

The Indwelling Word

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We read the word of God from Colossians chapter 3. Colossians chapter 3.

1 If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. 2 Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. 3 For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. 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. 9 Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10 And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: 11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all. 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. 14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. 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. 18 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them. 20 Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord. 21 Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged. 22 Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: 23 And

whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; 24
Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance:
for ye serve the Lord Christ. 25 But he that doeth wrong shall receive for
the wrong which he hath done: and there is no respect of persons.

Thus far the reading of the holy and divine scripture. We consider as our text tonight
verse 16,

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.

Beloved in the Lord Jesus Christ, I picked the songs that I picked tonight to smite
legalism on the nose and to declare the liberty of the church of Jesus Christ. You have
heard or heard of the sermon by Reverend Lanning in which he promotes the supposed
scriptural principle of exclusive psalmody and I am totally opposed and charge that
doctrine with legalism. That doctrine is legalism because that doctrine goes beyond the
sacred scripture, the sacred scripture set down for the church, how the church is to
worship God, and in the sacred scripture, the principles of the church's worship are set
down clearly and without any controversy. Over against those principles, there is the
legalism that is being promoted. That legalism comes in the form of the demand to the
church that the church must sing the psalms exclusively. That demand comes with the
charge that to sing any other versification of the sacred scriptures is a sin against the
second commandment, the sin that involves erecting an image in the language of the Old
Testament, that involves bringing strange fire, and that involves disobedience to the
command of God. If that is true, then I led you this evening in the erecting of an image.
The image that we erected was the singing of the Song of Mary, the Song of Zacharias,
and soon the Lord's Prayer. The position you must understand, and you may not be
fooled, the position is not, is the singing of psalms good for the church? The position is
not even should the church sing psalms exclusively. The position is that it is sinful in the
church. It is a violation of the second commandment in the church to sing any other
versification of scripture than the psalms. The position is not even that we don't want
man-made hymns in the church. That's not the position. The position is very clear, and
you may not misunderstand it. The position is that God demands that the church sings the
psalms exclusively, and God forbids by the church singing any other versification of the
sacred scripture.

That principle I absolutely reject. That principle I charge on the basis of the sacred
scripture with legalism. That legalism comes with an appeal to the Reformed creeds. That
appeal is first of all to Lord's Day 35, and the phrase in Lord's Day 35, we may only
worship God in the way that he commands in his word. The argument is, we may only
worship God the way that he commands in his word, and God has commanded that you
may only sing the psalms. That appeal comes with no explicit text from scripture that
says you may only sing the psalms. That position also makes an appeal to Lord's Day 38
where God speaks about the worship of the church on Sunday, but that appeal, in order to
bolster the position that you may only sing psalms, that appeal actually adds to that

Lord's Day. In the quoting of that Lord's Day, it says we must hear the word of God, and we must pray, and we must sing psalms, but that's not in that Lord's Day. The Lord's Day does not say that. That's an addition. And this position makes appeal to Belgic Confession Article 32, in which article of the Belgic Confession, the confession says we reject all human inventions in the worship of God, and the argument is a versification of some other portion of scripture. Not a man-made hymn. The versification of some other portion of scripture is a human invention that it must be rejected.

These appeals to the creeds are wrong. They are wrong because the creeds for the peace of the churches, the creeds are dead silent on the matter. Absolutely dead silent. The creeds had four places where they could legitimately add "and exclusively sing the psalms." They could have added it in Lord's Day 35. They could have added it in Lord's Day 38. They could have added it in Belgic Confession Article 7, or Belgic Confession Article 30, or Belgic Confession Article 32. They didn't. They're dead silent. They don't make a law for the churches.

Still more, that appeal to the creeds is ironic because the very same synod that adopted those creeds and supposedly was teaching by those creeds that the church must only sing the psalms, the same synod said in our adopted order, you shall sing the 150 psalms, the Song of Mary, the Song of Zacharias, the Song of Simeon, the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and some other songs. The very same synod, in other words, that synod that adopted those creedal articles, those creedal articles that bind us, that very same synod was silent on this matter but it broke its silence in Article 69 and it said the church shall sing the 150 psalms and these other things, and that's because the principle, the principle that governs the church's worship is sing the word of God. Sing the word of God. When you sing the word of God, the psalms satisfy that demand to sing the word of God.

