

Turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 3. This past Lord's Day we considered how the regulative principle of worship applies to the element of sung praise in worship. We saw that Paul's command to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs in Ephesians 5:19 is a command to sing the 150 Psalms of Scripture. Today we come to the parallel passage to Ephesians 5:19 found in Colossians 3:16, but here Paul places a specific emphasis upon this command that is not as explicit in the Ephesians passage. With that in mind, turn your attention now to the reading of God's Word from Colossians chapter 3 verse 16.

Read Colossians 3:16

Pray

The doctrine of exclusive psalmody may be the most disputed doctrine within Reformed circles. Some believe that the psalms are not suitable for New Covenant worship because they are part of the types and shadows of the Old Covenant and find their fullness in the person and work of Christ. They argue that because of this we ought to sing songs which speak of the redemptive work of Christ from the vantage of this side of the cross. Others say they appreciate the psalms and even try to incorporate them on occasion, but the hymns of the church are what the congregation loves and what should be sung primarily in worship. Perhaps the most frequently argued objection to this doctrine is that we ought to sing the name of Jesus Christ, and if we only sing the psalms then we never sing His name. Interestingly enough, this argument is never used against singing the popular hymn Amazing Grace. While those making these arguments would not agree with this assessment, each of these arguments really boils down to a diminished view of the Psalter. Inherent in these objections is the notion, whether intentional or not, that the Psalter is lacking and can be improved upon by incorporating man-made hymns in worship. This is not just my conclusions drawn from these arguments, but has been the historic Reformed understanding. William Romain, a very prominent theologian in the 18th century, did not mince words with his conclusions drawn on man-made

hymns. He writes, “I want a name for that man who should pretend that he could make better hymns than the Holy Ghost. His collection is large enough; it wants no addition. It is as perfect as its Author, and not capable of any improvement. Why, in such a case, would any man in the world take it into his head to sit down and write hymns for the use of the Church? It is just the same as if he were to write a new Bible, not only better than the old, but so much better that the old may be thrown aside. What a blasphemous attempt! And yet our hymn-mongers, inadvertently I hope, have come very near to this blasphemy; for they shut out the Psalms, introduce their own verses into the Church, sing them with great delight, and, as they fancy with great profit; although the practice be in direct opposition to the command of God, and, therefore cannot possibly be accompanied with the blessing of God.” These are strong words, but Romain is absolutely correct. These objections to the exclusive use of psalms in worship hold no water. The Psalter is sufficient for New Covenant worship. It is what we ought to sing with newness in the heart from this side of calvary. It is where we see the greatest expression and presentation of Christ in song, greater than any hymn ever penned. So the theme we will consider this morning is undeniable truth that the Psalms of Scripture are the very word of Christ. We will consider this theme in just two ways: first, Paul’s command that the word of Christ dwell in you richly; and second, that Christ is present throughout the psalms.

So first, let us consider Paul’s command in the opening line of our passage, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.” Before we can understand what Paul is commanding here, we must first understand exactly what the word of Christ is. The obvious answer is the sections of Scripture in which Christ Jesus is speaking. Some of you may recall the red-letter Bibles. You may have heard of red-letter Christians, those who held the red letters in their Bibles in higher regard than the black letters. This used to be popular in evangelicalism but lately the liberals have adopted this same mentality in an attempt to justify their sinful lifestyles. Are we to simply look to the red letters, the words which are recorded in

Scripture that Jesus Christ Himself spoke during His earthly ministry, and to hold those words in higher esteem than everything else in Scripture? Is that what Paul is commanding here in this verse? Obviously not. He later says in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The Spirit of Christ Himself is the Author of all of Scripture, and that is how every word in this Bible ought to be understood. This is the reason why several years ago I personally made it a point to never purchase another red-letter Bible again. The red letters and the black letters are of equal weight and ought to be held together in the highest regard, because they are all the inspired Word of the Lord. The word of Christ is not confined to only those words which He uttered during His time on earth that are recorded in Scripture. No, the entirety of the Scriptures can rightly be understood as the word of Christ.

