

The Intentionality of Christian Living - Part 3

Good morning, church. Well, I am glad to be back. It is good to be with you again. Thank you for the prayers. After dodging it for almost two years, I did in fact finally have my bout with COVID. I didn't think that was what it was at first, but it was. And all I can say is that I am glad to have that behind me.

It really is hard to believe that we are coming up on the 2-year anniversary that we have been dealing with this, but here we are.

You know, it's interesting; I read an article the other day that showed the greatest and most sweeping health impact that we have seen through this whole debacle has not actually been from COVID, it is rather the impact that everything that has happened has had on society's mental health.

And this is obviously observable with the skyrocketing numbers of depression and suicide, not just in our country but all over the world. In fact, Gallup conducted a study that reported a decline in the mental health of every single demographic of society except for one. There was one subgroup that actually reported an increase in mental health and stability in our society. You know who it was? Conservative Christians who attend church on a weekly basis.

Now for us that really is not that huge of a surprise. The only surprise is that a secular organization was able to identify it! But the reality is, we are the subgroup whose hope is not in this world. We are not living for this world. So, when the world around us is falling apart, our hope remains the same. We have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us.

Our lives are lived for one purpose—for the glory of God alone. We have Godward focused lives, and that does not change with the changing of our world. And the weekly gathering of the saints aids in that stability and keeps our focus upon the One for whom we are living. And ultimately this is a product of being filled with the Spirit. The Spirit of God leads us into a Godward focused life which has all kinds of affects upon the way we live our lives. And that is what we are going to see as we look at this passage today.

We have been working through this section in which Paul has been emphasizing the intentionality with which the Christian life is to be lived. He started this off in verse fifteen by saying that we are to “Look carefully then, how you walk. The Christian life cannot be lived flippantly or haphazardly. The Christian life is not continuing on as the world around us but just adding Jesus. No, the Christian life is fundamentally different.

As we have seen working through this section, we are to walk in wisdom rather than folly (vs 15). We are to redeem the time that we have been given by God in our very brief life. We do that by using our time for the glory of God rather than following the evil course of this world (vs. 16). We are to live our lives understanding what the will of the Lord is - that is understanding his revealed will in His Word and submitting our lives to it (vs. 17). And in v 18, as we saw last

time, we do that by not giving our lives over to the control of anything like drunkenness, but by walking in the reality of being filled with the Spirit of God, which leads to submission to the will of God. As we saw, our obedience to God is a product of the power of the Spirit living inside of us granting us supernatural self-control, by which we live for the glory of God alone. All of that is what we covered over the last two sermons, which took us through verse eighteen. If you missed any of that I would encourage you to go back and listen.

But today we are going to continue on as we look at verses 19 through 21. And what you have in these verses are the consequences or results that will be seen in a person who is walking by the Spirit of God. This is fruit that will be produced by one who is living their life in the reality that they are filled with the Spirit of God.

The truth is, what we are seeing here in these passages is that the Christian life is a life that is altogether different. It is a transformed life. Those who have the Spirit of God on the inside of them have different joys, different motivations, different attitudes, different demeanors than the world around us. We are not the same as the world. We are not just like everyone else, just redeemed and forgiven. No, because we are redeemed, because we are forgiven, we have the Spirit of almighty God living inside of us making us altogether different.

The things that bring us joy are different. The things that drive us are different. Our response to what is happening in our lives and around us in the world is different. Everything about us is different. Why? Because we are living for Him. We belong to Him. Essentially what you see Paul saying here is that one who is exhibiting the reality of the Spirit of God on the inside of them, one who is living as a person filled with the Spirit, will live a life that is Godward in its focus.

Paul brings that out in three key areas in this passage. That is what we are going to see today. It is seen in our Singing, it is seen in our Thanksgiving, and it is seen in our submission. The truth is as we look at this, we see that for the believer, God cannot be just a fleeting thought that you give attention to once a week. Because of what Christ has done, there is a restoration of our created purpose which is to know to enjoy and to glorify God with our lives. That is what we are living for. And that is what we see in this passage. A life that is God-centered and God-focused.

So, let's look at these three practices, starting with singing. Read with me, starting at verse 18: "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 your heart,"

The first indication that Paul lists of a life that is lived filled with the Spirit of God is that of the presence of music and singing in one's life. The reality is music is not simply an optional element in the Christian life. It is not. Nor is just an outlet for those who are more artsy or musical in the Body of Christ. No, the singing of music is a central aspect of the life of the believer. And it always has been. It is part of our worship.