What I also find especially troubling, and I'm serious, troubling, troubling to the very depth of my soul, is that those who held these convictions held them in the Protestant Reformed churches. They held them for years. And when our churches came together to form our denomination, we adopted church Article 69 and we adopted the principle of church order Article 69 which is almost exclusive psalmody. They put their name to that and for two years they sang those songs that they now charge with sin. I find that exceptionally troubling and so that I charge that position not only with legalism but that position with being divisive and unnecessarily troubling to churches on a man-made law. That behavior exposes the position as legalism. For decades in some cases, for years in other cases, they sang these songs and now we sin? That exposes, that tears off the cloak of piety that that position has clothed itself in and it shows that that position is a preference that parades itself as a principle and that position, as legalism always does, has troubled the churches.

I myself have been submitted to a new test of orthodoxy, not the creeds, but do you agree with exclusive psalmody? I myself have been charged with wanting hymns in the church. That's what legalism does. There are those who for their whole life sang, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," and that came out of the word of God that was in their heart and now they have to wonder, "Am I displeasing to God?" Legalism always

troubles the churches and I reject, I reject absolutely the charge of sin that when I sing some other versification of scripture, I violate the second commandment. In fact, I believe with that principle of exclusive psalmody, the gospel is at stake. The position that I am opposed to, and I want you to be perfectly clear tonight, the position I am opposed to is not let's sing the psalms. The position is not let us sing the psalms exclusively. The position is this that I oppose, we must only sing the psalms. If you sing the Song of Mary, you violate the second commandment. That's a gospel issue. There, the liberty of the churches is at stake. There too, a new principle contrary to scripture is introduced. What is the principle that governs the church's singing? We all agree what we do in church must be commanded in the word of God. What did God in fact command? That principle is found in our text. That principle is stated in Lord's Day 35 that they appeal to, that we worship God in no other way than he commands in his word. That principle is stated in Belgian Confession Article 7, that the whole manner of worship that God requires of us is spoken to us in his word.

And that principle is the same principle here. The Reformed Creed mentions that principle, the word, the word, the word governs the worship of the church that mentions that principle, and apply that principle to singing because the word of God does. Our text tonight is about your singing. I picked this text deliberately because this is the strongest text that the advocates of exclusive psalmody have. It is their bulwark. If they're going to promote exclusive psalmody, they must appeal to this text and this text overthrows their entire principle because the principle of the text is not you must only sing psalms. The principle of the text is this: let the word of God dwell richly in your heart. That's why you sing. God controls what you sing. The word of God dwells richly in your heart. Because the word of God dwells richly in your heart, you sing the word. Because the word of God dwells richly in your heart, you sing as that word moves you to sing. There's the principle.

The other principle is nothing more than a man-made invention and it's going to be a snare on the churches. It already is. And the churches must reject it. They must not give place to it, no, not for an hour. And at stake is the peace of the churches. Man-made laws and man-made principles that parade themselves around as God-inspired principles, they lead to endless scruples and controversies in the church. The church never has any peace. That principle, you must only sing the psalms and to sing any other versification of scripture is sin, that's the tip of a massive iceberg of controversy. That principle is a part of the whole idea of purity of worship. Next thing you know, we'll be arguing about crosses. And we'll be arguing about organs. And we'll be arguing about whether we can pray silently before the worship service. And the list will never stop because it's legalism.

This principle, this text governs our singing. Governs our singing, you must understand, not only in the church, governs our singing in the home, governs our singing in the school. Let the word of Christ dwell in your heart richly. And so let's consider the text, the indwelling word. Notice what this means, notice to what this leads, and notice the power in the churches. The text before us is about singing. It's about the principle of our singing and I could make an historic argument tonight. The apostle mentions wisdom in the text and there is an argument from wisdom and that argument from wisdom is an

appeal to what the churches have done in the past. There's wisdom to what the churches did in the past. There was wisdom at Dort. There was wisdom in the churches of the past because the churches of the past had the Spirit like we have the Spirit. The churches of the past had the word like we have the word.

