

# Raising the Worship Standard: The Translation and Meaning of Colossians 3:16 and Implications for Our Corporate Worship

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## INTRODUCTION

What is the role of musical worship in the local church? Why do we sing when we come together? Why was singing so important to God's

people in the Old Testament? Why is it so important to the New Testament people and the Church throughout its history? Why are we told by Matthew that just before Jesus went to the cross, he and the disciples sang together (Matt 26:30)? Why does Luke tell us that the early Church would sing together (Acts 16:25)? Why are we commanded to do so? In short, why is singing so important?

It is important because God loves music. The command to sing is the most frequently repeated command found in all of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Over one hundred years ago, F. M. Spencer wrote,

“No command is more frequently and emphatically imposed on God's people in the Old Testament than is the duty of singing praise to God. In the New Testament these commands are renewed and made emphatic.” In commenting on our verse from Colossians he stated, “Language in the form of a command could not insist more clearly and distinctly upon the duty of singing praise to God.”<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, Scripture teaches us important things about musical worship. As far as the *role* of musical worship, there is a key text that must be understood if we are to understand one of the main things the Church does. Colossians 3:16 (and its parallel Eph 5:19) is important for a biblical understanding concerning the role of music in the Church's gathered, corporate worship. I want to raise the worship standard. God loves music. He is honored and glorified in a way that makes it unlike any other medium. There is something special about God's people singing praises to him. And, as I assert in the following pages, when rightly translated and understood, Colossians 3:16 *elevates* the role of musical worship to its proper place. Here is

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how I suggest the verse be translated: “Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you, teaching and admonishing one another with all wisdom by means of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

The main point I wish to press here is that corporate, musical worship is an essential, God-ordained *means* of our teaching and admonishing one another, such that the word of Christ might richly dwell in us. I will argue this case in three steps. First, I will overview the paragraph of Colossians 3:12-17. Second, special attention will be given to verse 16 with regards to its translation, grammar, and meaning. Finally, I will note several practical implications for local church worship.

### OVERVIEW OF COLOSSIANS 3:12-17

Colossians 3:12-17 is a paragraph within the larger section of 3:1-4:6 which focuses on living out the Christian life. Paul begins by telling the Colossian Christians that if they have been raised with Christ, then “keep seeking the things that are above” (v. 1), as well as “Set your mind on the things above” (v. 2) because your life is “hidden with Christ in God” (v. 3). Verses 5-11 illicit the commands to “put off the old self of the flesh” and “put to death what is earthly” (v. 5) Then Paul gives a sample list on account of which the “wrath of God will come.”

That brings us to verses 12-17. Here Paul says that the Colossians are to put on the new self, clothed with the qualities of Christ as they love and forgive one another, are to be ruled by the peace of Christ, are to be thankful, and are to be richly indwelt by the message about Christ as they wisely instruct and admonish one another by means of various kinds of biblical music, singing with grace in your hearts to God, doing everything in Jesus’ name with thankfulness to God.

Note that Paul exhorts the Colossians to be thankful, and to express that thankfulness back to God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in verse 16. Believers who are full of thanks and gratitude to God for what he has done for them will find it

easy to live in peace with one another as well as to bear with one another and to forgive one another (v. 12), and to have their hearts ruled by the peace of Christ (v. 15). This is precisely fitting for Paul to say here, given what he says in verse 16. This visible and outward demonstration of thankfulness towards God is to be offered in the congregation’s singing to God (v. 17).

This brings us now to verse 16 where Paul exhorts them to, “Let the word of Christ richly indwell you” (*ho logos tou christou enoikeitō en humin plousiōs*). The “you” is plural, indicating that this is something to characterize the entire faith community of the Colossian church. Here again we have an imperative, just like the command in verse 15. The “word of Christ” (*ho logos tou christou*) is the message that centers on Christ and should likely be seen as an objective genitive. It is the message that concerns who Christ is and what Christ has done.

