

Christ-Centered Church

Colossians 3:14-17 - NCBC, Oct 11, 2015

Main Point: **Every part of a healthy church is centered on Christ.**

- United by love (v. 14)
- Controlled by peace (v. 15)
- Filled by God's Word (v.16)
- Occupied by Worship (v.17)

Application: **Give thanks, and make much of Christ in your church family.**

Opening Announcements:

Local Missions – Food Drive (This Sunday & Next) & Leaf Raking (Nov 7th)

Matt 5:14-16 ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

For those who are seeking opportunities to shine the light of Christ in our community ... have an opportunity to transform the reputation of NCBC in our closest community of Mackinaw



<<Lord I Need You>>

Let's now continue our worship by reading from God's Word. Please open your Bible to **Colossians chapter 3.**

If you do not have a Bible with you today, we'd love to give you one. Please catch the attention of the ushers as they pass by and it would be our joy to give you a Bible to use this morning. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

Our text this morning from Colossians 3 is found on page _____ of the Bibles we've handed out. So please stand with me now in honor of God's Word as I read our text for us from Colossians 3:14-17, reading from the **English Standard Version:**

Colossians 3:14-17 *And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.*

¹⁵ *And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which*

*indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.
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. 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.*

This is the word of God. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

What defines biblical community? How does God teach us to think about His church? What do you think of when you hear the word, church?

There are many common misconceptions about God's church today.¹ Some think that the word church primarily refers to a "building"... a place of worship. But God's church is a people – it's a gathering of His people. Of course these people meet together at a place... but God's church is not a specific location ...and God's church is not just an event.

Sometimes I'll catch myself saying, "I'm going to church..." but that's not helpful language is it? For church is not a weekly event, but a gathering of redeemed worshippers on loving mission together for the glory of God.

¹ Thankful to Brad Bridges blogpost entitled, "10 Misconceptions about the Church" that highlighted many of these misconceptions for me.

Another misconception is that church is just a place for perfect people.



That church is a country-club for people who have it all together... But this understanding of the church is far from the biblical truth of "people in need of change helping people in need of change."² God's church is not an elite country-club governed by merit and status...rather biblical church is a hospital community of humble sinners joyfully embracing one another in all kinds of social, economic, and cultural diversity as they together find all that they need in Christ!

Others think that church is just a bunch of judgmental people who hate anyone who disagrees with them.

² Paul David Tripp

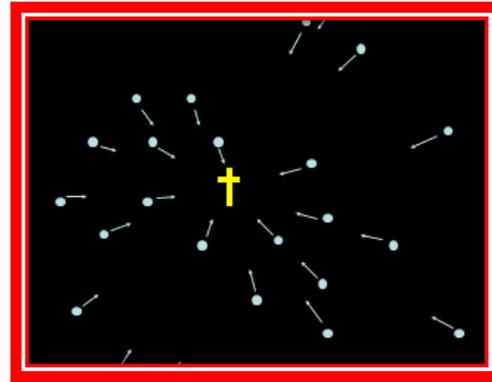


In this view God's people are known by what they are against, rather than what they are for. When people think of God's church in this way, they think that the church is just about promoting certain agendas, or causes, or even a particular political platform.

But biblical church is not just a once-a-week reality. Church is not an activity...but it's a people group. Church is not a location, and it's not where we go for anything. WE are the church.

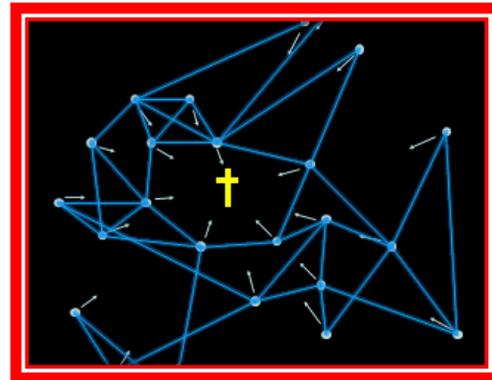
So if we took a picture of New Castle Bible Church – it would be a group photo of all of our members – not a picture of our campus or buildings.