So the command of the Apostle is that the word of Christ dwell in you richly. This Word ought to take up residence in your heart. The word dwell gives us great understanding of the place of Scripture in the life of a believer. If you dwell in a place it is not somewhere that you occasionally go to and enjoy for a time and then leave. When you go on vacation and stay in a hotel do you say that the hotel is your dwelling place? Of course not. That would be absurd. Everyone knows that visiting somewhere for a short time is not dwelling there. Where is your dwelling place? It is your home. It is where you spend the majority of your time. It is where you lay your head night after night. It is where you live. It is where you have taken up residence. That is how it must be with the believer and the word of Christ. It must make its home within your heart. It must take up residence within you. It is to dwell in you richly. Unfortunately, there are many Christians whom the word of Christ only visits occasionally as though it were on vacation. Those who never take up the Word unless there is some major event or crisis going on in their life. I remember when I was young hearing people

say that you can tell the spiritual state of a person by how much dust is on their Bible. While this is an exaggeration, there is some truth to it. Friends, if you are not taking up the Word daily, meditating on it, soaking it up like a sponge, then you will never grow and mature in the faith. Psalm 1 says of the blessed man, “His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” This must be true of you. This is what it means to have the word of Christ dwell in you richly. It must take up residence in your heart and guide and direct every step of your life. Matthew Henry writes, “We must take our instructions and directions from it, and our portion of meat and strength, of grace and comfort, in due season, as from the master of the household.”

And there is a qualifier that the Apostle uses in how the word of Christ is to dwell in you richly. It must be in all wisdom. You cannot be flippant or play fast and loose with the Word. It is not some toy to be used for your own pleasure. It is not some instrument that can be manipulated to fit whatever task or purpose you have. It must dwell in you with all wisdom. Wisdom is truth applied. It is taking what is sound, what is true, what is right and applying it to your life. Thankfully we have two entire books of wisdom in the Scripture which can aid in this. The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are compilations of sacred wisdom written primarily by King Solomon, and are great helps in applying the truths of Scripture to your life. But wisdom is found all throughout the Scriptures, not just in those two books. And more importantly, wisdom is a gift given by the Holy Spirit to believers. He is the one who imparts wisdom to you. You must go to the Lord and ask that the Spirit would guide you in all wisdom whenever you approach the Scriptures. If you are seeking to apply the Word to your life on your own then you will likely fall into the deadly pit of vain moralism or intellectualism. Both of these pitfalls are destructive to the soul and will tear down the body of Christ in a flash. Having the word of Christ dwell in you richly ought not be something which puffs you up. It ought not be a source of speculation which oftentimes leads men down crazy theories. But it also ought not be a mere academic

exercise. The word of Christ dwelling in you is not in order that you may become some great thinker of the age. No, the word of Christ dwelling in you rich must be in all wisdom, building you up and making you grow as Christians, and enabling you to conduct yourselves in every thing as becomes Wisdom's children.

So, brothers and sisters, I ask, does the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom? Does it truly dwell in you, or does it simply make visits every now and then whenever you decide it's time to take up your Bible. Friends, you must be in the Word regularly, daily, feasting on it. Be as the prophet in Jeremiah 15:16, "Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts." Utilize Bible study aids such as Charles Spurgeon's *Morning and Evening* or Octavius Winslow's *Morning Thoughts* or Joel Beeke's *Family Worship Bible Guide* to help you dive deeper into your Scripture readings each day. Go through a daily Bible reading plan to ensure that you are investing your time into knowing the things of God and are truly soaking up His Word. Make it a point to begin and end each day in the Scriptures, allowing the Word to take up residence in your heart. Friends, you must let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.

The Apostle Paul gives this command, but he does not let the command simply end there. He goes on to apply it in a very particular way, through the song of the Church. "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." It is in taking up and singing these psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, the 150 Psalms of Scripture that we considered last week, that the word of Christ dwells in you richly in all wisdom. This verse single-handedly destroys the objection against exclusive psalmody that we never explicitly sing of Christ. Not only do we explicitly sing of Christ, but we sing His very own word. John Calvin says the Psalter is "An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul; for there is not an emotion of

which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror.” Martin Luther called the Psalter a little Bible for it contains every aspect of Scripture in condensed form. But perhaps the words of Augustine are the most true, “The voice of Christ and His Church was well-nigh the only voice to be heard in the Psalms.” Christ Himself confirms this in Luke 24:44-45 in His discussions with the disciples after His resurrection, “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.” This is why the Psalms are just as applicable to us as New Testament believers as they were when they were written, for we have the full revelation of Christ and can rightly understand the true meaning of the Psalms. This is also why we can proclaim that the Psalter contains the songs of Christ Himself. So let’s take a look at some psalms to get a glimpse of how Christ is present in this book of praise.

