

Text: Colossians 3:15-17

Introduction –

Most of you know that I enjoy cooking, and one of my favorite dishes to make is chili. As we head into Fall, and the weather gets a bit cooler, a hearty bowl of chili always hits the spot. There are a number of ways a person can make chili, but for the all the variety, the core ingredients remain the same.

- First, you need a broth: you may use tomato juice or beef broth
- Then you stir in the seasoning: chili powder, paprika, and garlic are always good
- After that you toss in you need some kind of meat: ground beef or chuck roast are popular choices
- And finally you add the beans: kidney beans, black beans, pinto or beans will work

Mix it all together, and let it simmer on the stove for a couple of hours, and you've got yourself a pot of chili. There are a lot of different variations, but when it comes down to it, these are the core ingredients in almost every recipe.

Over the years I've attended many worship services, in different churches, in different states, in different denominations. While the order of service may have been arranged a little differently in each service, the core ingredients remained the same. Some churches have a massive pipe organ, while the others have worship band. Some have huge choir, dressed in robes, while others have only one or two singers leading the songs. Some churches use hymnbooks while others use Power Point to display the lyrics on a screen. But despite all of these differences, worship in all of these churches have a lot in common.

What are the elements of worship the church should observe when we gather for worship? While there is no single passage of Scripture that lays out a specific order of service, there are several verses that give us insight into how the early church worshipped God, which provides a pattern for us to follow today. One of those passages is Colossians 3:15-17.

In the chapter, Paul has been describing how believers ought to relate to one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ. And he goes on, in these verses, to describe what it should look like when we meet together as a congregation to worship the Lord.

One essential ingredient, when we gather together for worship, is peace.

Our attitude ought to reflect the spirit of harmony that we share in Christ. Verse 15 tells us, "*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts to which indeed you were called in one body.*" The very act of assembling together: in the same place, at the same time, with the same focus is an expression of worship. We're honoring Christ every time we gather together, in His name, as fellowship members of His Church. We're not sitting next to strangers; when we enter the

sanctuary, we are among family, with brothers and sisters in Christ. Our Heavenly Father is certainly pleased, when there is a mutual affection and shared devotion.

We've been trying to teach our kids about strangers. They love to say "hi" to everyone they meet, and that's a good thing, we want them to be friendly. We also want them to be a little cautious as well. And so we'll be at the grocery store and someone will smile and wave to them, so the kids will ask us: "what's her name?" And I'll tell them, "I don't know." They'll respond, "Is she a stranger?" And I'll tell them, "I guess so." They will look at the person and say, "I can't talk to you; you're a stranger."

We're not strangers in this place; we are brothers in sisters in Christ. Even if we don't know one another very well: if I know the Lord and you know the Lord, we're part of God's family. The love of Christ flows through us, and spills over into our relationships with one another. The peace of Christ is to rule our hearts, and sets the tone when we meet. In the previous paragraph, the apostle has just finished telling the Colossians, in verses 12-14,

"So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity."

Why does the apostle remind believers to show these attitudes towards each other? Because he knows that there our unity will be tested, now and then. There are going to be disagreements, and differences of opinion. The church is made up of lots of different people, and people don't always agree on everything. How do we deal with that? We need to demonstrate patience, humility, and forgiveness. Above all, we need to love one another.

If this harmony gets disrupted in some way, it will hinder our capacity for worship. It's sort of difficult to sing, "I love you Heavenly Father, but I don't care much for the other members of your family, and don't ask me to love him or her because it's not going to happen." That doesn't work. As we offer songs of praise, our voices might sound just fine, but it is not a pleasing sound to the Lord when our hearts are filled with bitterness and resentment. We can't even begin to talk about the other elements of worship, if the peace of Christ does not rule our hearts. Our services, Sunday morning, should reflect our unity in Christ.

Another essential ingredient, when we gather for worship, is preaching.

The Word of God should play a central role in every service. Verse 16 says, "*Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another...*" One of the reasons we gather, each week, is to hear God speak to us through the pages of His Word. We need the timeless truth that it offers, and its message is still every bit as relevant for our lives today, as when it was first written.

