

CORNERSTONE MUSIC



Expository Singing

(Music for the Glory of God and the Edification and Sanctification of God's People)

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Feb. 8th, 2023

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At Cornerstone we desire to live out the command in Colossians 3:16,

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with gratefulness in your hearts to God”.

As a resource for you and your family during the week and on Sundays, we are launching Cornerstone Music. The purpose of this ministry is to help and encourage you as you seek to honor the Lord in your worship and devotion to Him both at home during the week, and corporately on Sunday.

With the heart and purpose of music at Cornerstone centered around Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18-19, we want to sing old and new hymns, as well as write new songs for our church (Psalm 96:1-6), all in the context of God’s word dwelling richly in the lives of the body at Cornerstone. Cornerstone Music will provide playlists with biblical and faithful music as well as songs and musical resources that have been written for Cornerstone.

EXPOSITORY SINGING
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Expository Singing

Faithful preaching exposes the Word of God to the listener by preaching the Scriptures in context with themselves. God's message is proclaimed to the ears of the listener in the way in which He intended it to be when a proper hermeneutic (way in which we interpret) is employed in light of the grammatical and historical context. God's Word means the same thing for us today that it meant when He spoke it through the mouths of the apostles and prophets in the contexts in which it was inspired. Expository preaching exposes the meaning, depth, and richness of God's word to the ears of those listening. It is the Spirit's work to apply that faithful preaching to the hearts of those sitting under it (1 Corinthians 2). Preaching is for the heart.

Singing is also for the heart. Expository singing, although not a term normally used for singing, and certainly different and distinct from the primacy of preaching, is a way in which the Word of God is exposed to our ears in its proper context. The Spirit of God is at work in our hearts as we expound God's Word to one another in our singing, and the word of Christ dwells in us richly as we honor him with outward and inward melodies. Even as preaching is a public proclamation of God's Word aimed at the inner man, singing is a "telling" and "declaring" of God's Word aimed at the inner man for the glory of God. Psalm 96:2-3 says,

"Sing to Yahweh, bless His name; Proclaim good news of His salvation from day to day. Recount His glory among the nations, His wondrous deeds among all the peoples".

We are to proclaim the gospel of God's salvation *every day!* We must recount (tell) of His glory and of His wondrous deeds among every nation and people that the

Lord has placed us in. In Psalm 96, we do this in the context of our music as we gather in corporate worship.

Colossians 3:16 says,

“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”

Expository singing is meant to expound the word of God to us through music. We are to teach and admonish one another with our songs using the wisdom, depth, and clarity of God’s Word to do so. The Word of Christ is to *dwell in us richly* and this should be evident in our singing. This understanding of singing found in Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18-19 adds weight to the importance of fidelity and faithfulness in our singing and music. The songs we sing in church on Sunday morning, and throughout the week at home, are in this way, a type of musical sermon. These musical sermons we preach first to our own heart as the Word of God dwells in us richly, and then to one another as we teach, admonish, and encourage one another with the truths of Scripture through our singing. Our songs are meant to be more than just clever rhymes with a Bible theme and trendy music, they are 3-5 minute musical sermons that expound the Word of God to us.

Sanctifying Singing

The “Word of Christ” in Colossians 3:16 that is to dwell in us richly as we sing to one another is the same Word that constantly bears fruit in the believer. In Colossians 1 Paul says that he gives thanks to God ever since he heard of the saving faith of the Colossians, and because they heard and responded to

“...the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you, just as in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and multiplying, just as it has been doing in you also since the day you heard and understood the grace of God in truth”. Col 1:5b-6

God’s Word bears fruit in the believer when they *hear* and *understand* it. Paul’s prayer in Colossians 1:9-12 is that they would be full of the knowledge of God’s will with all spiritual wisdom and understanding, and that they would bear fruit because of that knowledge. According to Colossians 3:16, the central purpose of our singing is teaching and admonishing one another *for the purpose of sanctification*. Verse 17 makes this clear by saying that everything we do in word or deed is to be done in the name of Christ.