In a diagram format, we could illustrate God's local church with the following drawing:



Here every dot represents an individual believer. The cross represents God and His Gospel of Jesus Christ. So you notice then that a biblical church is a group of people who are united with Christ by faith – ever growing to become more and more like Christ in their daily lives.

But to make this diagram even more biblically accurate, we'd need to connect the dots, right?



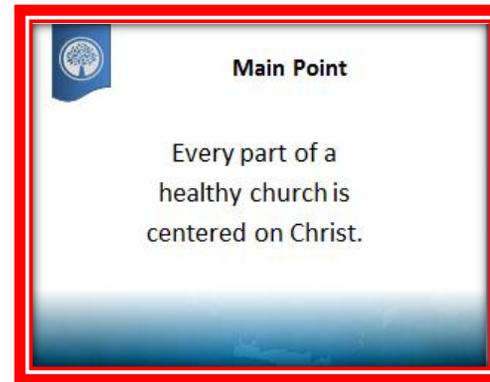
For the biblical church is a gathering of redeemed people together – all in genuine relationship with others – in their common worship of Jesus Christ as Lord!

Now...you might say, “Thanks for the lesson on church...but what does this have to do with our text in Colossians 3 this morning?” Well I’m actually setting the table for our study this morning.

Paul and Timothy wrote the letter of Colossians. The believers in Colossae were under attack from false teachers who were aiming to shift the believer’s hope from the sufficiency of Christ and His gospel for their daily lives. So in chapter 1, they defend the preeminence of Christ and clarify the priorities of all Gospel ministry. In chapter 2,³ they warn the church against all false teaching, and now in chapter 3 they write so that the believers would know how to live out their faith in Christ.

The last couple of weeks together, we’ve seen that Christ-followers are to put off sins of the heart, and put on Christ-likeness. Then **Colossians 3:12-17** speak of how our union in Christ transforms our relationship with other believers...in other words, we are studying a passage of Scripture today that answers the question, “What do relationships look like inside Christ’s church?” And today, in verses 14-17... we come to this exceptional description of biblical community, and learn that,

³ 2:2 – that they would have their hearts “encouraged, being knit together in love” so that they would gain the full assurance of knowing Christ.



Every part of a healthy church is centered on Christ.

A biblical community will make Jesus the center of everything. By definition, a healthy church is a community of God’s people who are centered on Christ in every part of their relationships with one another.

Our text this morning highlights 4 specific ways that all healthy churches stay centered on Christ. First in verse 14, let’s review that healthy churches ...healthy biblical communities... are **United by love**.



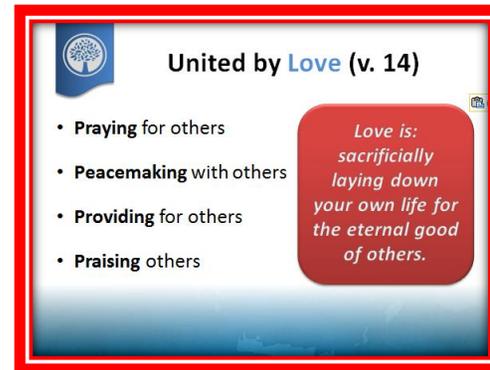
In verse 14, all those who have been chosen by God, declared holy and set apart by God, and loved by God are now commanded,

...above all these [Christian virtues] put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Biblical love is the belt which ties all Christ-like virtues together in our relationships with one another. Biblical love is the summary of all the Christ-like attitudes and actions that were described in verse 12-13 before.

Biblical love among its members, for each other... is a defining mark of a Christ-centered church. Harmony and unity in Christ's church comes as a Body seeks to love another, just as Christ has first loved us.

The kind of love that is mentioned here is a far cry from a mamby-pamby tolerance or pampering of other. This is the same love that we saw back in Colossians 2:2.



Hearts knit together by an active love that truly prays for others, works to make peace with others, takes opportunities to provide for others, and is constantly blessing and encouraging others with sincere praise.

Loved ones – healthy churches are united by ... active love of its members for one another. Not by programs. Not by cold doctrine alone. But by gospel-truths that are incarnated into individual sacrifices, prayer closets, peace-making, and relational pursuits of one another.

So it begs the honest question for you this morning – What functionally unites you with the other believers that you regularly get together with? Is Christ's love for you practically overflowing into others around you?