Now we test, we test all that the churches do in the past and now by means of the word of God but what did the church of the past say about singing? Did the church of the past say it is wrong to sing any other versification of scripture and you must only sing the psalms? No, she did not. Very early on, going back almost to the time of the apostle, if not to the time of the Apostle John, the church sang the Gloria Patri. She sang that almost after almost every psalm. "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, as it is now and as it shall ever be world without end." They sang that and the church of the past sang the Song of Mary, they sang the Song of Zacharias, they sang the Song of Simeon, they sang the Lord's Prayer, they sang the Apostles' Creed. They sang even the song of the angels that they sing as they stand before the presence of God in heaven, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." They sang that. That's the church of the past.

A very old synod, around the year 500, said that the churches accept the psalms or songs derived from the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments. No other hymn shall be sung. That's their principle. Sing the psalms. And you may also sing things from the canonical writings. That's what was at Dort. Dort had a principle and the principle was almost exclusive psalmody. And let me put that principle to you in the words of the text, "Let the word of Christ dwell in your heart richly." That's the principle. That was the principle of Dort. Dort's principle was not you must sing exclusive psalmody and to sing anything else is sin. That could not be Dort's principle. That could not be Dort's principle because she put those other songs in there. It was downright sinful for Dort to do that. Dort led the churches astray now for 500 years.

That was the wisdom of the church of the past. That was the wisdom that came to Dort through the Reformation, a singing had been really confined to the monks and the priests and the monasteries by the Roman Catholic Church but when the Reformation came, when the gospel came, the gospel revived the church's singing and with that revival of the church's singing, the Reformed churches led by Calvin restored the psalms to their place of honor. But Calvin never condemned hymns. Calvin had in his songbook the Song of Mary, the Song of Zechariah, and so forth, other songs. John Knox, there was no stronger advocate of psalm singing than John Knox and he sang the doxology after every psalter number. Besides having the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed and all these other songs, that was the principle of the church, let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart or sing psalms almost exclusively.

That's the principle of the text. Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart. This is the question. Why did the church sing psalms almost exclusively? That's the question you must ask yourself. Why did the church sing psalms almost exclusively? Because God said you must only sing the psalms? Then the church has sinned nigh on two thousand years. That's a very serious charge. Then I'm sinning and I sin for forty-three years of my life

whenever I could sing. We've been sinning since we started as a congregation. We were sinning back in the Protestant Reformed churches. Why do we sing the psalms almost exclusively? Because the Apostle says here, "Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart." That's the proper principle. If you start there and you stick there, you can't go wrong. If you start there and you stay there, no one can ever disturb your peace with this silly and foolish notion that you must only sing the psalms and to sing anything else is sinful.

"Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart." You know what the word of Christ is. The word of Christ, we can simply say, is the entire scripture. The entire scripture. That's the word of Christ. The word of Christ aren't the little words in red. This entire Bible is the word of Christ. That's what Christ said about the Bible in John 5, verse 39. He said to the unbelieving Pharisees, "In the scripture you think you have eternal life? Search them, for they are they that testify of me." He told them, in all their study of scripture, they could never find Jesus Christ and he said, "I'm everywhere in the scripture." The whole scripture is the word of Jesus Christ. And Jesus Christ said the same thing in Luke 24, verse 44, different words, "that all things which are written of me must be fulfilled that are written in the law of Moses and in the prophets and in the psalms." The whole scripture. That's the threefold Hebrew division of the Bible. The law of Moses and the prophets and the Psalms.

The whole Bible, Jesus is saying, speaks of me and the whole Bible must be fulfilled and what does the whole Bible say about Jesus Christ? The word of Christ is the Bible's revelation about Jesus Christ. It tells us that Jesus Christ is very God. He's the one who made the worlds. It tells us that that God who made the worlds became a man and was born of the virgin Mary. It tells us who Jesus Christ is. As to his person, he is God. As to his natures, he is God in man. And because he is God in man, he is the Savior. That's what the Bible tells us about Jesus Christ and the Bible therefore also tells us about the work of Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ came to call sinners, of whom I am chief. He didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. The Bible tells us that he fully satisfied for all our sins and he fulfilled all righteousness. The Bible tells us he established the kingdom. He made all the promises of God yes and amen.