Music, in and of itself was God's invention, God's creation. And it can be and is employed for many purposes like celebration, dancing, entertainment, self-expression, lamentation, love, war,

whatever. Music has been employed for all of those things and many more. It is diverse in its usage. But music finds its highest expression, and the fulfillment of its created purpose, in worship. That is what music is ultimately for. God has given us this gift of music by which we may express our praise and adoration and gratitude and our love for Him and all that He has done. That is what music is ultimately for.

But notice here what Paul says first, he says "Addressing one another in psalms hymns and spiritual songs". Most translations translate this as "speaking to one another in psalms hymns and spiritual songs" The question is, what does he mean by this and why are these songs to be directed at one another?

The word in question here that is translated, "addressing" or "speaking" is the Greek word *laleo*. It simply means to speak or to communicate. But in the context of music, obviously the idea is simply that of singing. This was a common way to refer to singing at the time. We see this in Deuteronomy 32, the song of Moses that he delivered to Israel just before his death. It says that Moses spoke the words of this song to the assembly of Israel. In Second Samuel 22, David's song of deliverance, it says that David spoke the words of the song on the day that the Lord delivered him.

So, this simply refers to singing. But there is an element in which they use this word—the speaking of these songs—because these are songs that have lyrics that are didactic in nature: They are songs that teach, songs that admonish, songs that praise. They are songs where the lyrics matter. They are consequential in our lives and should be paid attention to.

That's why Paul says that in one sense these songs are directed at one another. Addressing one another. There is very much a horizontal aspect to our singing. Yes, these are songs that extol God for who He is and what He has done. But at the same time, these are songs that inform, and teach, and even encourage one another toward trust and obedience and faithfulness.

How often do we hear that in the psalms where they are addressing one another and call for action? Psalm 66: "Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; Come and see what God has done; he is awesome in his deeds toward the children of man. Bless our God, O peoples; let the sound of his praise be heard, Psalm 37: "Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers! For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb. Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness."

That is a song! To one another, that glorifies God. And there are many like this. Many of the Psalms—the Spirit inspired songs of Scripture—have this horizontal element of calling for the people of God to live in faithfulness. It is a horizontal element that is meant to direct the eyes of the people upward as we are taught about God and His goodness and admonished to live for Him. Many of our hymns do the same thing.

That is why when we look at the parallel verse in Colossians, we see this element come to the surface with more clarity. Listen to how Paul phrased it there. Colossians 3:16: Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Paul brings

out the same command but rather than just saying speak to one another, he elaborates and says teaching and admonishing one another in our singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

This is why, philosophically and historically, the church has engaged in congregational singing. This modern notion of performance oriented "worship" is an aberration from Scripture and history. It's not about a performance. It is not about a show. No, it is the children of God, the redeemed, joining their voices together to sing songs that edify. Songs that doctrinally and theologically are sound and deep. And they teach and admonish one another.

There is a power and a solidification in our hearts as we hear one another singing the same truths, as the Body of Christ joins with one voice to worship God together. This is why, when we sing, we need to sing. Don't just stand there. Lift up your voice. Allow those around you to hear you. Your children need to hear you singing God's praises. Your wife needs to hear you singing God's praises. Your husband needs to hear you singing God's praises. Your brother or sister in Christ needs to hear you singing God's praises.

We all need to hear one another. We need to sing and sing loud, church! "Yeah, but Logan I can't carry a tune in bucket." Welcome to the club! Come stand by me I will make you feel better. But sing, it doesn't matter. It does not matter if you are gifted in singing. It's not about you. It is about the redeemed singing together. God has saved us. We have everything to sing about. Sing. And listen to those around you sing.

But as a side note, this is just one more reason, among the countless of others throughout Scripture, of why the gathering of the saints is not optional. It is absolutely necessary. You cannot live this out, you cannot participate in this apart from the corporate gathering of the Body of Christ. Lone ranger Christianity is foreign to Scripture. No, we are to gather, and we are to address one another in psalms, hymns, and Spiritual songs.

Now we need to ask, what are these three different categories of songs? There is some discussion and disagreement as to the precise meaning of these terms among commentators and scholars. And the reality is, you can't make too big of distinction among them. All three of them are used interchangeably in the book of Psalms and in the New Testament.

