

♪ Worship Notes ♪

THEME: Song in Scripture (part 3)

THE MINISTRY OF SONG

(Ephesians 5:18-20)

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

1. A Spirit-filled ministry

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, . . .”

“For we are the real circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.” (Philippians 3:3)

It's intriguing that the first result of the filling of the Spirit mentioned by Paul is *singing!*

2. A mutual ministry

“ . . . addressing one another . . . ”

There is an important horizontal aspect to our ministry of song in corporate worship: it is something we do *together*. Personal and private worship is an important part of our walk with God; but in the gathering of the church we need to be focused on one another as well as on God. (This suggests an important corrective to many of our worship conflicts: congregational worship is to provide a mutual benefit, rather than primarily an individual benefit; hence, the ubiquitous “what’s in it for me?” or “what do I get out of it?” attitude with which so many approach corporate worship shows a severe misunderstanding of why we come together.

3. A diverse ministry

“ . . . in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs . . . ”

The exact designations of these three apparent categories of song have been widely debated for the past two thousand years, with no indisputable outcome. However, it is quite certain at least that Paul is saying that we should use *different kinds* of songs in our corporate praise. (See the article “Blended Worship: Good for the Body” [HERE](#).)

4. A God-focused ministry

“ . . . singing and making melody to the Lord . . . ”

Ultimately of course, our song is directed towards the One who alone is worthy of our praise. We don't sing for our own enjoyment or benefit (though those may well be positive side-effects), but at his bidding and for his pleasure and glory.

5. An internal ministry

“ . . . with all your heart . . . ”

“Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

For worship to be God-honoring and God-pleasing it must be an expression of a devoted heart. Both the Old and the New Testament make it clear that God is far more concerned about the inner attitude of worship than with what external form it takes. (See [Worship Notes 1.11](#).) Hence our song must well up from the inside.

6. A responsive ministry

“ . . . giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father . . . ”

“Praise the Lord according to his excellent greatness.” (Psalm 150:2)

We only have a song to sing because of God's initiative in revealing himself to us and showing himself mighty in his saving acts on our behalf. All worship is a response to God's gracious self-revelation. (See [Worship Notes 1.5](#).)

7. A Christ-empowered ministry

“ . . . in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. ”

“In the midst of the congregation [Christ] will sing [the Father's] praise.” (Hebrews 2:12)

Our song pleases God because we come in and through our great High Priest, whose song subsumes and perfects our own. (See [Worship Notes 1.8](#).)

Significant Studies on New Testament Song (Colossians 3:16 & Ephesians 5:19)

David F. Detwiler, “Church Music and Colossians 3:16”
Bibliotheca Sacra 158:631 (July-September 2001): 347-69.
(Access article [HERE](#))

Detwiler does a helpfully thorough exegetical examination of the passage and its grammatical and interpretive challenges. Based on his conclusions, he suggests the following translation and layout for the verse:

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,
with all wisdom
teaching and admonishing one another
with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs;
with grace
singing to God
in your hearts.*

Steven R. Guthrie, “Singing, in the Body and the Spirit”
Journal of the Evangelical Society 46/4 (December 2003): 633–46

Guthrie examines, in the light of church history and the context and teaching of Ephesians 5:19, why it is that Christians do and should sing. He concludes that music makes “a distinctive contribution to Christian worship.” It “enlists body and sense in the praise of God” in a way that reorients our faculties away from self-fulfillment to a higher corporate purpose. Communal singing in itself “offers a powerful aural image of life together. In particular, music articulates a kind of unity in which individual distinctiveness is preserved and even enhanced” (p. 646).

Another fascinating insight contrasts Augustine’s rather suspicious view of the power of music (pp. 633-34) with Paul’s own argument in Ephesians 4 and 5. Guthrie writes: “Paul shares the same broad concerns as Augustine . . . , but the recommendation emerging from those concerns is entirely different. To put it very crudely, Augustine says: ‘Irrationality is bad. Sensuality is bad. Therefore, be careful about music.’ Paul on the other hand says, ‘Foolishness is bad [Ephesians 4:17-22; 5:10,15,17]. Sensuality is bad [4:19–5:18]. Therefore, you had better sing [5:19]” (pp. 637-38).

Quotables

SINGING TO THE LORD

“O come, let us sing to the Lord,
To him our voices raise;
With joyful noise let us the rock
Of our salvation praise.

Let us before his presence come
With praise, and thankful voice;
Let us sing psalms to him with grace,
And make a joyful noise.”
(*Scottish Psalter*, 1650)

“You can’t summon the nations to sing [Psalm 96:1] if you aren’t singing. Our job in missions, first, is to sing.”
(John Piper)

“Paul’s exhortation to sing, then, is bound up with his emphasis throughout the Epistle on the unity of the body of Christ. Music voices the shared life of the church. It is not accidental that the commands to sing in Eph. 5:19 lead on to the exhortation in verse 21: “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Music is both an image and a means of attaining to this unity. Structurally, the command to sing is the hinge connecting two sections of the epistle. Chapters 4 and 5 urge the Christians to put away the kind of self-gratifying and self-interested behavior that destroys community. The second half of Chapter 5 and the first half of Chapter 6 paint a picture of healthy community life, in which each member senses and responds to the needs of others.”
(Stephen R. Guthrie, “Singing, in the Body and in the Spirit,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46/4 [December 2003], 642)