The whole Bible is the word of God concerning his Son, Jesus Christ, who he is and his glorious salvation. The word of Jesus Christ, you could simply say, is the truth. The word of Jesus Christ is all of the theology of sacred scripture. That theology reveals God in the face of Jesus Christ as the God of our salvation and that word of Christ then, also, is set down in the Reformed creeds. When somebody asks me, "What's the word of Christ?" I can turn to the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgium Confession, and the Canons of Dort and say, "This is Christ's word to you." That's extremely important. When the Reformed faith was setting down the summary of the word of Christ, they didn't say you must only sing psalms. They didn't. They set down the word of Christ, which was, sing the word.

The word of Christ is the truth. We're bound together by these creeds. That's what binds us together. That's the test of your orthodoxy and the test of my orthodoxy. The test of my orthodoxy is not whether I want the principle of exclusive psalmody. That is not the

test of my orthodoxy. I signed the creeds. I died once with the creeds and I'll die again with them because they're the word of Christ and they're dead silent on that matter of exclusive psalmody. And that word of Christ, he says, let it dwell richly in your heart. Those words in wisdom really belong with teaching and admonishing. Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart in wisdom, teaching and admonishing. When the word of Christ dwells richly in your heart, then in wisdom, you're going to teach and admonish. That wisdom there is the faithful, sound application of the word to every situation in life that the church encounters. When the word of Christ dwells richly in your heart, he fills you with himself, that's Christ. He fills you with himself and when he fills you with himself, he fills you with wisdom.

The word, this word, makes wise. Let that word of Christ dwell richly in your heart, and the thought of the text is that that word comes and that word takes his abode with you. The Word that was God and is God, that Word became man, and that Word was crucified, and that Word rose again, and that Word ascended up into heaven. But that Word is nigh you, even in your mouth and in your heart. Jesus Christ, who is the content of the sacred scripture, he has taken his abode in you, so that he is the indwelling Word and there inside of you, he fills you with wisdom, this wisdom, the whole Bible. And then what he says, "Let that word of Christ dwell richly in your heart," he's not an Arminian. Let Christ into your heart, that's not what he's saying. He's saying as that word of Christ comes to you through the preaching of the word, don't fight that word. Don't resist that word. Don't try to overcome that word. Be filled with that word, so that that word lays hold on you in the very depth of your being and that word there is the power in your heart, and from the heart that word influences your entire life, so that your whole life is a life of the word. You live by the word. You worship by the word. You speak by the word. You teach by the word. You admonish by the word. The word is everything.

The word is the sacred scripture, the whole of sacred scripture, the theology of sacred scripture, and when that word of Christ dwells richly in your heart, when it fills you up, so you eat it, and you drink it, and you're satisfied by it, what happens? He says you start to sing. Isn't that true? You sing. What Christian doesn't sing? Now, they might not have very good voices, might not be able to carry a tune in a bucket, but Christians sing. That's what he says, "Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart and sing." That's the thought of the text. Really, you could put a parenthesis around teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, spiritual songs. The thought of the text is let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart singing. That's the thought of the text. It is clear from the parallel passage in Ephesians chapter 5, verse 19. In Ephesians chapter 5, verses 19, he says this, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." His main thought is singing.

When the word of Christ dwells in your heart, when that word lays hold on you, when that word brings unto you all of your salvation and the knowledge of God, you sing, and that singing, he indicates, is worship he says to the Lord. You don't sing merely even to one another. You don't sing merely to yourself. You sing to the Lord. You lift up a cheerful voice and in that singing, you sing to the Lord. That's why in scripture, singing and prayer are really the same. The psalms, the prayers of David the son of Jesse are in it.

It just calls the psalms prayers. The psalms are not only songs, the psalms are prayers. In the same sense that we come before the throne of God in prayer, we also sing before God.

"Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your hearts and sing," and when he says sing, he is not talking only about the church. That is the arbitrary imposition on the text that is made by those who want to say you must only sing the psalms. They make an arbitrary imposition on the text. They put something in the text that isn't there. The Spirit didn't put it there. Now I ask you, read Colossians chapter 3. In Colossians chapter 3, is he only talking about the public worship of God? "Husbands, love your wives. Wives, submit to your husbands. Fathers, don't provoke your children to wrath. Servants, work. Put away all corrupt and filthy communication. Put off the old man." Is that talking just about worship in church? It's talking about your whole life.

