed ...”

In other words:

- **Paul’s instruction** touches on **absolutely every single aspect** of **our lives**.

- It **pertains** to the **totality** of **our life** lived here on **earth**.
- **No sphere** of **our life** is **exempt** – or **left untouched** – by **this command**.

It is **something akin** to – as **one slogan** has it:

“All of Christ for all of life.”

So, **Paul** is **saying** that **in everything** – **what we say** and **what we do** – we are to **do all** *“in the name of the Lord Jesus”*.

Now, **what** does **this** mean?

Well, **I think it means**:

- That **we** are to **live lives** that are **governed** by the **lordship of Christ**.
- That **everything** that **we do** is to be **done on behalf of** – **for the sake of** – and **unto the glory of** – **Christ**.

We are to **live lives** – and **be a community** – that is **consumed** by **his glory**.

As **Paul** puts it in **1 Corinthians 10:31**:

*“So, **whether** you **eat** or **drink**, or **whatever** you **do**, **do everything** for the **glory** of **God**.”*

In other words:

- **All of life** is to be **lived** with the **ultimate goal** of **glorifying Christ**.
- **We** are to **live** in light of the **lordship of Christ** – and for the **glory of Christ**.

This is to be the **grid** *through which* – and **principle** *by which* – **we** are to **live our lives** – and **relate to one another**.

And **how do practically we do that?**

Well – **F. F. Bruce** provides us **some helpful questions** we could **ask ourselves**.⁸

We could **ask ourselves**:

- **“What is the Christian thing to do here?”**
- **“Can I do this without compromising my Christian confession?”**
- **“Can I do it ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus’ – whose reputation is at stake in the conduct of his known followers?”**
- **“Can I thank God the Father through him for the opportunity of doing this thing?”**

These are **questions worth asking** ourselves – **questions** that – *if thought through* – will **put us in a better stead** to be **the kind of people** – and **community** – that **God wants us to be**:

- **One that acts in line with the nature and character of Christ.**
- **One that is consumed by his glory.**

Conclusion

So, **Paul** has **completed** his **masterpiece** – he has **given** us **God’s masterplan** of **what the Christian community should be like**.

It is an **idyllic community** – one that is:

- **Marked by Christ’s virtues.**
- **Ruled by Christ’s peace.**
- **Saturated by Christ’s Word.**
- **And consumed by Christ’s glory.**

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 160.

And it is **my conviction** that a **community** that has **these characteristics** is a **community** that is **healthy, thriving, and flourishing**.

And – **conversely speaking** – an **unhealthy, struggling, and dying community** is **one** that has **lost sight** of – and is **not putting into practice** – **Paul’s commands** in **this passage**.

And, friends, **the thing** is this:

Nothing less than our witness to the world is at stake!

As **Francis Schaeffer** puts it:

“Our relationship with each other is the criterion the world uses to judge whether our message is truthful – Christian community is the final apologetic.”

Friends, **may we be a community** that is **increasingly marked by these qualities** – for **the glory of God** and for **the good of others**.

Let us pray.