

Wil Owens
Singing in the Local Church; Colossians 3:16-17
GPBC
10.4.20

Introduction – Since we are currently searching for a part time worship leader, I thought it would be a good time for us to spend a couple of weeks seeing what the Bible says about song worship. Throughout the NT we learn what believers do when they gather for worship. They pray. They give. They teach and proclaim the Word of God. They share the Lord's Supper. And they sing. Singing has always been and always will be central to Christian worship.

But what's the nature of the singing in the local church? In our day we have terms categorize the style of music. Words like traditional, contemporary, and blended. We even hear descriptions like relevant, modern, cutting edge, and even secular.

I suggest to us this morning that above all those terms, our first and foremost concern be that our song worship is biblical. May the Bible be our guide and foundation for the singing in this local church. Rather than simply mimicking what appears to be working at the church down the road or even borrowing from an unbelieving world, may our song worship be grounded in the Word of God, setting our individual preferences aside and letting the categories be what they may. When we all aim to be scriptural rather than trying to please each preference, our song worship will glorify God and nourish our faith.

- I. Singing in the Local Church is Congregational
 - a. The main exhortation of v16 is the first line – Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. Everything else in v16 is explaining how the church pursues the goal of being filled abundantly with God's Word.
 - b. The central factor is that we have to be together to live out the faith. V13 says bear with one another. Later it says forgiving each other. V16 says teaching and admonishing one another and singing. God means for us to live in a community of faith, the church.
 - c. The life of the local church is measured by its corporate worship. God does not call us to isolate but rather to gather. It's when we are gathered that we are equipped in the Word, encouraged in fellowship, and strengthened in the faith. We can't fully mature alone because we can't fully apply the Word of God alone.

- d. Singing in the local church is congregational. Since we are believers, we all have a song to sing and reason to sing. We know the joy of the Lord, the grace of salvation, the faithfulness of God, the truth of His Word, the power of His Spirit, and the glory of His Son – believers can't help but sing. Or at least, make a joyful noise to the Lord!
 - e. That's not to say there's no place for soloist or groups or special music in corporate worship, but it is to say that the majority of our singing in church includes every voice of those who are redeemed.
 - f. If you have been saved, if in Christ you have been transferred from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son, God has put a song in your heart.
 - g. Isaac Watts writes in the 2nd verse of his hymn, "Come, we that love the Lord," – Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God. But children of the heavenly King will speak their joys abroad.
 - h. Ps 89:1 says I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord, forever. Corporate worship is our rehearsal for eternity.
- II. Singing in the Local Church is Blended
- a. V16 calls the church to sing all kinds of songs. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are categories of song compositions. Each identified by its construction and arrangement.
 - b. In our day we mean something different when we say "blended".
 - c. Generally speaking "traditional" means hymns out of the hymnal, accompanied by piano and/or organ and largely favored by the older members of a congregation. "Contemporary" means newer songs found on the radio, accompanied by guitar and/or a variety of instruments and largely favored by younger members. "Blended" is some kind of combination of traditional and contemporary.
 - d. Often in local churches hymn lovers and new song lovers become steeped in their preferred style. Our preferred style is what our generation is accustomed to. It's what resonates to our ear and therefore to our liking. The traditional style sounds out-dated to the contemporary ear, and the contemporary style sounds too out of place to the traditional ear. Because another style is almost foreign to us, we easily move from liking our style to disliking the other style, and eventually convince ourselves that we can't even sing a song of a different format or style than our preference.