Your whole life involves singing. Isn't that true? Who has not gathered at a gathering and you're sitting around, you're having a conversation, and you're enjoying one another's company and somebody says, "Let's sing a psalter number," and how does that not add immeasurably to the evening? Singing comes up out of the joy of our heart because that word of Christ dwells richly in our hearts and we sing. We sing the word.

That is the clear teaching of the text. Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart and sing the word. It is a source of wonderment to me that the advocates of exclusive psalmody are shy about this text, some of them, some of them are just ignorant and they don't see that in the entire context the apostle is talking about our life and all of a sudden here in this verse he switches to public worship? They're shy about the text because they defend their position from the charge of radicalism by saying, "All we're talking about is the public worship. You can sing what you want in your homes, you can sing what you want in the school, but in public worship only sing psalms." The text doesn't allow that. The text is talking about your whole life. There's a principle that governs singing in all your life.

Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart and sing in the home, in the church, in the school. Besides, I don't believe that that disjunction, that sharp separation between public worship and home and school is even creedal. I don't believe it's biblical. I understand perfectly well that there are things that happen in the church worship service that don't, let's say, happen in the school. Women teach at the school. They're not allowed to be ministers. But that's explicitly stated in scripture. But the reality is the life of the child of God is one organic whole and when the Reformed creeds in Lord's Day 35 and the Reformed creeds in Belgic Confession 7 mentioned the whole manner of our worship, it's talking about your whole life. When God told Israel don't make any images, he wasn't saying simply, "Well, you can't have an image in the temple, but you can have one in your house. You can't have an image on Saturday, but you can have one Monday through Friday." That wasn't what he was saying. When he says don't have any images, he was talking about how you worship God in all your life. And the text is too. It's talking about your whole life.

And if this text therefore means, it doesn't, but if it means you must only sing psalms and to sing any other versification of scripture is sinful, then that's true for the school, the home and the church. Then that's what the text means. You must only ever sing the psalms. Rather, the Apostle says let that word dwell richly in your heart and sing, and when you're looking about for what to sing, he gives you what satisfies that requirement. He doesn't say you may not sing some portion of the word of God. How ludicrous. I can preach any text in the Bible, I can pray any text in the Bible, but I couldn't sing it? That's folly. The Apostle when he says sing isn't saying you may never sing some part of the Bible in worship. He's saying to you when you want to sing the word of God, sing the psalms.

Those words, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, they could mean three different kinds of songs, psalms and hymns written by somebody and spiritual songs written by somebody. That's a possibility. Even Calvin admits that that's a possibility and the reason is because those words, psalms, not hymns now, psalms and spiritual songs, in the New Testament do not always refer just to the psalms. I'll prove that to you. In 1 Corinthians 14, the apostle says, "Why is it when you come together, everybody has a psalm?" And he says that in the context of the Spirit's supernatural gifts at the time of the apostles. The Spirit gave people the ability to heal people, he gave the ability to have a new revelation. They'd have a new revelation, it wasn't in the Bible, and among those, he gave them the ability to sing spontaneously. They could sing the word of God in the music of the Holy Spirit, instantly and spontaneously, just like they could speak in tongues they'd never learned. That wasn't a psalm. That was some inspired composition of the Holy Spirit. Then that word spiritual songs, the word song is really ode, in the Revelation, in the book of Revelation, in Revelation chapter 5 and in Revelation chapter 15, in the heavenly sanctuary of all places, they sang two odes. They sang two spiritual songs, worth is the Lamb, and they sang the song of the Lamb.

So those words could mean three different kinds of songs and I suspect that the reason that the proponents of this exclusive psalmony do not appeal to these texts is of the longstanding disagreement about what those words mean, and the fact that the definitive explanation of what those words mean cannot be settled on the basis of scripture. If the Bible only ever used the word psalm to refer to the psalms, okay. If the Bible only ever used the word ode to refer to a psalm, okay. But the Bible doesn't. And the other position is that those three words, psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, all refer to psalms, that in the book of psalms, there are psalms, and there are hymns, and there are spiritual songs, three different kinds of psalms. I suppose that's defensible. I could go along with that. I don't have any problem with that interpretation whatsoever. Let's say they refer to psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Then what that means is this, when the apostle says, "Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart and sing," he's not prescribing the psalms exclusively. He is saying something about those psalms. That book of psalms encapsulates the entire word of God. That's a beautiful doctrine. It's a very beautiful doctrine.

