

"Religion of the Heart"

Ephesians 5:17-21

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by C.W. Powell

I want to read two very closely connected Scriptures for they illuminate each other, both written by the Apostle Paul, but to different churches, but dealing with the same subject. The first is my text: Ephesians 5:17-21:

“17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. 18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; 19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; 20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” (Eph 5:17-21)

The second is Colossians 3:15-17:

“15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” (Col 3:15-17)

True Christianity is first and foremost a religion of the heart. There are wonderful and prized ceremonies and sacraments that we observe and do, which have been commanded by our Lord. Among these are baptism and the Lord's Supper, observance of public worship, public confession of faith, giving of tithes and offerings, public singing and prayers, the public preaching of the Gospel, and so forth. These are commanded by our Lord and cannot be dispensed with without damage to our souls, but all of these things must be from the heart or they will not be accepted by the Lord, for He is a Spirit and must be worshipped in Spirit and in truth.

As we have seen from our study of Ephesians these past months Paul is greatly

concerned about the inner life of the saints at Ephesus. It is interesting that in the messages to the churches that the Apostle John received from the Lord Jesus which he recorded in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation, the complaint that the Lord Jesus had against the Ephesian church was they had “left their first love.” It was the life of the inner man that He reproved, although their lives were full of many good works and good things. The Lord said to them:

“4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. 5 Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.” (Re 2:4-5)

It was their love that defined them as a church, and they would be removed from being a church [removed candlestick] if they did not repent. The love of the church for Christ and the love of the members of the church for each other is not optional if we would be numbered among the people of God.

If we compare the two passages I read, the one from Ephesians 5 and the other from Colossians 3 and set the corresponding phrases side by side we see a remarkable parallelism of content and form.

Ephesians: “17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. 18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;” Colossians: 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom;

Ephesians: 19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Colossians: teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Ephesians: 20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.” Colossians: 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

So I have three things to say from these three ideas from Ephesians, illuminated by Colossians.

- I. What we are to do? We are to be wise
- II. How we are to do it? We are to make melody in our hearts
- III. What the results will be? We are to live under the authority of Christ.

I. What we are to do?

a. Ephesians: “17 Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. 18 And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;” Colossians: 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom;

b. Do not be unwise: Don’t be stupid. It is the will of God that you have joy in your hearts and live lives of thankfulness to the Lord.

c. Being filled with the Spirit and have the Gospel of Christ dwell richly in you are different ways of saying the same thing. Being filled with the Spirit is to be filled with the joy of the Spirit.

d. It is the word of Christ that is to dwell in you richly: This is Paul’s theme in this whole book: “16 That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; 17 That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; 19 And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” (Eph 3:16-19)

II. How are we to do this? We are to make melody in our hearts. The word melody comes from the word for harp. Our hearts are to be musical instruments by which the Holy Spirit makes music pleasing unto the Lord.

a. Ephesians: 19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. Colossians: teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

b. The heart may be in instrument of the flesh and the devil and be filled with all sorts of foul music: 5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: 6 For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:7 In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.8 But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

c. Instead, the heart is to be transformed and renewed by the Gospel of Christ: 12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

d. This is the reason that we are commanded to keep our hearts with all diligence:

i. Pr 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

ii. Pr 15:13 A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.

iii. Pr 15:15 All the days of the afflicted are evil: but he that is of a merry heart hath a continual feast.

iv. Pr 17:22 A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

v. Ec 9:7 Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.

e. But we cannot keep our hearts. I am not talking about a life free from trouble and distress.

i. These things are real and we have troubles just like other people have troubles. We are not talking about pretending that evils are not real and palpable, but we are talking about a joy in Christ and

transcends these things because it is not rooted in the things of the world. So we are commanded: “My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.” (Pr 23:26)

ii. If the world has our hearts then the troubles of the world will overcome us. The love of Christ must dwell in our hearts.

iii. “Psalms” just doesn’t mean the book of psalms, but the music of the word of Christ. The Gospel should be music to our hearts, and our hearts must be instruments upon which the joy of the Gospel is played by the Holy Spirit. But the command “make melody” means that we have a choice in this; we can be grumpy and spiteful and angry and vindictive and mean, or our hearts can be wells of living water, bubbling forth the water of life and joy to those round about us.

III. What the results will be? We are to live thankfully under the authority of Christ.

a. Ephesians: 20 Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; 21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.”

Colossians: 17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”

b. Both passages call for thanksgiving; Ephesians says “submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” Colossians says “do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

i. Doing all in the name means doing all under the authority of Christ. We are not our own, but belong. We are therefore to live under the authority that he has established.

ii. Both passages following this exhortation by commandments concerning human relationships: husbands/wives; parents/children; masters/servants;

iii. Living under the authority of the Spirit and in the joy of the Lord means to accept your responsibility under the yoke of Christ and perform it in the joy of the Lord. Whatsoever we do we are to do it

“heartily” as unto the Lord, and not with eye service to be seen of men, as Colossians tells us.

c. This was commanded under the law, but the law could not produce its own fruit: “46 And they shall be upon thee for a sign and for a wonder, and upon thy seed for ever. 47 Because thou servedst not the LORD thy God with joyfulness, and with gladness of heart, for the abundance of all things; 48 Therefore shalt thou serve thine enemies which the LORD shall send against thee, in hunger, and in thirst, and in nakedness, and in want of all things: and he shall put a yoke of iron upon thy neck, until he have destroyed thee.” (De 28:46-48)

i. Israel did not serve the Lord with gladness because of the power of sin.

ii. It is the gift of the Holy Spirit in Christ that works the love and grace of God in the heart that brings the joy of the Lord.

IV. Summary and application. The following are absolutely essential for the joy of the Lord I speak of:

a. Faith in Christ, knowledge and trust, where we have learned to trust him for all things.

b. Our affections and love must be set on Christ and not on the things of the earth. The earth passes away and the desires thereof, but he who does the will of God abides forever. “Enter into the joy of the Lord,” is the destiny of the people of God, and that is not on the earth but in heaven. But we have the beginnings of that eternal joy now, if we believe. “in my heart I feel the beginnings of eternal joy.”

c. Presentation of ourselves to Christ: we are not our own but belong to our faithful savior Jesus Christ. “1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Ro 12:1-2)

d. Unbelief and misery go together; faith and joy go together. Joy and

unbelief cannot be mated You cannot serve God and mammon. Destruction and misery are in the path of unbelief, but in the presence of God there is fullness of joy. Christ Himself is the way: “8 I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. 9 Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. 10 For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 11 Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Ps 16:8-11)

Amen and Amen. God bless you.