But typically, Psalms are obviously viewed as a reference to the Psalms of the Old Testament. These are songs of praise usually accompanied by a musical instrument. The term *Hymns* was a common word in the culture for a poetic expression sung to a deity, or a festal song of praise. A Hymn is a religious song in its nature. And the word "song," ode, was just the generic word for any song which is likely why Paul used the modifier spiritual. Spiritual songs. Songs of a spiritual nature. I think the overarching idea here that the Scripture is communicating is that we are to use a diverse range of musical form in our corporate singing to worship our God.

Because that is ultimately what this is about, is the worship of God. Look at what he says next: "...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart..." While yes, our singing has a horizontal aspect and purpose to it, ultimately our singing is to the Lord. It is directed to Him. He is the object of our affection and our worship, and we direct our worship to Him and to Him alone.

But I want us to notice a couple of things Paul said here. First, notice the Christological focus to which he is directing our worship in this passage. Paul says singing and making melody *to the Lord*. Every usage of the word 'Lord' in the book of Ephesians is a reference to Christ. Now obviously we worship the triune God in totality. Paul is not saying that we worship the Son to the exclusion of the Father or the Spirit. But the Christ-centeredness of our worship is what makes our worship Christian.

It is the Son who has redeemed us. It is the Son who came as God in the flesh. It is the Son who sacrificed Himself on our behalf. He bought us with His own blood, and we worship Him as a result of that. It is for this reason that every passage in Paul's writings that has been identified or noted to be an early hymn, is completely Christological in its focus: Colossians 1:15: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him (Colossians 1:15-16). That has been identified as an early hymn and it's about Christ.

Or 1 Timothy 3:16: "He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory"

Or Philippians 2:6-11: "Though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

All of these passages have been noted by scholars to be part of an early hymn or confession of the church and all of them are intensely Christ-focused. You see for Christians, we cannot merely speak or worship with generic God-speak. Yes, we do worship God and sing of God and preach about God. But we must go beyond that. Why? Because God has revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. And God has seen to it that our redemption is centered upon His Son. It is through faith in Christ and Christ alone that we are saved.

So yes, we worship God in all of His fullness, but with more specificity we alone worship the Son. We see the beauty of this in the book of Revelation. In chapter 4 there is the heavenly scene where the apostle John is taken straight into the throne room of heaven and there he sees the four living creatures around the throne saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come! And then he sees twenty-four elders fall down before Him who is seated on the throne saying, "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power..." The worship of God in His fullness.

But then you get to chapter five and there appeared to John between the throne and the four living creatures a Lamb standing as though it had been slain. And it says at the sight of Him, they sang a new song: "Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the

elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

This right here is the purpose of all of creation and all of redemption. The reason why we exist, the reason God created in the first place, the direction everything is heading is right there to the worship of Jesus Christ. The Lamb who was slain on our behalf. That's what creation is for. That's why we are here. That's why we exist. And that is why we were saved. And so, when we sing to the Lord, we are taking part in the very creational and redemptive purpose of God.

But notice what he says. This isn't just lip service. This is worship that is generated from the heart.

He says: “Singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.” One thing we have to understand, is that singing isn't in and of itself worship. It is not. True worship is a life, a life that is given over to God. A life that has given allegiance to God and to God alone. A life lived in obedience and for the purposes of God. That is true worship. Romans 12:1: “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

Living a life given over to God is our spiritual worship. Well then, what is singing? Singing is the *expression* of worship. Singing is the God ordained means by which our hearts, that have been given over to God, are able to express our worship. If we live a life contrary to the worship of and obedience to God and then we come in here and sing, we are not worshipping. You are not worshipping if you are just singing with no reality of what you are singing in your heart. To do so is to play the hypocrite. It is to be just like those of whom Isaiah prophesied: “This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me...”

No. True worship generates from the heart. A heart that has been given over and lives for the glory of God. To sing is the overflow of a life of worship. A life of worship causes one to sing. Even in the worst of circumstances, a heart that is given over to God can and does sing. That is why church history is loaded with stories of men and women who when facing hardship or persecution, or even death, resort to singing. Some of you may know the story of John Huss, a pre-reformer who was preaching the gospel one hundred years before the reformation began. He came to his understanding of grace because of the influence of John Wycliff in his life. Eventually Huss was arrested and asked to recant his preaching. He was unwilling to recant, and because of that they executed him by burning him at the stake. and it was said that he sang praises to the Lord Jesus Christ while he burned. Only a true believer, with a heart of worship, could do that.