Sometimes people have the wrong impression, thinking that the Bible is just an ancient book, written thousands of years ago, and they wonder what relevance it could possibly have for our

lives today. After all, isn't the human race much more enlightened in our modern age? Actually... no. If we're honest, we realize that the human race hasn't really changed all much through the centuries. We deal with the same struggles, and wrestle with the same kinds of problems, and have the same spiritual needs as the men and women of the ancient world. God spoke to them, and He is still speaking to us.

Scripture teaches us about who God is, and who we are. We learn about the salvation that is found in Jesus Christ. We discover what it means to follow the Lord, and to serve others. We learn about the future hope laid up for us in heaven. But we need more than head knowledge, the message has to work its way into our hearts. That's why Scripture admonishes us to put our faith into practice. When we go astray, the Bible calls us back to the right path. We are encouraged to live for the Lord.

There are several ways that we incorporate Scripture into the worship service each week.

- We may do a responsive reading, in which the worship leader reads one part and the congregation reads another. In that way, we are declaring God's truth to each other.
- Scripture is also presented in our songs. The best hymns and choruses are those filled with solid biblical doctrine.
- And God's word is proclaimed through the sermon.

Paul urges us, in the passage, to do more than listen as the Bible is read, but to: "let the word of Christ dwell within you." That means opening the door of our heart, and allowing Scripture to become a part of our lives, shaping our thoughts and desires.

We need sound biblical teaching if we are to grow in our walk with God. The apostle Peter writes, "*Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation,*" (1 Peter 2:2) Just like a child needs to eat healthy food, if they are going to grow. Some kids would probably be content with a diet of candy bars and potato chips, but their parents steer them towards fruits and vegetables so they will be healthy and strong.

Worship, without the word, is incomplete. God invites us to come: offer our praise and express our prayers, but He also wants us to listen. So when you walk through these doors each week, pray that you might hear the message He has for you.

The next ingredient when we gather for worship is praise.

When the church gathers, we should be eager to lift our voices together expressing our gratitude for who God is and for the things He has done. Verse 16 goes on to say, "...*teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*"

All throughout the Bible, OT and NT, we find a song of praise on the lips of God's people. In the book of Exodus, after the children of Israel crossed the Red Sea on dry land, and God saved them from the Egyptians, they responded with praise. Exodus 15:1-2 tells us:

“Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord: “I will sing to the Lord, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea. The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father’s God, and I will exalt him.” (Exodus 15:1–2, NIV84)

Later on, in Israel’s history, God gifted David with all kinds of musical ability and he composed an entire hymnbook of songs. He appointed musicians to lead the assembly in praise. **In Psalm 144:9** he cries out, *“I will sing a new song to You, O God; Upon a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You.”*

In the earthly church, God’s people expressed heartfelt praise the same way: through song. Worship involves much more than singing, but singing is certainly an important part of our worship.

The apostle uses three words to describe our music: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. The early church probably used verses from the OT psalms in their worship, as well as composing new choruses that exalted the name of Jesus Christ.

One of the main reasons that God created us with the capacity to sing and make music was so that we would use these gifts for His glory. Songs have a way of connecting to our emotions in a special way, and when the lyrics are carefully crafted it can be a power means of communicating truth. Isn’t it amazing how the words of a song have a way of sticking with us for a long period of time? You might hear a sermon on the trinity and forget half of it by the end of the day. But when you hear the music: “holy, holy, holy” the lyrics are right there and you find yourself singing along.

When you’re in the grocery store they usually have music playing quietly in the background. We don’t usually notice it. It’s just there. But the other day a song came on, while I was shopping, and immediately I found myself humming. It was popular when I was in high school. I used to have the CD. Even though I hadn’t heard it for years, I remembered almost every word, and I was still singing it when I got home. Music stays with us, even after the worship service is over. One author describes our songs of praise as “take home theology,” because the best hymns and choruses provide us with an easy to memorize, biblical summary of the important truths of Scripture.

Music inspires us, but it is not for our own personal edification. We are singing to God, He is the one who deserves our praise. And the passage shows us that there is also a sense in which we also are singing to each other. Paul tells us in verse 16 that we as we sing, believers are, *“...admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs...”* As you sing, you are speaking to me. As I sing, I am speaking to you. We are sharing the gospel those who do not yet know the Lord. And we are reminding one another of all the reasons we have to give thanks to our God.