To grasp this, we have to look at the entire context of Colossians 3 (Ephesians 5 shares a similar context for church singing). Leading up into Paul’s writings to the

church in Colossae about music, he tells them they are to seek the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God and *set their minds* on it. Why? Because their lives are hidden with Christ in God. They are to lay aside all the unfruitful works of darkness that they formerly walked in and put on the new man who is “being renewed to a full knowledge according to the image of the One who created him” (v1-10). This renewing is for all people who are in Christ (v11). The fruit of that knowledge is a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and genuine love. It is then that the peace of God rules in our hearts and we are a thankful people (v12-15). Our songs are to flow out of those very things (v16). Thankful hearts and godly lives that follow (v17) are the result of the Spirit’s work of sanctification through the Word. Church music and singing then, in its proper context, is a way in which we teach and admonish one another for sanctification and edification. It is a way in which we collectively and corporately set our minds on things above, not on things below.

Singing for the Saved

In light of everything written above, this should go without saying: church music is not for the unsaved, rather, it is for the saved. We should not tailor it to the taste of the unbeliever under the pretense of evangelism. Only saved souls with their minds set on things above and not on things below, saints with the Word of Christ dwelling in them richly, can sing in the way the scriptures tell us to sing. Then the singing of God’s people can be a telling and declaring of God and His salvation (Psalm 96), and in this way it is evangelistic. If the unsaved are among us, may the Lord use our singing to bring them to repentance.

Singing to one another (in the unity of Christlikeness)

Tom Pennington in his book *Three Hallmarks of a Biblical Church Member* says this:

“Ephesians 5: 18–19 says, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord” (emphasis added). Paul calls the believers in Ephesus to speak to one another in song (the horizontal aspect of worship). He also tells them to sing with their hearts to the Lord (the vertical aspect of worship). Paul makes the same points to the church of Colossae. He writes, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God” (Col. 3: 16, emphasis added). Paul instructs the Colossians to teach and admonish one another through song (horizontal), and he also calls them to sing unto the Lord (vertical). When we sing, as believers, we’re to express to one another what we know to be true of God and His Word. We’re to show that our confidence and hope are found in

the living God and His Son. We're to affirm the great truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ to one another."¹

As the blood bought church of Christ sings together corporately, we are collectively worshipping God while living out Psalm 96 - *proclaiming* the gospel of God's salvation to one another and ascribing worth to Him. Our singing is *recounting* to one another the wondrous deeds of God. We are teaching and admonishing one another (for sanctification and edification) with the knowledge of God. It is aimed at our own hearts individually as well as corporately. Our worship of the Lord individually is effective in collectively teaching and admonishing one another. This teaching and admonishing one another through singing is to be done in gentleness, kindness, humility, patience, and forgiveness (v12-13). (V12) All with a heart of compassion because we are all saved by the grace of God, elected in Him before the foundation of the world. We are a "set apart" people. Set apart by God for good works (Eph. 2:10). And as God's elect, we are all beloved by God Col. 3:12). He is faithful to us even when we are unfaithful to Him.

This way of life then, is to bring about the unity and like-mindedness of God's People. We are to bear with one another and forgive one another even as Christ forgave us (v13)! Philippians 2 shares this same way of thinking:

"Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, fulfill my joy, that you think the same way, by maintaining the same love, being united in spirit, thinking on one purpose, doing nothing from selfish ambition or vain glory, but with humility of mind regarding one another as more important than yourselves, not merely looking out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this way of thinking in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although existing in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a slave, by being made in the likeness of men." Phil. 2:1-7

Singing from the Heart

Again, in the same chapter quoted above, Tom Pennington says,

*"Worship has both a vertical focus—God—and a horizontal focus—the people around you. Although our worship is to be primarily focused on God, worship with other believers is actually a chance for us to be aware of, and minister to, the people around us. This balance between the vertical and the horizontal exists in all elements of worship. Your worship should be offered to God, but intentionally offered with and for others."*²

¹ *Three Hallmarks of a Biblical Church Member* by Tom Pennington. Greater Heritage (Nov. 11th 2022)

² *Three Hallmarks of a Biblical Church Member* by Tom Pennington. Greater Heritage (Nov. 11th 2022)

While it is true that we are essentially singing to one another as described above (and clearly laid out in Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19, and elsewhere in Scripture), singing corporately or at home is ultimately between the individual and God. We must *each* let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. We must, *each one of us*, sing with thankfulness *in our hearts* to the Lord. The Lord looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). We must ask then, what manner of worshippers are we to be? Jesus clarifies this in John 4:22-24. The Samaritan's were worshipping without the knowledge of God. The Scripture did not dwell in the Samaritan woman richly. Jesus tells her that true worshippers worship the Father in "Spirit and Truth".

