

A People Called to Sing!

Our text for family visiting this year is a good one. There's good counsel there for Christians of every age.

But the passage includes one bit of instruction that strikes me every time I read it. Perhaps it hits me so hard because it reflects my natural inclination ... or perhaps because it points to something we seldom see in our culture.

The instruction is found in Col. 3:16. The verse is a passive command – that is, a command to *allow* something to happen. Specifically, God's people are to allow “the word of Christ” to “dwell” within them “richly” or “abundantly.”

In allowing this to occur, three fruits of that Word are to become evident. First, we *teach* one another. That's the easy one: Christians are to increase each other's knowledge of God and His Word. And we *admonish* one another. Again, this is not a stretch to accept, even if it's a bit harder to do. We are to hold one another accountable for *obeying* God's Word – correcting our brothers and sisters when they err, and calling them to repentance when they sin.

But then comes the third fruit of Christ's abiding Word: *singing*.

Using Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs; expressing God's grace – we are to *sing*. It is to arise from within our hearts – but then it comes forth from our lips. Christians are called to be a *singing* people.

This is a necessary fruit of possessing the Word of Christ.

Col. 3:16 is an often-misused verse. Countless are the folks who have cited this verse and Eph. 5:19 to show that we should not sing only Psalms in worship. In point of fact, however, formal worship isn't in view in either verse. (In fact, no New Testament passage tells us what to sing in worship. We learn that primarily from the Old Testament and from Biblical examples.)

No, Col. 3:16 isn't about worship. This verse speaks about Christ's call upon *all* of life. And it tells us that the Christian life should be filled with *singing*.

What should that look like?

First of all, our singing should be done “in grace.” That's the literal translation. The NIV says, “with gratitude.” The ESV uses “thankfulness.” But the Greek says “grace” – which is much more vague.

To sing with *grace* should include *gratitude*. God wants us to express our gratitude in singing, especially as we respond to the favor He has shown to us.

But it also means that *God's* grace should be in our hearts. We should sing *in response* to God's gracious work. We should be *reflecting* that grace – showing, by our songs, that God's grace has found a home within us.

And singing “in grace” should make our songs full of *hope* – a living confession and a lively celebration of the future God has promised us in Christ.

God's grace – living within us, changing us, giving us abundant reason for gratitude – *this* is what should give rise to our songs. This is what should abound within our hearts and overflow from our lips. This is what should make our singing *unquenchable* – flowing from the very depths of our souls!

Furthermore, our singing should be done “to the Lord.”

He is the audience – not our family, nor our spouses, nor our neighbors when the windows are open.

God wants the *whole creation* to sing His praises (Ps. 96:11-12; Ps. 98:4-9; Ps. 103:20-22; etc.). How much greater is *our* calling to praise Him, since He has redeemed us from death and condemnation!

And He wants us to seek His blessing in song. Think how many of the Psalms begin with David crying out to God about the injustice of his enemies or the impossibility of his situation. David knew: God hears our song, and He wants us to use our songs to seek His blessing.

And having received that blessing, He wants us to show our *gratitude* in song. God wants us to tell Him how much we appreciate His answers to prayer, His blessings in life, the hope of salvation ... and His abundant love.

This instruction to “sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with [grace] in your hearts to God” is a calling we too often overlook. Yet it should be a natural result of allowing God's Word to dwell within us. As we grow closer to Him, gaining a deeper knowledge of and appreciation for His Word, our *singing* to the Lord should become more and more natural.

But notice what Col. 3:16 *does not* mention: talent.

God doesn't care whether your voice is naturally melodious or naturally ... “unrefined.” He gave it to you, and its sound pleases Him. So sing songs of praise to Him; sing psalms of prayer. Acknowledge both His sovereignty and His love in song. Sing *joyfully* to the Lord – and also sing in your grief.

But as the Word dwells more and more fully within you, do *sing* to the Lord – for our God *desires* the singing of His people.