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Lord's Day Morning  
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'Renewing Your Hearts and Vision' Series  
#7

## "Renewing our Fellowship" Colossians 3:11-17

### Introduction

As we continue our summer renewal series we want to build on the last couple of weeks. We talked about renewing our marriages two weeks ago; then renewing our families last week. Today, we turn our attention to the church, which we often refer to as a *family of families*.

There are some interesting trends taking place in the church in America. We've moved decidedly out of the "church growth movement" of the 90's into what World Magazine recently labeled the *NextGen Worship* church strategy.

These latest approaches to church include things like virtual churches – where you can worship interactively online. Many mega churches are going to multi-site campuses where the sermons are shipped in via video feed so that the popularity of certain pastors will draw congregations not only in other parts of the city, but in other states and even other nations. There are even a few drive-thru churches popping up where you can drive to a location, tune your radio to a particular frequency and worship in the parking lot without the hassle of ever leaving your car.

All of these innovative ways of reaching people are novel, seem to have some effectiveness, but ultimately begs the question about the nature of the church. If the church is a family of families, a

community of believers, and the body and bride of Christ then at what point have we compromised what God calls the church and fed the monster of individualism while sacrificing the community and communion of the saints?

In the long run, broken and distant relationships, lack of a unified belief systems and a weakening of authority structures hinders the building of the church. A strong and growing church requires a strong commitment to the church and to one another as family.

As we look back in order to move forward, we want to ask God to deepen and renew our covenant bonds of fellowship to Christ our head and to one another so that we might grow up into Christ.

### [Colossians 3:11-17]

Jesus said he would build His church. And as with almost everything Jesus promised, He places upon us certain expectations and calls for commitment. By His grace, God provides everything we need for salvation. But the fruit of that salvation is a demand for discipleship. There is a price to be paid. We lay down our lives, we take up our crosses and we follow Him. If we desire this congregation to be strong and growing and fulfilling Christ's mission for us, we must renew our commitments to the church and to one another. So what kinds of commitments does Christ expect of us?

I. A Commitment to the Visible Church.  
Every believer is committed to the concept of the invisible church. The invisible church, as we learned in our study of the Catechism is *the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered*

*into one under Christ the head.* Every true believer affirms they are part of this perfect church.

But the same cannot be said of everyone's view of the visible church. The visible church is a *society*, as the catechism teaches, who have made a profession of their faith. In other words, the visible church is a group of people who have covenanted together around the gospel.

Throughout the Scriptures, the unfolding of the gospel comes in the context of God gathering a visible people to Himself in an established society. It was the nation of Israel in the Old Testament with judges and kings and prophets and priests. In the New Testament it's the organized, structured church, with pastors and elders and deacons. Both have authority structures and accountability and terms of entrance.

So in the early New Testament days of the visible church there was the authority of the apostles and the soon to follow laying on of hands of elders and deacons. And we find that as people were converted they were baptized and added to the church (Acts 2.)

At the heart of a growing multiplying church is a group of people who have committed themselves to the faith, doctrine, vision and purpose of that church. And so Paul makes no apology for speaking of and writing to the visible church. To the visible church in Philippi he writes in Philippians 2:1,2, *Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose.*

What is Paul doing here but calling the visible church to a unified commitment to the one another in Christ?

In other places he invokes church discipline; he demonstrates the authority of the church to send missionaries, to ordain officers, to gather for worship.

Some people argue today that there is no clear proof text for church membership. But like many other doctrines of the Scripture, the evidence is not in a single verse of Scripture, but in the overall weight of the Old and New Testaments together that God has and is calling His people to unite together in a common confession of faith. Like a strong love between a man and woman, that love is sealed by marriage vows that unite the couple together in the good times and the bad. So too, a love for Christ is demonstrated by a covenant commitment to Christ and His church, the bride of Christ.

So you teenagers need to be thinking about this. Do you know Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? Are you a committed Christian? Then one of the fruits of that should be a public profession of your faith. If you have been baptized then you are already of member of the church. But when the evidence of your baptism is clear in your life and you are ready to assume the responsibility for your faith, you need then to make your commitment to Christ known by joining the church.