Ok...I'm convicted now. You see – a Christ-centered church is united by love. **1 Corinthians 13** kind of love. The healthiest church families are not united by common

experience, or by common confession, or by common culture, or by common interests and personalities... but genuine, Spirit-empowered sacrifice and giving for the eternal encouragement of others.

But biblical community is not only united by love, but also **Controlled by peace (v. 15).**



Notice verse 15:

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Every part of a healthy church family will be centered on Christ ... when their relationships together are controlled, or ruled by, the peace of Christ.

Peace here refers to the calling of a truce...the absence of conflict. Between us and God. This is the peace that

Christ provides between sinner and a holy God – through faith. *No matter* how you feel... you're no longer at war with God. As **Romans 5:1** says, *Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Our positional peace with Christ unifies all sinners together in a common peace with each other.

And when it comes to Christian relationships within the body of Christ, God's gospel peace should rule ... meaning to umpire or referee. To have the authority to judge or decide – to identify "fouls" in our relationships.

You see, man-centered community is always the fruit from a shifting gospel root – and two gospel roots to Christ-centered relationships are identity and worship.

God's Gospel therefore referees in the Christ-centered Church, and keeps members from committing these common fouls of misplaced identity or misdirected worship.



Controlled by Peace (v. 15)

2 Categories of Relationship Fouls

- **Identity Fouls** – looking to define myself outside of how Christ defines me in His Gospel
- **Worship Fouls** – seeking for rest, purpose, and satisfaction outside of Christ and His Gospel provisions

Identity fouls occur when a child of God forgets that they are a sinner saved, and welcomed, and at peace with Christ ... but instead they look to their own talents or achievements or their reputation in others' eyes to answer the question of "Who am I?"

The identity I assign to myself will always affect the way I respond to you. For example,⁴

- *If I tell myself I am smarter than you, then it will be hard for me to take your advice,*

So where do you find your identity? Is God's Gospel ruling and controlling your view of yourself? Do you believe that you are far more sinful than you even know, and yet more loved and welcomed and accepted in Christ than you could dare to believe?

⁴ Indebted and very thankful for the excellent work of Paul Tripp and Tim Lane in *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making* in this section.

Worship fouls occur when a believer forgets that God Himself is the highest good who is able to satisfy all of his needs, and fails to rest in who God is. Instead, this believer fouls in his refusal to worship God for who He is as Creator and Savior.

When you forget that God is a good creator, you try to remake other people in *your* own image.⁵

When you forget that God is Savior, you become too casual about your own sins and too focused on the sins of others.⁶

Listen, if my soul is still at war with God, then my heart will constantly be committing relational fouls with others.

But the foot of the cross is level, and now that I've been adopted by God, and united together in one Body of Christ... I'm free to love and generously serve others.

Do you know God's peace this morning? Jesus promises all who believe on Him – "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." (Luke 7:50)

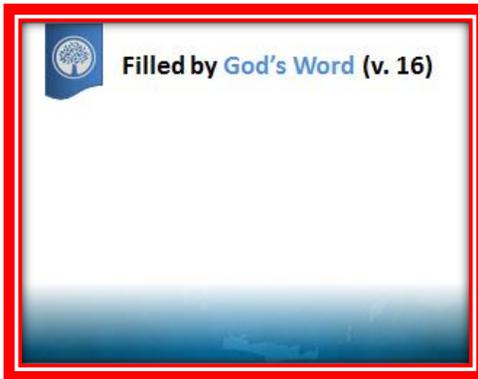
So Col 3:15 is not a verse about my emotions...and it's not a verse about decision-making...but Col 3:15 is

⁵ Relationships: A Mess Worth Making, Paul Tripp & Tim Lane

⁶ Relationships: A Mess Worth Making, Paul Tripp & Tim Lane

teaching us that Christ-centered churches are made up of hearts that are ruled and governed by our accepted position in Christ's gospel.

So what are the measures of a healthy church family? First, they are united together by love. Second their relationships are controlled by God's gospel peace. And third, every part of a healthy church that is centered on Christ is **filled by God's Word (v.16)**



Look again at verse 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.

