

This morning I want you to know that I'm aware that God brings people here as He moves in so many ways and times in people's hearts over the things that we spent time looking at the last few weeks—the giants, the circumstances, trials, troubles and even suffering that come into our lives. Those things are often the things God uses to prompt us to seek after Him and so we begin to come looking for a community of people who are seeking God and the difference He can make in our lives.

Today, we have some important things to consider because of some changes that we are presently moving through as a church—moving into a new beginning with ECO and making a decision to stay with one worship service. What causes me concern this morning is that there's so much to share—so much to say—that we don't get bogged down in personal preference things.

There are 4 crucial things to share about commitment to unity in the Body of Christ. They really are vitally important. It is a big commitment to belong to a church. And so therefore, what ought to be the things that are foremost in our minds and on our hearts as we come to commit ourselves and to covenant with others to be the Church of Jesus Christ and as that church coming to worship together corporately?

1. First, as we belong together in the Church of Jesus Christ, we must always keep Jesus Christ as Lord at the focal point of life together.

He is Lord of the Church. It's hard to understate that. In the New Testament He is the cornerstone. He is the Life. He is the center. He is the Vine. Paul says here that He is the head of the Church. “Head” indicates both source and origin. It also designates Christ as supreme over the church as her Lord. So it's imperative that we understand this. Whatever else we are as we come together, we are united under the Lordship of Christ! And in order to get under His Lordship you have a process that you undergo your whole life in which you learn more and more of what He wants.

Now, that Lordship is found for us in a common way in the authority of the Scriptures. It is the Word of Christ that dwells in us richly as we teach and admonish each other. The Word of God incarnate and inscripturated is our common link together. In the Gospel of John, chapter one, it doesn't just that Jesus is the Word of God; it says He's the Word who was God. That's getting us into the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If all that is true, it means there can be no halfway measures with following Jesus.

Paul says in Colossians 3:1-2, “Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.” The Apostle Paul is saying to us that when we gather together as the Church of Jesus Christ, we're not our own. It's not my dreams and my expectations and my hopes and my wishes, but it's seeking together to know the Lordship of Christ and His will for our lives.

This text is about what it's like to live together as a church when Christ is all and in all. Paul refers to believers as “those who have been chosen of God, holy and loved.” Paul tells us in verses 9-10, “you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.” The reason we experienced the taking off of our old self and the putting on of a new self was that God loved us and chose us and set us apart as holy to the Lord. We are elect, holy and loved. In other words, God took the initiative with us. God elected, God sanctified, God loved. His aim in creating new people was that they would stop boasting in their distinctives (*that separated them*) and boast in Christ (*who united them*).

When we come together as the church, as a community of faith, as the Body of Christ, we must keep before us individually, and keep before us as a community, the centrality of Jesus Christ, His gospel and His word. That is our common bond.

2. In our life together, we must covenant to grow through thick and thin.

I think that we lose sight of the fact that while the Church is to be a loving and caring environment to be sure, it was created for us to grow up—to really grow up—to maturity—full maturity, even to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Jesus came not to be served, but to serve! This is the place where, by God's sanctifying grace, He knocks off some of the jagged pieces of our lives, and the rough edges and He polishes some of the sharp corners.

Howard Spring said rightly, “The church must discover its function is not to enlarge its membership as much as it is to purify it. The cause of Christ is not advanced by churches becoming filled with people, but by becoming full of God.”

Paul gives us a list in vv. 5ff that we are to avoid. Actually we're told to put them to death. We're supposed to put these off. These are the things in our relationships with one another in our new lives in Christ that ought not to be there. Then Paul gives in vv. 12-15 a list of things that we are to put on—compassion, patience, kindness, gentleness, humility, peace and forgiveness. I need to tell you—these things don't happen in a vacuum. They come as they're lived out in relationship between believers.

Growth is not easy. And one of the things we do as a community of faith is to commit ourselves one to another through all times.

3. As we come together as the church we commit ourselves to give something.

I think the word that captures that concept most appropriately is this word 'chosen.' Paul uses it here in the verse 12. The sense of being chosen places a very clear mandate upon us. We didn't choose to be here, contrary to what you might think. God chose you and called you and therefore you are part of the Body of Christ and somehow or another you have been directed here. At the very least that means that we're not chosen for our self-gratification, but we're chosen to do something. Again in Ephesians 4, Paul says that *"the whole body joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work!"*

We have been called and chosen and ours is simply a response to the task and mission ahead that God has for us.

4. Lastly, the most important focus of the church. The number one primary mark of newness in the new people and the new community is that Christ is all and in all.

Don't miss that all important climax at the end of v. 11: *"But Christ is all and in all."* If you ask, "What's new about the new self of v. 10, and what's new about the new community of new persons?" the answer is, *"For them Christ is all."*

This message, the message I want you to most understand this morning is about the new community that Christ is creating through the creating of new people. I want to paint, this morning, a huge banner. And on the banner are the words, CHRIST IS ALL.

No matter what the issue is. No matter what the program is. No matter what committee we're talking about. No matter what ministry we're talking about. The same is true about worship.

It exists for Christ, or for nothing.

It rests on Christ, or it rests on nothing.

Because CHRIST IS ALL.

He is all that matters about everything. And you better get that straight or you don't understand the church or your call as a Christian. This morning I admit very candidly that I tremble at the thought that Christ could be swallowed up in a message that focuses on our relationships, when the truth is that our relationships should be swallowed up in him, so that CHRIST IS ALL and in all. I stress it because the world never stresses it. And you spend most of your time in the world. And there is a lot of world in the church. I stress it because it is the very heart of the Bible and the heart of the new community and the heart of the new creation in Christ, the new Christian self.

As I close, let me add this. We ought to put into practice giving thanks for the Church and for one another. In v. 16 Paul says to do all that we do "with gratitude in your hearts to God." Then in v. 17 he says, "whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." The church of Jesus Christ—that's you, by the way—all of you who have trusted in Jesus Christ by faith, are a gift of God's grace, one to another. We don't say that enough.