

# WHEN WE GATHER

## Colossians 3v16,17

Singing and the gospel have always gone together. In his Journal, John Wesley records his first visit to Newcastle in May 1742 like this:

*Sun. 30 . At seven I walked down to Sandgate, the poorest and most contemptible part of the town; and, standing at the end of the street with John Taylor, began to sing the hundredth Psalm. Three or four people came out to see what was the matter, who soon increased to four or five hundred. I suppose there might be twelve or fifteen hundred, before I had done preaching; to whom I applied those solemn words, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and by his stripes we are healed." Observing the people, when I had done, to stand gaping and staring upon me, with the most profound astonishment, I told them, "If you desire to know who I am, my name is John Wesley. At five in the evening, with God's help, I design to preach here again." At five, the hill on which I designed to preach was covered, from the top to the bottom. I never saw so large a number of people together, either in Moorfields, or at Kennington Common.*

Last week Dave Fellingham reminded us of the role singing has played through the centuries alongside the preaching of the gospel.

And, of course, these two things have also been inseparable in Christian worship. In our text today we see the Apostle Paul giving instructions to the young church at Colosse about what to do when they gather together – and we see the same two ingredients. Spoken words and sung words, the two have always gone together.

**v16. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.** Notice the expression **one another**. When we come together it is not about one person "performing". Christians can become like everyone else, "consumers" who go to the best show in town – whether the attraction is the style of music, the preaching or something else. Yes, there is a place for leadership and gifted people but when we gather everyone has a part to play.

In a very large gathering this will be worked out differently from a small group meeting in a home. But in our context here on Sundays we should be able to put 1 Corinthians 14v26 into practise. *"When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue (language) or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church."* A good attitude, then, is "What can I bring, not just what can I get, from this meeting?"

### 1. SPEAKING

**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly:** Some scholars think that the believers in Colosse were becoming preoccupied with other things when they gathered, for example angels. (See 2v18) So this was a necessary corrective. We might be pulled in another direction. Keep the focus on Jesus and truth about Jesus.

**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly** This might be something *about* Jesus – or it could mean something *from* Jesus. This is what we need more than anything else in our meetings.

- Something *about* Jesus might come through a Bible reading, a song, preaching or teaching, a personal story - or in some other way.
- Something *from* Jesus might come, again from Scripture, preaching, words of knowledge – but especially prophecy. A word of Christ among the believers in Antioch led to Barnabas and Paul setting out on their overseas missions.

Such words will come from many, not just one person or a few regulars. And it will come as the overflow of your life in God through the week. Some of you have so much to bring. Please don't hold back. We can also bring something about or from Jesus by praying for each other and by our conversation with kindness and encouragement.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you **richly!** Our gatherings should be full to overflowing with stuff about Jesus, so that we leave full of truth, full of the gospel. We feel strengthened and built up– “edified”. We are rich with truth!

**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.**

**Teach:** When we gather like this, teaching may come from those who have a specific gift to teach - but we all have a part to play in teaching one another. One or two people may have “a teaching” or share a story which illustrates what God has been teaching them more personally. We love stories like this. More please!

We can also teach one another, *without words, by* our example. This happens every Sunday when we come together with – the welcome at the door and inside, the lugging of pa equipment and manning the desk, putting out chairs & tables & the sign on the high street: their are teams which serve us every week - the worship teams, those who serve in Bubbles, Count Kids, level X. In all of these ways and many others, we are teaching other about serving – and that is another expression of Christ, who came to serve and not to be serve.

**Admonish:** But what does it mean to admonish? It is not rebuking, but it does involve a note of warning. The Greek word means ‘to put into the mind of’. It was used of instruction that affects the will and disposition rather than the intellect. It may not give specific answers to problems but it addresses your attitude.

General admonition may come publicly, but personal admonition should not. If you feel you have a word from God for someone it is best to take someone along to listen and weigh it. When this doesn't happen it is possible for some to cause mayhem with supposed words from God! Our words need to be spoken **with all wisdom**. Rash words can do harm.

## 2. SINGING

Singing together is still big in our 21<sup>st</sup> century culture. Go to any major football stadium and you will hear the crowd singing together. Go to a rock concert and fans will be singing the band's "anthems" and waving their arms in the air. There are choirs for all ages and all styles of music. The recent TV series 'The Choir' has underlined the value of corporate singing. Singing together is still very important. But our text is saying more than singing is good for us.

**Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.** . . .  
Wherever Christians have gathered, right from the start, they have sung together. But what did they sing?

**Psalms** made up the bulk of the Jewish hymn book. We can still sing them today. The book of Psalms in our Bible is a collection of sacred songs, poems and prayers originating in Israel's worship. Many are by King David, and some have an autobiographical element. You will find all manner of human emotions expressed - adoration, joy, praise, thanksgiving, anger, despair, sadness, guilt, doubt and joy.