The psalms satisfy the requirement to sing the word of God. That's why you and I, if we wanted to, could just simply sing the psalms. Seventeen years of my ministry, I picked

more songs that weren't psalms tonight than I have in seventeen years. I don't ever pick the psalms. We could just sing the psalms. Can't now. Now I know what's behind that suggestion. Can't now. Somebody thought, "Well you can't have a cross in church." Put a big one up. It's not a sin. Now I know what's behind that. You must only sing psalms. Legalism. But I'd go along with just psalms because the psalms encapsulate the entire word of God. All theology of scriptures in those psalms. The whole range of experiences of the child of God in the church in those psalms.

That answers the retort of those who say to me, and will say to you too, if you believe what I'm preaching tonight, and you say, well, the principle is sing the word of God and they'll say to you this, "Get busy versifying the entire scripture then." My response is I don't need to. God already did that. Not forbidden to, but I don't need to. They're all in the psalms. All the thoughts of scripture, all the theology of scriptures, all in the psalms. Don't tell me to get busy versifying the whole scripture. God did that already. What's your problem? Don't you understand that? I don't need to waste my time with that. But it's not sinful to versify scripture and sing it. The Holy Spirit did it. He took scripture and he versified it. He made a song out of it.

And, too, that thought of the text, "Let the word of Christ dwell richly in your heart and sing, and when you're looking about for something to sing, sing the psalms," that also answers those who say, we need hymns. We need hymns. And you say, "Well, why do we need hymns? Well, those psalms, they're written in the Old Testament and we live in the age of fulfillment, and there's things that happened in the New Testament that aren't covered in the psalms." We go, "Oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. The Holy Spirit wrote all the scripture in those psalms. I don't need to make any hymns." Not forbidden to, but I don't need to.

Psalms. Sing the psalms. That's good for the home. You want to sing the Song of Mary, Zacharias, or whatever in the home, go ahead. You're not sinning. I have to tell you that tonight. You're not sinning. Sing the word with grace in your heart, make melody to the Lord. Not sinning. Sing the psalms. Sing the psalms. There's nothing like the psalms for the depth of theology, for their timelessness of expression, for the range, wide range of the experience of the child of God. We go through all kinds of things in life, sometimes we're on the height of faith, sometimes we're in a trough of despair and the psalms address every part of that. From theology to eschatology, the psalms cover all of theology.

Sing the psalms and it's not sinful to sing scripture, and that explanation too, when the apostle says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in your hearts richly, singing, and what you're going to sing is the psalms," not exclusively, but you're going to sing the psalms. They get pride of place. They get the honorable position. That also explains why you versify the psalms. We, in fact, don't sing the psalms, not literally. We sing a versification. Some poet, I don't know all of them, some poet took the words of the psalm and he put it into poetic form and he put a tune to it. Some of those versifications are more literal. Some are less literal. But they all express the theology of the psalms. That's the key. We may versify the psalms. From a certain point of view, there might be many things that I want

to improve about this book, but this book gives me the psalms. Not because it gives me the psalms word for word, but it gives me the theology of the psalms and here I want to warn you, you adopt this principle as a church that you must only sing exclusive psalmody and the next argument you're going to be having is how close are we singing to the psalms? That's the next argument you're going to have and it can be proven historically that that principle leads to the chanting of the psalms. Now there's something very beautiful about the chanting of the psalms. It's not what God requires. You must sing the psalms, although not exclusively, but almost exclusively, and when you sing them, sing a good, faithful versification of them. You don't need to sing the King James Version and chant it.

And why? Why can you versify the psalms? When I read the Bible, I read the words, the very words. When I preach, I preach those very words. Why can I versify the psalms? Because the principle is sing the word. Sing. Sing, making melody in your hearts to the Lord. And that position, sing the psalms, give them pride of place, give them the honor in the congregation, that gives honor to the word. It's the word that's the issue in our worship, the word. You may never lose sight of that. That's what this position does. This position takes the focus ultimately off the word. This is going to be your argument, how close are we to the psalms? You're not even talking about the word anymore. The word. Sing the word. And that singing of the word has power in the church. That's why the apostle says, sing. Singing has power. Singing really, next to theology and preaching, is one of the greatest gifts that God gave to man. That's why the church has always been on guard against what she sings, because you can sing heresy right into the church because that poetry, along with that tune, it insinuates itself right into your heart.