So this is the first commitment Christ would desire for us – a commitment to the visible church.

## II. A Commitment to the Means of Grace.

The thing that makes the church different than any other club or organization that you might join, is that God has given to the church special means by which your life can be supernaturally changed for good.. We call those things, *the means of grace*.

Turn in your Bibles to Acts 2:41, 42. After the conversion of these multitudes on the day of Pentecost, what happened next? (Read)  
It was through these things that this new body would grow strong and vibrant.

1. Apostles teaching – Having begun their faith by hearing the Word of God, they wanted more. So they *devoted* or *continued steadfastly* in the apostles teaching. The idea of the word there is like that of a personal attendant, a servant or handmaid. The whole attention is placed upon the master. You listen and watch, ready to respond to the needs. It involves alertness, eagerness and sacrifice. That's the spirit of the people of God. That ought to be your attitude. The subject of the attention was not the apostles, but the teaching. Your eager attention and that of the whole church must be upon the Word. Ready to respond, eagerly watching and listening and studying.
2. Fellowship – I believe in the context here it is speaking especially, although not exclusively, of fellowship in worship. It's the kind of thing described in Colossians 3:16; *Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.* Also Hebrews 10:22-25 (read). But think about this. How are we going to be affective in teaching and admonishing one another and stirring up one another to love and good deeds, if we are never together, if we don't know each other very well, and if we don't share a covenant commitment to walk in

harmony and unity together, and if we don't worship together?

3. Sacraments – First they were baptized and added to the church. And then they began to participate in the Lord's Supper. Jesus had given them this memorial supper in which He promised to be with them. The Lord's Supper is a critical part of the life of Christian. It's not something to be forsaken or dismissed. They were eager, especially those who had not known Christ, to be with Him at a meal.
4. Prayer – What a difference praying must have been for these new converts. Now they had the Holy Spirit residing within them. Now as they prayed they knew that God was hearing them. As a people of God, we pray not only individually, but corporately.

So you see, the church had this devotion to the means of grace. The things that would help them grow and become strong, were the things that they devoted themselves to the most. Sadly, sometimes today we devote ourselves most to the things that matter least. (Leisure, sports, money, career, you name it.) If we are going to be a strong growing church, then we must be committed to the things Christ has given us to make us strong and growing.

So let's all evaluate our relationship to the means of grace in the church. There is more here than simply showing up on Sunday mornings. Through our mid week Bible studies, fellowship and work activities and ministry events, we join together – we are united in one heart and purpose - as the family of God.

- A commitment to the Visible Church
- A commitment to the Means of Grace

### III. A Commitment to Relationships.

This brings us back to our text this morning. In Colossians 3 12-15 we have the spirit that God requires of us within the church. This is important, because to be a strong church, it's not merely about going through all the right motions and doing all the right activities. It's about the heart. It is a quality of the heart that reflects the nature and image of Christ. Look at verse 12 and see if that kind of thing is not something attractive to you. *Those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

How do you know if you have that kind of heart? It will be reflected in three ways.

1. You will be willing to bear with one another. None of us are perfect. As in any family, we have struggles and weaknesses. In Christ, we are to bear with and help carry the loads of one another, even if they are at times brought on by our own weaknesses.
2. You will be forgiving of one another. Paul gives us a very pointed reminder as to why we must forgive each other – it's because of all you have been forgiven by Jesus. Are there grudges you are holding in the church? Offenses of another that you are unwilling to forgive. In the church we must be committed to forgiving. That means, forgiving real sins and real hurts – not just imaginary or surface hurts. Your offenses against Jesus were real and deep. He died to forgive you.
3. You will love each other. This is the perfect bond of unity. Unity is something we come to because we love each other

enough to stay together and work through our differences.

We have been through some tough times as a congregation. Some of those have been because of circumstances brought on by the providence of God; some have been because of ministry things God has called us to; some have been because we have struggled to see eye to eye on things; some have been because we have all sinned against other in the church from time to time.

But God is gracious. He has called us to holiness and humility and compassion. So let's keep putting on these things. If we love each other and bear with each other and forgive each other, Jesus will be pleased.

Today, let's recommit ourselves to one another. We are the family of God. He has called us to live together for Him.