**Hymns:** One of the very earliest documents, outside the Bible, reporting how Christians worshipped together was by a Roman Governor in Bithynia called Pliny, to the Emperor Trajan He wrote: "*They meet at dawn to sing a hymn to Christ as God.*" The text of Philippians 2v6-11 is thought to be an early Christian hymn – focussed on Christ. This was probably one of the ways new believers learned and internalized truth, by singing it. The same happens today. Our greatest traditional hymns and the best of the new songs we sing are full of biblical truth; they are full of the gospel.

**Spiritual songs:** these may be more spontaneous prophetic songs and others sung under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit; it may be singing in a language you have not learned with the gift of tongues. (1 Cor. 14v15) Ephesians 5v18-19 says: "*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.*" New Testament scholar James Dunn writes of this: "*such singing is understood to be the result of being filled with the Spirit, in some ways like the uninhibited singing of those who are drunk, but expressive of a very different Spirit...This is "lively, spontaneous, charismatic worship."*" In this quote from Ephesians the songs are sung both to one another (to build one another up) and to God. But in Colossians Paul concentrates on the latter.

**As you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God:** This is singing *for God*. It is not a performance. There is nothing mechanical about such singing. It is heart worship not lip worship. It is for God's pleasure.

G.K. Chesterton was a genius and one of the most influential writers of the twentieth century. He was also skilled in arguing for the Christian faith. One day he and a

friend stood on a street corner listening to the Salvation Army. When the strains of the brass band had died away the friend remarked, somewhat contemptuously, “*I don’t like that kind of stuff!*” Chesterton’s simple reply was “*No, but suppose God does.*” Worship is not *primarily* to make you feel good (though it does!).

Paul rounds off with a summary statement. **v17. And what you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.** Everything is worship. When I came to know Jesus at the age of eighteen I began to pass exams – not because God was showing me particular favour, but because now I took study seriously. I wanted to be the best I could be for God. That’s worship. We can easily separate life into little boxes – “*This is my church life, this is my family life, this is my work/school life, my social life*”. No, everything in your life can be offered to God in worship. Don’t separate the sacred from the secular.

And, as Phil reminded us earlier this year, *everyone* worships 24/7. The big question is not are you worshipping, but *who* and *what* are you worshipping?

**John Wilthew. October 2009**

## Message Summary

### WHEN WE GATHER

Speaking and singing the gospel have always been inseparable in Christian worship. In our text today we see the Apostle Paul giving instructions to the young church at Colosse about what to do when they gather together – and we see the same two ingredients. **3v16. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.** Notice the expression **one another**. When we come together it is not about one person “performing”. Christians can become “consumers” who go to the best show in town. A good attitude is “What can I bring, not just what can I get, from this meeting?”

#### 1. SPEAKING

**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly:** This is what we need more than anything else in our meetings. This might be something *about* Jesus – or something *from* Jesus. When we get together the word of Christ might come through a Bible reading, a song, preaching or teaching, a prophetic message, a personal story, by praying for each other or in some other way. **Richly** means our gatherings should be full to overflowing with stuff about Jesus, so that we leave full of truth, strengthened and built up.

**As you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom:** we all have a part to play in teaching one another. But what does it mean to **admonish**? It is not rebuking, but it does involve a note of warning. The Greek word means ‘to put into the mind of’. General admonition may come publicly, but personal admonition should not. Our words need to be spoken **with all wisdom**. Rash words can do harm.

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- **Psalms** made up the bulk of the Jewish hymn book. We can still sing them today. The book of Psalms in our Bible is a collection of sacred songs, poems and prayers originating in Israel’s worship.
- **Hymns:** The text of Philippians 2v6-11 is thought to be an early Christian hymn – focussed on Christ. This was probably one of the ways new believers learned and internalized truth, by singing it.
- **Spiritual songs:** these may be more spontaneous prophetic songs and others sung under the immediate inspiration of the Spirit.

This is singing *for God*. It is not a performance. It is heart worship not lip worship.

In v17 Paul rounds off with a summary statement. **And what you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.** Everything is worship. Don’t separate the sacred from the secular. As Phil reminded us earlier this year, *everyone* worships 24/7. The big question is not are you worshipping, but *who* and *what* are you worshipping?

**Questions for Discussion.**

**SPEAKING AND SINGING TRUTH  
Colossians 3v16,17**

*Please read the message summary first.*

1. What can we “bring” to a Sunday meeting or a small group in a home?
2. What kind of things help you most when we meet together – on Sundays or in small group? Share some specific examples.
3. What things do you sometimes find difficult?
4. Compile a top ten of the songs and hymns you love best – and talk about why each one is special.
5. Have you ever brought a spontaneous or prophetic song in a meeting? What might hold you back from doing so?
6. If *everything* is worship – what aspects of your life could you start thinking differently about?