How often isn't it that when you're going to make a theological point, the psalms instantly come to mind, and you just sing them? That's what singing does. It insinuates that truth into your heart. That's in one part how the word of Christ dwells richly in you. It dwells richly in you very often through singing. Mothers sing to their children, "The Lord is my shepherd." The children sing at school to one another. In the church we sing to each other. At home we sing around the dinner table the psalms. When we have a gathering we sing. And that word has a power. Do you understand that that word has a power, not because it's an exclusive psalm? The word has power because it's the word. The same Word that made the world, the Word that was made flesh, the Word that dwelt among us so we beheld his glory, the Word that dwells in our heart, that Word is the power. He's the power of God unto our salvation. Not that it's an exclusive psalm. The word. The word as it's contained in the whole Bible and if you want to sing that word to each other, sing the psalms almost exclusively because those psalms are the word.

And it's that power. It's a power and beauty of singing that I've really been robbed. I've been robbed of that. I don't know about you, maybe you're stronger than I am and you weren't robbed, but I was robbed. I was robbed of my peace. I was sitting munching on the gospel peacefully. I was robbed of my joy. I had joy in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. I was robbed of my happiness in the worship. I was worshipping my God as he commands and a man-made law was brought in and I was robbed. And there are others who were robbed too. I saw a couple, not here, when the whole congregation was lifting

up with one voice to the Lord, they sat mute because it wasn't supposedly a psalm. They were robbed. That position, that exclusive psalmody, when it's brought to heaven and the entire heavens erupt with "Worthy is the Lamb," they'll sit mute and mar the beautiful scene of heaven.

This position robs the church. When we sing to each other, we teach each other. That's the power of singing, it teaches. It teaches us about the glory of our God, the perfection of our salvation, our hope, our joy, our comfort. It teaches powerfully. That's why we teach our little children to sing very quickly, almost as soon as they can memorize things, "Okay, we're going to learn the Lord is my shepherd. We're going to sing, Praise God from whom all blessings flow." We're going to learn those things. They teach. But when you're arguing about a stupid man-made principle, and that's really what I want to call it, stupid. Now in our churches, if that faction doesn't back off its legalism, we're going to get a whole series of silly sermons about what we should sing. Really? We were all singing the psalms. I didn't pick hymns for you. We were happy with the psalms. And now that's been taken away. Our happiness has been taken away. We've been robbed of the power of that singing. That's nine-tenths of the reason why I'm preaching this to you tonight. I do not want you to be robbed. I don't want you to go home and look at your wall and see on the wall a picture that says, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow," and think, "Wow, I might not be able to have that." That's a sure sign you're dealing with legalism.

Sing the word and teach one another. That's its power. And admonish. That word admonish, I suppose it could mean rebuke. You can rebuke one another by words of song. But it encompasses the whole Christian's concern for his brother. You see a brother straying, you sing to him. You see a brother down, you sing to him. You see a brother happy, you join him in singing. That's the power of singing and what we sing is the word. It's that word that is the power. And those that disturb our peace with their legalism, they must show with a specific text from scripture where God says you must only sing the psalms. That's their job. They ought to bring it to the Classis before they spread it all over the church. We have an adopted position. It's been the Reformed position for 500 years. That position is sing the word. Express this way, sing the psalms almost exclusively. I could be content for the rest of my life in my home and at my school and in my worship service singing nothing but the psalter. I could be very content with that. But I will never do it on the ground that to sing a versification of another portion of scripture in the worship service is sin. That I must oppose as legalism. Amen.

Let us pray.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee for thy word. Bless that word unto our heart. Especially by means of the word, restore to us our peace and our joy in singing that we may teach one another and admonish one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, because the word of Christ dwells richly in our heart, singing and making melody, giving thanks to thee our God for our salvation. Forgive us, Lord, all our sins. We ask this for Jesus' sake. Amen.