Tom Pennington again says,

*"In John 4:24, Jesus adds that the true worshiper must worship "in truth." That means, first, our worship must be directed to the true God revealed in Scripture. There's no true worship if it's directed anywhere besides the God of the Bible. Second, we must worship God based on the complete revelation of Scripture. Scripture alone must inform our worship. To worship God "in truth" we must worship Him solely according to the biblical revelation of both who He is and how He desires to be worshiped. To worship in spirit means we must worship from within, from our souls."*³

Our worship must be with Scripture informed genuineness. Spirit filled worship is worship that comes from the Word of Christ dwelling in us richly (Col. 3:16) when it is applied to our hearts through the Spirit. We worship God *who is spirit* with our spirit. This is always accompanied by exemplary lives of holiness and humility that tremble at God's Word. These are the ones that the Father is seeking to worship Him: Scripture informed hearts and minds who submit to and live by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Isaiah 66:2b says,

"But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word".

God goes to church with the humble and repentant one who reverently trembles at His word. ⁴

³ *Three Hallmarks of a Biblical Church Member* by Tom Pennington. Greater Heritage (Nov. 11th 2022)

⁴ See *Where God Goes to Church (Isaiah 66:1-5)*, a sermon by Daron Roberts at Cornerstone Bible Church on 2-13-22

Singing with Thankfulness

Only when we worship God in spirit and truth can genuine thankfulness well up in our hearts. How can we be genuinely thankful to God if we do not have the spiritual knowledge of Him? Thankfulness also comes from our experience with God's kindness when we "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8a). But we will not taste unless we fear Him (Psalm 34:7,9). Thankfulness, like contentment, comes with maturity. We are to set our minds on things above (Col. 3:2). Only then can we live out our calling to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts regardless of our circumstances (Col. 3:15). This produces genuine, joyous thankfulness and a heart that is pleasing to the Lord.

The Primacy of the Pulpit

Just as the command for singing in Colossians 3 and Ephesians 5 comes in the context of Paul's instructions for sanctification, the singing of God's people has always been centered around instruction for godliness through the preaching of His word. In 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2, we read that

"All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be equipped, having been thoroughly equipped for every good work."

It is this Scripture that Paul, by God's authority, charges Timothy to preach. The Scriptures, through the Spirit, hold everything that pertains to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1), and they are to be preached faithfully. When the people of God gather, above all else, the Word of God is to be preached. Nothing is to eclipse this. Consider the account of Nehemiah in Nehemiah 8-9:

"And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they said to Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which Yahweh had commanded to Israel. Then Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly of men, women, and all who could understand when listening, on the first day of the seventh month. And he read from it before the square which was in front of the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of men and women, those who could understand; and all the ears of the people were attentive to the book of the law. Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden podium which they had made for the purpose."
Neh. 8:1-4a

They were attentive to the law and desired it to be preached to them. Which Ezra did from a wooden pulpit. Then Ezra, and 13 men with him, expound on the words of the Law that were read and *exposit* it to the people:

“And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed Yahweh the great God. And all the people answered, “Amen, Amen!” while lifting up their hands; then they bowed low and worshiped Yahweh with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, were providing understanding of the law to the people while the people stood in their place. They read from the book, from the law of God, explaining and giving insight, and they provided understanding of the reading”. Neh. 8:5-8

Preaching is the primary way in which the Word of God is delivered with clarity and depth to His people (the reason God gifts the church with called, qualified, and gifted pastor teachers; Eph. 4:11b-12). Nehemiah 8:12 is especially insightful when considering the primacy of preaching. They *understood the words* through the preaching:

“Then all the people went away to eat, to drink, to send portions, and to celebrate with great gladness, because they understood the words which had been made known to them.”

It is in this context that the people respond (ch 9) with a lengthy song of adoration to God, confession of sin, and devotion to the Lord to teach and admonish one another. Then in ch.12 they sing a song of celebration. All of this is within the surrounding context of the centrality of God’s Word preached faithfully.