The word of Christ – that's God's Gospel. Healthy communities of believers seek to truly make God's

Gospel "at home" in their lives and relationships together. Letting God's Word lavishly dwell within our hearts, and minds.

You see, it's good for a church like New Castle Bible Church to have a formal core value statement that says,

"We value the Word of God – therefore, we will exhort one another to love, study, and obey the Bible while upholding it as our final authority."

That's good, but not enough to determine whether or not we are a healthy church. Because remember, fundamentally, the church is the people – not an institution, or an event.

Last night our family enjoyed a very sweet evening of fellowship with some dear brothers and sisters. At the end of the evening, one of the brothers said, "Well I've just been to church!"

You see -- We are the church. So if the word of Christ is going to dwell richly within our church – it must be dwelling richly in all of us together!



All of our teaching, or positive instruction ...and all of our admonition or counseling of one another... should be saturated with the gospel of Christ. When God's people are scratched...may we bleed Bible.

Dear brother or sister, is God's Word dwelling in you richly?

You see Christ-centered churches are not measured by what happens on Sunday mornings during the formal worship hour together...but by the realities of the community's culture and personality together.

So how "at home" is God's Word in us ... not just in our formal meetings... but on our Facebook posts, Twitter feeds, and day-to-day text messages and phone calls? What "gospel" are we continually believing and proclaiming in our relationships with one another?

If God's gospel of peace is going to rule in our relationships together in the Body – then we must be filled by God's Word.

Let's have a bit of a pop quiz this morning, shall we? Don't worry – this is not your final exam. ☺ What Scriptures or biblical principles are "top of mind" for you when I mention these common household problems or topics:

Fear.
Forgiveness.
Worry.
Gossip.
Anger.

It's a good test, right? You see we can't live in a community that's so affected by the threats of layoffs and not be faced with these topics in our normal interactions with others. But let's not fool ourselves – we're not a Word-filled church if our responses to these realities are not Word-filled.

Please let me be boldly clear on this joyful reality this morning. Whatever you feed will grow.

Do not become content with spiritual snacks on God's word. Causal glances at God's Word have little spiritual benefit.

“But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.” (James 1:25)

A Christ-centered church is a Word-filled church. And although I don't have time this morning to fully unpack this, it's too good to not mention quickly that when you compare **Ephesians 5** and **Colossians 3**, you find that what it means *to let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly* is actually *to be filled with the Spirit*. To be filled with God's Spirit means to let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. If you show me a spiritual man – I'll show you a man who is filled with God's Word. If you join me in longing for the church to be revived with a fresh wind of God's Spirit in power and authority ...then you are joining me in longing for the church to renew our commitment to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly.

And verse 17 is clear – such Gospel indwelling produces the response of singing. A Word-filled people are a people of joy, happiness, and thanksgiving. Such songs are sincere – coming from the heart – in grateful response to God's grace.

But notice in verse 16 that there is a *diversity in the kinds of music* that sweeten the hearts of the redeemed.

Psalms refer to the Old Testament Psalms put to music.

Hymns refer to songs of praise and worship as found in the New Testament or contemporary times. And **Spiritual Songs** are songs of personal testimony urging our hearts towards greater belief in Christ alone.

So differing musical tastes or “musical languages” must never be allowed to divide or separate the body of Christ in our formal or informal worship together. Rather, brothers and sisters should defer to one another's preferences as we all respond back to God with thankful hearts for all He has given us in His Gospel provision.

And this leads us to the fourth mark of a Christ-centered church. God's people who are centered on Christ together will be united by God's gospel love, controlled by God's gospel peace, filled by the words of God's gospel, and **Occupied by Worship (v.17)** in every part of their lives together.



Look quickly 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.

Verse 15 is focused on the peace of Christ. Verse 16 is focused on the word of Christ. And verse 17 is focused on the Name of Christ.

Every part of the Christian's life and relationships with others must be done for the name or reputation of Jesus Christ. It's all about worship – living for the exaltation and praise and glory and honor of Jesus. The Christ-centered church is really all about Jesus in every way – it's not about us!

Here's another way we could say this... every member of Christ's church is His representative. Everything we say or do in our relationships with others should be consistent with the character of Jesus and with the fact that He is our Lord.