Or a story you are likely much more familiar with is that of Paul and Silas from Acts 16. These men were beaten to a pulp by an angry mob and then beaten with rods by the magistrate for preaching the gospel. And after that they were thrown into the inner prison, basically a dungeon

locked in stocks. And yet at about midnight that very night, Scripture says that these two men were praying and singing hymns to God. Only a Christian.

Another story, a lot closer to home for us, I remember a few years back—almost six years ago now—when Paul Machado was facing his own death due to liver cancer. I asked Jessica permission to share this, but for those of you who weren't here, Paul was a member of our church, and he was a man who loved the Lord Jesus Christ, and he was 30 years old when he was dying. Caleb and I went to visit him and Jessica in the hospital, and then again later when he was in hospice. And Caleb brought with him his guitar. Because even in the midst of facing death, even in the midst of the prospect of losing her husband, Paul and Jessica lost no trust in the goodness of our God. In fact, the way they wanted to spend our time together beyond fellowship, was to read the Scripture, to pray, and to sing God's praises. So that's what we did.

The question is, who does that? Who can sing in a moment like that? When death is at your doorstep, how do you sing? Only a person with a heart that has been arrested by the grace of God and is given over to him can do that. This is the fruit of a believer—of a Godward focused life. A life that is filled with the Spirit of God. Singing praises to God is part of what it means to be a Christian. It is not optional. We are to sing, church!

The same is true for thanksgiving. The first practice of a Godward focused life is singing, and the second is thanksgiving. Look back at the text: "...addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

Thanksgiving is another non-optional element in the Christian life. Actually, even beyond that, beyond the Christian life, we as mere creatures are called to give thanks to the God who created. God in creation lavished His goodness upon all of creation. The air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, the rain that falls, the land that produces, the sun that shines, everything, everything is a gift of God's common grace upon all of creation.

In fact, in the first chapter of Romans, one of the big indictments upon fallen humanity is the lack of thanksgiving towards the God who created them. Listen to this: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened." One of the greatest evidences of the wickedness of the of fallen human heart is a lack of thanks toward the creator of all things.

Now, if that is true in a general sense upon created humanity, how much more is it true for the redeemed? Our lives should be absolutely characterized by thanksgiving to God. As Paul says here: "...giving thanks always and for everything." You see it's not just that this is a good thing to do as a Christian. Or that this is the optimal way to live the Christian life. No, this is part of your calling. This is part of what it means to be a believer. Listen to what Paul said about this in

1 Thessalonians 5: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. This is the will of God - for your life. To give thanks. Always. And for everything. In every circumstance.

But the question is, how and why do we do that? Because there are circumstances that we pass through that we do not feel thankful for. Some of you are going through things right now that you would rather not be going through. How do we give thanks not only in the midst of it, but even for it? Well, part of the clue is in the way Paul has phrased this. We are to give thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is using language that reminds us of our redemption. It is in Jesus Christ that God is our Father.

This is language that harkens back to the first chapter of Ephesians, to the way he opened this letter: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...” He chose us in Christ for redemption, for adoption before the foundations of the world. In Him we have obtained the forgiveness of our sins as he lavished His grace upon us. As a result, we have a waiting inheritance according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will. No matter what we are going through, no matter what we are facing, that is our status in this world. Always.

So, not only are we to thank God generally as the creator and provider of all things in our lives, but we are to thank God specifically as our Father for pouring out His love upon us through His Son Jesus Christ. And that reality transcends anything that we may pass through in this life.

But even beyond that, it is not just that we give thanks in the midst of hard things, but the believer alone can thank God even for the hard things. This is the glorious truth of Romans 8:28 that for those that love God, all things work together for good. God ordains even our sufferings for the expressed purpose of conforming us to the image of His Son. This is why the Scripture says to Count it all Joy when you pass through trials of various kinds. You can count it joy - count your sufferings as Joy. Because they are working for your good. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4 with regards to our suffering, no matter what it is, this is a light momentary affliction that is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory that is beyond all comparison.