“[Jesus] is the One who composes the melody in our hearts [Ephesians 5:19].”
(Sinclair Ferguson, “True Spirituality, True Worship” (audio message, Covenant College, February 16, 2004)

“The Romans had the lions. . . but the Christians had the songs—and that’s why the Christians won.”
(Ronnie Stevens, on Ephesians 5:19)

“Paul actually expects Christ to be encountered as his people share with one another a whole range of verbal ministries in the congregational gathering. For example, as they ‘sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs’, with gratitude in their hearts to God, they will fulfil the apostolic injunction, ‘Let the word of Christ dwell among you richly’ (Col. 3:16; cf. Eph. 5:19--20).”
(David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, 197-98)

“Thus, the ‘vertical’ and the ‘horizontal’ dimensions of what takes place should not be artificially separated. One part of the meeting cannot be ‘the worship time’ (e.g. prayer and praise) and another part ‘the edification time’ (e.g. preaching), since Paul’s teaching encourages us to view the same activities from both points of view. The God-directed ministry of prayer or praise and the notion of edification are intimately linked in the New Testament (e.g. Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19).”
David Peterson, *Engaging with God: A Biblical Theology of Worship*, 220-21)

"In the New Testament the predominant sound when the church gathers is the singing of the congregation (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16). They constitute the real worship team." (Bob Kauflin, [Worship Matters blog](#), February 6, 2009)

"A German saying:
"The folks I talk to are my fellow human beings;
the ones I sing with are family."
(Mark A Noll, "We Are What We Sing," *Christianity Today*, July 12, 1999, 37)

"As with prayer, song had become the special province of the Spirit (1 Cor 14:14—15, 26; Col 3:16; Eph 9:19). The evidence from Colossians and Ephesians suggests that some of the singing was corporate; the language of these passages further indicates that besides being addressed as praise to God, hymns served as vehicles of instruction in the gathered assembly."
(Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 885)

"This Colossians passage [3:16] well illustrates that for Paul, marvellously, singing to God and instructing each other are one and the same activity! We are singing our 'teaching' to each other, even whilst grammatically addressing God, and this, as I have suggested above, is parallel with singing which grammatically addresses the people around, but in fact is a hymn to God."
(Colin Buchanan, "Doctrine and Worship," *Evangel* 16:1 (Spring 1998), 18)

"Indeed the real crisis is this: Ecclesiastical authorities, while recognizing that music is important to congregational life, usually fail to see that its biblical role puts its squarely within the ministry of the Word as a partner to preaching. For, as the apostle Paul told us, the word of Christ dwells richly within us with all wisdom when we teach and admonish one

another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs and sing with gratitude in our hearts to God with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16)."
(Leonard Payton, "How Shall We Sing to God" in *The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, 189)

"Good church musicians constantly ask whether the "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" of the church's worship are sung 'so that the Word of God may dwell in us richly' (the forgotten purpose clause of Col. 3:16). Good liturgical musicians worry about the link between theology and worship: whether worship in their church depicts God as only indifferent and far removed; whether it gives the impression that prayer is simply an act of cognition, or conversely, an act of pure emotion; whether worship in their congregation makes it clear that the Bible is central to the life and faith of the church. The good ones, as I describe more fully elsewhere, know that worship expresses the deepest theological convictions of the community and that it reveals as much about the belief of the community as do catechisms and confessions."
(John D. Witvliet, "Training Church Musicians as Pastoral Liturgists," *Musicians for the Churches: Reflections on Vocation and Formation*, 18.)

"True theology is theology that sings. Commenting on the words from Psalm 22:22 put into the lips of Jesus by the writer to the Hebrews, 'I will sing your praise in the great congregation' (2:12), Calvin says: Christ is the great choirmaster who tunes our hearts to sing God's praise."
(James B. Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*, 10)

"The most important musical group in the church is the congregation: the whole people of God lifting their hearts and their voices to God in praise."
(RM)

Coming Worship Events

CALVIN SYMPOSIUM ON



January 28-30, 2010
Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA

[INFO](#)



**Clarkston International Bible Church,
Clarkston, Georgia**
February 19-20, 2010

[INFO](#)



All Nations College (UK)

February 26-27, 2010

This year's event is open to all interested in how to learn about the music of other cultures, especially in cross-cultural ministry.

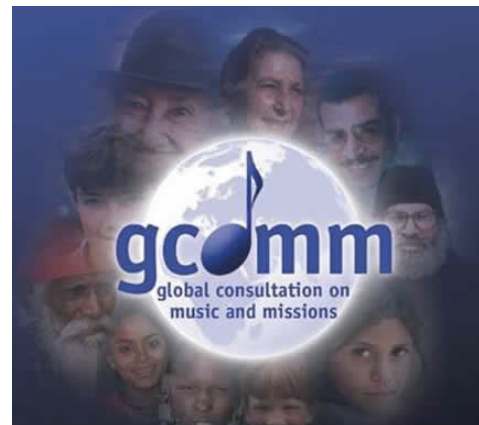
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GComm Asia 2010

Singapore

July 4-7, 2010

[INFO](#)



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