We see that dimension of worship in many of the Psalms. **Psalm 149** begins: *“Praise the Lord! Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the saints. Let Israel rejoice... Let the people... be glad in their king!”* The psalm is an invitation encouraging God’s people to

lift their voices together to sing His praise. We have many songs, that we sing, that express this same dynamic.

The songs that we sing become the soundtrack for our lives. They shouldn't merely be words to us, but we are asking God to give us the ability to live them out each day. When we sing, "I love to tell the story," we are asking God to give us courage and opportunities to share our faith. When we sing, "Just a closer walk with Thee," we are expressing our desire to know God more and more each day. We ought to think about the lyrics that we sing. These are more than words on a page, they are our prayers. That takes us to our final point.

Another essential ingredient when we gather for worship is a renewed sense of purpose.

The time we spend together should remind us of our purpose and calling in Christ. Look at verse 17. "*Whatever you do in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.*"

The apostle tells us that we are to honor God in "whatever you do." Worship is not just what we do when we're here, in this place, for the hour or two that we spend with one another on Sunday morning. But when the service is over, after the final prayer has been said, when exit these doors and go out into the world, as we return to our daily routine... whatever we do, we are to do all in the name of the Lord Jesus."

- You go to work each day, do your job to the glory of God.
- When you cook dinner for your family, prepare the meal to the glory of God.
- When you coach your son's soccer team, step on to the practice field and bring glory of God.
- When you lead your daughter's Girl Scout troop, do it to the glory of God.
- When you go grocery shopping, walk through the aisles of the store in such a way that you bring glory to God.

If you maintain that mindset, throughout the week there will be no distinction between the secular and sacred parts of your life. You will consider every part of your life as being sacred, devoted to the Lord.

It's so to lose sight of this. Life is hectic. We become busy. There are all kinds of demands placed on us every day. We get caught up in the daily routine, rushing from one activity to next, and in the midst of it all end up losing focus, forgetting that we have a greater purpose. Worship reminds us why we're here, and what the ultimate goal of our lives should be: to bring glory to God in all we do. It renews our focus on Christ, and our calling to serve Him. As we take time out of our busy lives to meet with our brothers and sisters in Christ we discover that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. As we open God's Word, we are encouraged to live out our faith each day. As we join our voices in praise, the passion in our heart for the Lord is rekindled. In a sense, worship keeps that fire burning bright.

This coming weekend, we're planning to get together for a campfire. It's always a fun thing to do this time of year, as the evenings get a little cooler, and starts getting dark a little earlier. When you first light the wood, the flames are roaring, and the heat is intense. You have to move your chair back a few feet so you don't end up cooked. But as the evening going on, the fire gets a little smaller, as the wood burns up, and instead of flames you have a few glowing coals. You have to move your chair closer and closer to feel the warmth. And then somebody tosses another big log in the fire ring, and before you know it is roaring again.

When we gather together, each week, to worship the Lord, it's like adding fuel the fire in our hearts. We encourage one another, and are inspired to live for the Lord.

Will we always do all in the name of the Lord Jesus? We confess that it's not always the case. But it's our prayer, it's our desire, it's the goal and ambition of our lives. It's what we're striving for, and we're asking the Lord to shape our hearts more and more to reflect His character in every facet of our lives. When we leave this place, the songs go with us into our homes, into our neighborhood, into our workplace, into our schools, into our community and we pray that others would hear this song through our lives.

Hopefully, as we leave these doors each week we are equipped and energized to live for the Lord in the various places that we go. Your sanctuary might be a classroom, or a home, or an office, or a factory. That is where you bring glory to God each day. But this is the sanctuary that we share, where we come together as the Body of Christ, and find encouragement to continue living for Him.

Conclusion –

Our passage this morning has given us insight into what our worship should look like, when the church gathers together each week.

There should be a spirit of peace, because we are fellow members of God's family, joined together in Christ. Whenever something comes between us, we need to do everything possible to resolve these tensions so that our worship will be hindered.

There should be the preaching of God's Word, and our hearts ought to be eager to receive the message Christ has for us as we open the pages of Scripture.

There should be a joyful praise, as we join our voices together to glorify God. The hymns and choruses we sing have a powerful effect, that stays with us all through the week.

There should be renewed purpose, as we are inspired to head back to our daily lives seeking to honor the name of Christ in all that we do.