Turn with me now to Psalm 22. I will read the first 14 verses. Listen to the words of this Psalm and see our suffering Savior calling out in these words. “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. Many bulls have

compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion. I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.” The very first verse ought to be of great familiarity to us, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Are these not the very words of our Savior as He hung on the cross? Here the psalmist is given a prophetic insight into the suffering of Christ during His passion. If it were not for this Psalm, we would have to speculate and draw some stretched conclusions about the mental state of Christ during this time. But because we have Psalm 22 on this side of the cross, we have a full understanding of what the Psalm is speaking of as well as a greater understanding of how to approach the passion narratives in the Gospels, particularly those passages pertaining to the anguish Christ suffered on our behalf.

Consider Psalm 40:7-8, “Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” These words are attributed to Christ in Hebrews 10, and here we sing of the perfect obedience of Christ Jesus as the God-man. Or look at Psalm 69. In Psalm 69, we have Christ speaking plainly — but, suddenly, He says in verse 5, “O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee.” Is this still Christ speaking? Yes it is — now as our sin-bearer made to be sin for us. He is not a sinner personally — but He is loaded with our sins for which He is personally guilty. Is this not what we see in 2 Corinthians 5:21, “For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” We see Christ’s own example in letting the word dwell in Him richly in Psalm 119, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee... Teach me, O Lord, the way of thy statutes; and I shall keep it unto the end... O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.” We sing of the purity and perfection of Christ Jesus in Psalm 139:21-24, “Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine

enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Or consider perhaps the most famous messianic psalm, Psalm 110, “The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth. The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek. The Lord at thy right hand shall strike through kings in the day of his wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, he shall fill the places with the dead bodies; he shall wound the heads over many countries. He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.” Here we see Christ exalted in His mediatorial role over all things. The Lord, Jehovah, said to David’s Lord, Adonai. This is the Father speaking to the Son, “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” This Psalm is not just about Christ, it is the Father speaking directly to Christ. This Psalm is literally a song of Christ. If you continue on reading you get to verse 4, “The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.” The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that this is in reference to the priestly nature of Christ who, being of the tribe of Judah, is of a greater lineage of priests than the Levites and is able to make intercession on behalf of His people as their great High Priest. Understanding this Psalm puts everything in perspective regarding the Epistle to the Hebrews. And Hebrews shows us the fullness of this Psalm.

The final Psalm I want us to look at is one that some people will adamantly argue is not for Christians today. In fact, many hymnals do not include a single one of these imprecatory psalms because they view them as unsuitable for Christian praise. Turn with me now to Psalm 58 as we look and see how the words of an

imprecatory psalm are still the word of Christ. “Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men? Yea, in heart ye work wickedness; ye weigh the violence of your hands in the earth. The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies. Their poison is like the poison of a serpent: they are like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ear; Which will not hearken to the voice of charmers, charming never so wisely. Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth: break out the great teeth of the young lions, O Lord. Let them melt away as waters which run continually: when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces. As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away: like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun. Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in his wrath. The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So that a man shall say, Verily there is a reward for the righteous: verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth.” What can this have to do with Christ? Where is the love and mercy? Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is a righteous judge and He will come to judge the living and the dead. Are Christ’s works of judgement not made absolutely clear in this Psalm? Does it not show His absolute hatred for His enemies? Does it not, by contrast, show the absolute beauty of His salvation? Yes, it should make us uncomfortable, for the judgement of our Holy and Righteous King will be devastating to those who are not His. But this also displays the amazing grace of God that His wrath isn’t poured out on all men, but that Christ’s chosen are covered by His atoning sacrifice. We must see that the Psalter is the songbook of Christ, and we must seek to understand it as such in order to see the absolute majesty of the word of Christ.

Brothers and sisters, let us never forget that Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God who is also the Son of Man, took every word of every Psalm upon His own lips. When we praise God with the Psalms we are using the very same words that Christ Himself used. He did not view the Psalter as unsuitable when He instituted New Testament

worship, and neither should we. The Person of Christ is fully presented in the Psalter, as well as His work. Matthew Vogan puts it perfectly, “We have the living presence of Christ as we sing His own words concerning Himself in the Psalms. Christ indwells His people and enters into a special communion with them through His Word.” Why would we need anything else? Why would we take anything else upon our lips as praise to the Lord? Friends, the Psalms of Scripture are the very word of Christ.