Singing with the Sermon in Mind

Singing in Colossians 3 is in the context of Paul’s instruction to the Colossian church for holy living. This was driven by a true knowledge of God that bears fruit in the believer. Then comes the singing as the Word has dwelt in us richly. After reading the above portion of the worship service we see in the book of Nehemiah, we should pause for a moment to reflect on the importance of singing with the pastor’s sermon in mind. The people of God in Nehemiah’s day responded to the Word of God that was expounded to them with confession of sin and *singing*. The song that they spoke in Nehemiah chapter 9 follows the progression of Psalm 96 that we looked at earlier. They proclaimed the good news of God’s salvation, they recounted His glory and His wondrous deeds, they proclaimed His nature, they ascribed to the Lord glory and strength, and they lifted up an offering to God and cried to Him loudly, and they did this with their hearts made pure before Him by confessing their sin and putting on holiness. This song was a response to the Word of God that was preached to them.

- Preparation and Response

It is helpful for us to understand that our songs are both heart preparation and response to the Word of God being preached. Many of the Psalms contain a call to worship. A call to prepare the heart to meet with God through His Word. They are heart preparation. Psalm 96 (Psalm 29 parallels much of Psalm 96) begins with a call to worship God with a *new song* to proclaim who He is and what He has done. Singing a new song involves meditating on the Word of Christ and it brings a fresh melody to the wonderful truths of God's Word.

It is also fitting to respond to the Word in context with the passage of Scripture that the pastor has just preached. As noted above, this is what the people of God did in Nehemiah 9. They responded to God's Word with singing. And their singing was in context with the message that was just expounded to them. This type of expository singing in response to God and His Word is found throughout Scripture. Israel and Moses certainly sang in context in Exodus 15 when the Lord delivered them from the Egyptians. Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn together at the first communion service. We don't know the content of the hymn that was sung, but with Christ leading His disciples in the Lord's Supper we can be sure it was the most edifying and instructive hymn that could have been sung in that moment.

When we prepare our hearts through music *before* a sermon, and we respond with singing after a sermon, our songs should take into consideration the passage of God's word that the pastor is preaching. This provides an anchor point for the Lord's church to sing together with unity. Not every song has to exactly coincide with what is being preached. That's probably not even possible every Sunday, but if we take it into consideration then what we sing is driven by the context of the passage, not our own feelings or musings. This provides a safeguard against disjointed music that fails to support and point to the primacy of preaching. And it encourages a biblical hermeneutic in our singing. It can help protect our songs from taking God's Word out of context.

As we saw earlier in Colossians 3, Expository singing is to let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly and in context. Our songs should not be taking God's Word out of context to promote our own thoughts outside of God's Word. Rather, our songs are to be submitted to God's Word and exegeted from a passage of Scripture in its context. That's not to say we can't have topical songs about the substitutionary atonement of Christ or the faithfulness of God, but we should be able to point to passages that they were drawn from. And that pointing should be found accurate in the intended meaning of Christ substitutionary atonement or God's faithfulness in the context of a given passage. A grammatical, historical hermeneutic certainly matters in our singing.

Singing with Order in Mind

The progression of worship through music that we see most often in the Psalms and in other places in Scripture tends to have an order to it. While it's certainly not sinful to put together a music set that falls outside some of the patterns that we see, the effectiveness of it could be hindered. As noted above, preparation and response to God's Word being preached is an appropriate way to understand corporate music on Sunday. I've put the following categories under the two categories of preparation and response.

- Preparation:

- Songs of Adoration

Psalm 146-150, and many others, begin with a call for the people of God to praise the Lord. Songs with a call to worship God and to praise Him for His mighty acts and character (Psalm 150) are great songs to begin a worship service with.

- Songs of Confession

After ascribing worth to God and the glory that is due Him, it is fitting that we confess our need for Him and our sinfulness. Many of the Psalms begin with recognizing who God is and progress to confessing sin and a need for God's mercy and grace. Songs of confession can be a lament and cry out to God for help in our need, or a confession of our own unworthiness and sinfulness.

- Songs of Devotion

Songs of devotion are a good response to a previous song about our need for Christ and a recognition of His perfect and endless supply. We should be devoting ourselves to Christ in our music. Songs of devotion are appropriate and should flow out of genuine repentance and a recognition of the lordship of Christ.