Have you noticed what I've been skipping so far in our study of verses 15, 16, and 17? Did you pick up on the worship theme?

Verse 15 – and be thankful.

Verse 16 – with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Verse 17 – giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Thanksgiving is returning praise. It is worship. It is one of the defining characteristic of a church that is bound

together in Christian love. Gratitude. Thankful awe for God's gospel that has brought peace and rest to their souls. A lifestyle response of gratitude and grace that is constantly fed and renewed by the indwelling Word of Christ. This is the occupation of a Christ-centered church.

Can I remind you of what this looked like when the church was just getting started in Acts 3? Peter and John were entering the temple for a 3pm prayer service when they ran into a lame man begging outside the Beautiful Gate of the temple. And Peter told the man, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" And he reached down and grabbed his right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping, and praising God.

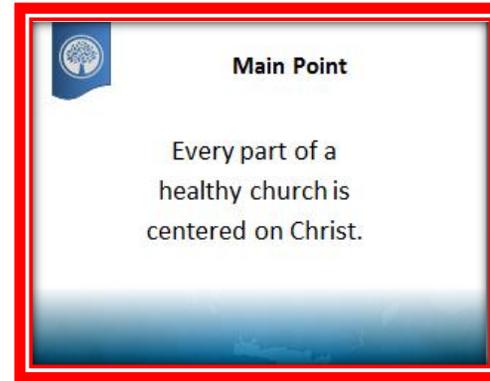
Church – may we awaken from our short-sighted stupors, and repent of our gloomy dispositions. We must not live as neglected orphans! We have been raised up together with Christ and made to walk in newness of life! Our entire life and attitude should reflect this joy – we who were once dead, have been made alive together with Christ! What awe and wonder and amazement is appropriate for our daily lives.

So church, may every part of our lives be centered on Christ. Let's all **Give thanks** today, **and make much of Christ in our church family.**

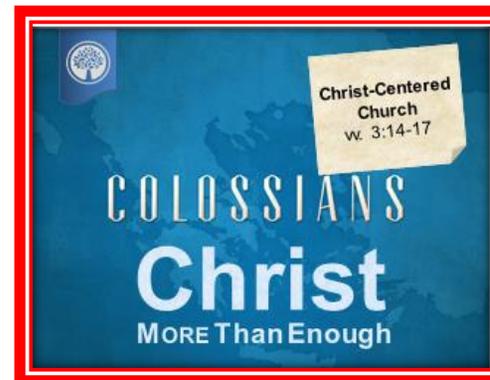


Have you thanked God yet this morning for all that He is, and all that He has done? Are you so satisfied in His love towards you, that you are free to really reach out in sacrificially love towards others? Maybe God is directing your heart towards one of your brothers or sisters this morning that you have the opportunity to generously serve. Let your life be controlled by the peace that Christ has made between you and God. Live according to the treaty... you're adopted and accepted...and thus enabled to really serve and care for others with genuine transparency, humility, and without pretense or pride.

And may you read and heed God's Word more and more this week... so that every one of your interactions and responses to others would be consistent with God's kingdom agenda and principles. Free your heart to sing this week – shepherd your soul with praise and joyful response. Make much of Christ in every word and deed – so that in all things He might have preeminence, and He might be worshipped and treasured above all else.



It is not uncommon for people to ask me for recommendations on how to select a church home. How can I find a good church? Well this morning we've learned that **every part of a healthy church is centered on Christ**. Biblical communities of faith will be united in love, controlled by peace, filled with God's Word, and consumed by a lifestyle of worship of Christ. And that is our prayer for New Castle Bible Church. That Christ would be everything to us. And that our practical culture would match our printed confession in every one of these ways, to the glory of Christ our Lord.



Well next week we will narrow our focus as we consider the Christ-Centered Marriage from verses 18-19. Marriage is under attack today in our culture, and so I'm looking forward to taking an entire message to strengthen our view of God's perfect design in marriage. No matter if you're single, widowed, divorced, or married – next week's message is one that you can't afford to miss. So keep reading through Colossians at least once every week during this series. And may His gospel dwell in us richly this week!

Let's pray.

Closing prayer.

Closing Song – <<The Church's One Foundation>>

Jude 24-25 *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*