- e. All of this tension in church singing boils down to format and style. Churches then try to come up with some kind of resolution. Some churches decide to remain traditional, and often lose a younger audience and their energy. Some churches decide to go entirely contemporary, and often lose an older audience and their maturity. Some churches trying to accommodate all its members offer a traditional service and a contemporary service, which usually results in two churches under one roof with little to no interaction. Finally some churches attempt a blended service in an effort to keep the unity of the body, and as a result, congregational singing suffers because people aren't inclined to sing outside of their preference.
- f. The point is you can't win when you've tied yourself as a church to these categories. And why should we be tied to these categories – they are not even biblical categories.
- g. I suggest to us this morning that we set aside these extra-biblical categories along with our individual preferences and adopt new, biblically-rooted categories. If we have a vision and pursuit of biblical song worship, the tension of preferences will fade away and the congregational singing will rise.
- h. Col 3:16 says sing all types of songs. Sing psalms. Sing hymns. Sing spiritual songs. It's blended song worship. Not our definition of blended, hymns and radio favorites. But blended in the sense that many varieties of format exist. As long as they are teaching you and admonishing you in the Word of Christ, sing them.
- i. We have to move past the categories of traditional and contemporary to a better, biblical set of categories like older songs and newer songs. Throughout the history of redemption, God's people have always taken the truths of Scripture and produced songs. So there have always been new songs, which means there are always more older songs. The list of older songs grows as the list of new songs grows.
- j. Psalm 40:1-3. At some point in redemptive history, Ps 40 was a brand new song. By the time we get to Col 3:16 it's an old song. But Paul says when the church gets together, you should sing that song.
- k. Col 1:15-20. That passage has been called "A Christ Hymn" throughout church history. It was a new song when someone put an arrangement to it. Now it's an old song.

- l. Let me have the attention now of everyone here who says I don't like traditional worship. I can't sing hymns. Listen to these lyrics written in 1680. (Now remember those who only like hymns and don't care for contemporary songs. In 1680 this was a contemporary song) Praise to the Lord.
 - i. Now if you are in Christ and reconciled to God, it doesn't matter if those words are in a hymnal or played on a piano or organ. Would you not sing that?
 - ii. The accompaniment and arrangement doesn't matter. It's the words that allow the Word of God to dwell in you richly.
 - m. Let me have the attention now of everyone here who says I don't like contemporary worship. I can't sing those new songs. Listen to these words written in 2015. His mercy is More
 - i. Now if you are in Christ and reconciled to God, it doesn't matter if those words are not found in the hymnal or if played with a guitar and drums. Would you not sing that?
 - n. Let's adopt the categories of older songs, newer songs, and one more – the best songs.
- III. Singing in the Local Church is Lyric Driven
- a. We get so wrapped up in style, which is instrumental accompaniment and musical arrangement, rather than the content of the words – the emphasis of Christian singing is the words we are singing, not the instrument we are playing!
 - b. In fact, the NT never mentions instruments when it addresses believers singing. The focus is not the accompaniment but the lyrics.
 - c. The purpose of arrangement is not to satisfy preference. The purpose of instruments in the church is not for entertainment or performance. It's to lift up the lyrics and to remember the lyrics. How many instruments should you have in a church? According to Psalm 150 as many as you can find and play. After listing all kinds of wind and percussion instruments, Psalm 150 says let everything that hath breath praise the Lord! In other words, all the instruments are to encourage the singing and all the singing is praising the Lord.
 - d. So what words do you sing that praise the Lord? His Words. V16 let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.

- e. The best songs to sing in church, old and new, are the songs with lyrics that take the truth of God's Word and plant it in our hearts. Lyrics that are doctrinally rich, filled with God's promises, declaring the majesty of God, celebrating the gospel, announcing the hope of glory, and exalting Christ. We don't sing but 3 songs on Sunday morning, so let's sing the best songs.
- f. The best songs have lyrics that teach us – they teach us the things of God. They admonish us, that is, they correct our thinking and bring it back in line with Scripture. And when we sing them to one another, God's Word begins to take hold in our souls, nourishing our faith.
- g. When that type of singing envelopes a congregation, you are sure to find the Word of Christ dwelling richly in it.

Conclusion – May this be our song worship vision and pursuit. Singing to one another – congregational. Old songs and new songs – blended. Lyrics filled with the Word of Christ – the best songs. And that pursuit will lead us right into v17!!