- Response:

- Songs of Response

Responding to the Word of God that was just preached to us can include celebration, repentance, confession, songs of lament, prayer, devotion etc. the context determines the response.

To the Praise of His Glorious Grace (With Zeal!)

I noted earlier that Colossians 3:12 tells us how we are to live now that we are the elect of God. Ephesians 1:5b-6a tells us that this election is “according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.” Everything that we do as the elect of God is for the praise and glory of God! Our singing is no exception. The Psalms tell us often that our singing is to glorify God and make much of Him. We are to ascribe to the Lord the glory due His name (Ps. 96:8, 29:2).

First and foremost, singing is for God’s glory. Our singing is to an audience of One. God alone sees our hearts as we sing to Him. When we sing, our lips are to reflect what is in the heart. Anything less than a heart that trembles at God’s Word and worships God as He is revealed in Scripture is not true worship. Our physical bodies and voices are to testify to what is already in our hearts. And we are honoring God when we praise Him with our lips and hearts in tune to His Word.

If this is true for us, we should sing *loudly!* In Nehemiah 9 they shouted their song of response to the Lord and to one another (9:4). The Psalms speak of our instruments and our voices being loud in honor of the Lord (Psalm 66:1, 150:5). I find it particularly interesting that the order of the Christian home is the context immediately following Paul’s instruction to the Colossians about singing. Men, we are to lead our families. And this includes leading them in singing loudly to the Lord and to one another. This is not an area we get to be lax in because we don’t have a good voice. According to all of the passages mentioned above and many more, God makes every one of us singers even if we can’t hold a tune. And the consensus of Scripture is that we are to sing loudly. Churches that have godly people singing loudly together for the glory of God and the edification of one another are truly pleasing to God with their music.

Conclusion

In Colossians 3, our singing is both a result of and a way in which the Word of Christ dwells in us richly. All of this in the context of instruction in holiness. Holiness that comes about through a knowledge of God and His will for us. This knowledge is found in His Word. And this Word is to be preached. With the Word of Christ dwelling in us richly, we are to admonish and encourage one another through singing to one another. Singing the Word of Christ to one another is immensely profitable for the believer. Thankfulness and praise to God along with holy living is the fruit. It is fitting that the context immediately following this is the order and function of the Christian home.

After a close look at Colossians 3 above, Psalm 96 summarizes musical worship well. According to this Psalm, our music is to be a “telling” and “proclaiming” of God’s nature, glory, and deeds. Verses 7-9 lay out the gathering of God’s people and how they are to worship Him. The families of the peoples are told to “Lift up an offering and come into His courts” (v8) “Ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength. Ascribe to Yahweh the glory of His name;” (v7b-8a). They are told to worship God in the “Splendor (adornment) of holiness” and to “tremble before Him” (v9).

The people of God in Psalm 96 are told to “put on” holiness (the splendor of holiness). Literally to “adorn themselves with set-apartness”. This is what set-apart people do. After putting off the old man with his deeds (Col. 3:5-11), the chosen ones of God are to “put on” Christlikeness. In Psalm 96, this is the same “put on” that Paul mentions in Colossians 3:12-17. In this state of heart and life the Lord’s church is to “come into His courts” and gather for worship. Then we can ascribe worth to God (worship) in spirit and in truth (John 3:23-24) with humility before Him.

It’s worth noting at the end of this Psalm how all of creation gives glory to God because he is coming to “judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in His faithfulness” (V13b). Evangelism will happen wherever God is proclaimed and worshiped. And every knee will bow to Him in reverence and grace, or rebellion and judgment.

Church Music then, is to be for the glory and praise of God and for the edification, instruction, sanctification, and unity of God’s people. It is incredibly unifying for the Lord’s church to confess the truths of Scripture with their mouths, collectively, from the heart. Many churches throughout history have drifted from the true orthodoxy of Scripture. It often begins with subtle compromise that shows up first in their music. The music of a church is to come under and support a faithful pulpit. There is doctrine in what we sing. Doctrine aimed at the heart and the mind for the purpose of edification and sanctification. Singing in church is meant to put the Word of God in the mouths and minds of Gods people.