All of your sufferings, not just all of *your* sufferings, all of the sufferings of all of the saints in all places at all times, all piled up and combined, are all a light momentary affliction that is not worthy to be compared with the glory that awaits us. Brothers and sisters, if we really knew the totality of what is in store for us, we could do nothing but worship and give thanks. There would be no complaining. There would be no grumbling. Only worship and thanksgiving.

But even now, even though we can't see it in its fullness yet, it is the fruit of the Spirit-filled believer that gives thanks to God for everything at all times. Because of what He has done. That is a product of a Godward focused life.

Now, lastly, I want us to look at this last clause - this last practice of a Godward focused life, which is submission. More specifically, submission that is motivated by and focused upon Christ. Look at what he says: “...giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.” What he is

saying here is that those who are filled with the Spirit will be marked by willing submission to the relationships in our lives that are ordered by divine ordination.

Now we are not going to spend a lot of time here primarily because what Paul is doing is introducing everything that he is going to be talking about in verses twenty-two all the way through chapter six, verse nine. This is a kind of hinge verse if you will. So, in the coming week we are going to be expounding much on what this looks like lived out.

But a couple of things I do want us to understand here. One is that this is an often-abused verse. Because submission is such a dirty word in our culture, many like to come here and say - "no one is really supposed to submit to anyone in particular, we are all just to submit to one another. We are all just supposed to engage in so-called 'mutual submission.'" Egalitarians particularly like this verse, those who want to do away with the divine order of the household, because they say this principle of mutual submission is to carry on through the text, so husbands and wives are just to submit to one another. The problem with that is that you would have to say that parents should be submitting to their children and masters should be submitting to slaves. For those are the categories that Paul moves onto next.

No, that is not at all what Paul is saying here. The word *submission* means to subject oneself under or to be subordinate. It has nothing to do with value or worth and everything to do with order. It is always used in the context of authority or implied authority. The so-called principle of "mutual submission" doesn't even make sense because it destroys the meaning of the word itself. If everyone submits to one another there is no authority and there is not true submission.

The truth is, what Paul is doing here is giving a general principle for how we are to submit in the relationships in our lives that require submission. And then he goes on to give some examples of what this looks like. Husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. It is not an exhaustive list, but they are examples of where this is fleshed out.

And for the Christian, we are to submit in those relationships that require submission out of reverence for Christ. Quite literally the word here is in the fear of Christ. Many of your translations maintained the literal meaning of the word fear here: "In the fear of Christ." And that is right. The fear of the Lord is to drive our obedience. Likely Paul is still playing off the wisdom literature that says the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.

The idea that is being communicated is that in any relationship where submission is required, that submission is given willingly, freely, not for the sake of the one we are submitting to, but for the sake of obedience to Christ. Because it is by His will, His providence, that we are in that relationship, and it is His word, His directive that He calls us to submission. We see the same thing in 1 Peter 2 with regard to our submission to the government: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution..." And then he says "Fear God. Honor the King" We do not submit for the sake of the one we are submitting to. We submit for the Lord's sake, in the fear of Christ. Knowing that ultimately, we will give an account to Him, not to any worldly authority. And because of that it frees us up to entrust ourselves to His goodness even in our temporal submission.

We are going to talk more about that in the coming weeks. And even the bounds of our submission. It is not absolute. There are some limits. But what we need to see today is that submission, even our submission to others, is a product or a mark of a Godward focused life, because it is a focus on God, on Christ, that drives our obedience and submission.

In the end, church, we can see from this passage just how different we are from the world. We can see the product of a Spirit-filled, Godward-focused life. And this has been especially evident over these past two years. Only the Christians have been singing praises to God and giving thanks to God in the midst of all of this. Even our submission, Christians have willingly submitted where we can, but the true church demonstrated that our submission is in fact for the Lord's sake. Because when the state went outside the bounds of its authority, the church willingly submitted to God rather than man. Why? Because this is not our home. We are not living for this world. We are living for God. And the state is not our God. Caesar is not Lord. Christ is Lord.

That's why Christians are willing to face the consequences. They are willing to suffer loss to continue to do this. To continue to sing His praises and give thanks to Him at all times and for everything. That's why we are here. So, church, I am going to pray, and I am going to give you a moment for prayer and reflection and then we are going to stand and sing. Church, let's make today a day where the culture of our singing goes to another level. Let's sing loud, church. Let those around you hear you. Let's lift our voices together with one voice to the worship of our God. Men, I am specifically calling upon you here to lead out. Lead your families and sing. Let's pray.