What Paul says is that God’s people are to put the message of Christ at the very center of their corporate worship together as the gathered body of Christ. This is what it means for the word of Christ to dwell *richly*. As Moo states, what is in view is a “deep, penetrating contemplation that enables the message of Christ to have transforming power in the life of the community.”<sup>3</sup>

That raises the question, “How is the word of Christ to dwell in us richly, and what does that have to do with musical worship?” This is pressing since Paul writes concerning the church’s music next. So, how does that happen? Another way to put it might be to ask, “What should believers expect when they gather to worship and specifically, sing?” Is the music of the local gathered church just something to be done before or after the preaching? Is it just something we do because it would be a sacrilege if we didn’t? Or, is there a grander purpose for the music of God’s people? These questions are answered in verse 16 to which we now turn.

### THE TEXT OF COLOSSIANS 3:16

The Greek text is generally stable, with three

variants in need of mentioning. The first concerns the unusual phrase “the word of Christ” (*ho logos tou christou*). All English Bibles translate this more difficult reading, for good reason. More than likely, a few copyists altered the reading to the more ordinary “the word of God” (*ho logos tou theou*) seen in A, C, and 33, and appearing in the margins of the NRSV, NASB, NJB, and NET translations. “The word of the Lord” (*ho logos tou kuriou*) is found in a few others (8\*, I, 1175). As Comfort notes, “The documentary evidence strongly favors “the word of Christ,” as does the general tenor of the epistle, which is aimed at exalting Christ.”<sup>4</sup>

The second variant comes in the phrase (*en [tē] chariti*), and whether or not the article should be included (P<sup>46</sup>, 8<sup>2</sup>, B, D\*, F, G, Ψ, 6, 1505, 1739) or omitted (8\*, A, C, D<sup>2</sup>, 075, 33, 1881, M). Both readings are well-attested, and the difficulty of a firm decision is seen in the brackets used by the editors of NA<sup>28</sup>. If omitted, it means “with gratitude” or “thankfulness,” which is how almost all English Bibles translate it. If included, it could refer back to “the grace” in 1:6 (cf. 4:18) and would be translated “by the grace (of God)” or “in the realm of grace.”<sup>5</sup> Moule notes that that context “favours ‘gratefully’” and that “on the whole the easiest sense is “gratefully singing.”<sup>6</sup> The external evidence slightly favors the presence of the article, while the context of Colossians 3:15-17 focuses on thanksgiving, and many commentators and most translations agree. Further, the phrase with the article (*en [tē] chariti*) finds its parallel in the phrase “with all wisdom” (*en pasē sophia*),<sup>7</sup> adding a grammatical argument in favor of the article.

The final variant in need of mention comes at the very end of the verse and concerns the dative in the phrase, “in your hearts to God” (*en tais kardiais humōn tō theō*). Most of the oldest MSS read *tō theō*, with the variant being *tō kuriō*, (“in your hearts to the Lord”) found in C<sup>2</sup>, D<sup>2</sup>, Ψ\*, and M, and is the reading found in the KJV and NKJV translations, and in the margin of the NRSV and NEB. It is likely a scribal conformity to the parallel passage of Eph

5:19 (*tē kardia humōn tō kuriō*), found in the *Textus Receptus*,<sup>8</sup> yet the widespread manuscript evidence is in favor of the *to God* reading.<sup>9</sup> The distinction in meaning is that one makes God the Father the object of gratitude/thankfulness while the variant makes Christ the object. This is subtle but notable distinction, though clearly for Paul both are deity and thus worthy of doxology.

#### TRANSLATION

With the text established, how do the English translations render verse 16? That depends largely on how the three participles, *didaskontes*, *nouthetountes*, and *adontes* (“teaching,” “exhorting,” and “singing”) are understood. All three are parsed the same (masculine, nominative plural, present active participle), but what is their relationship to one another and to the main verb *enoikeitō* (“let the word of Christ dwell”) What is their relationship to the three intervening datives *psalmois*, *humnois*, and *ōdais* (psalms, hymns, and songs)? English translations may be divided into four groups which highlight slightly different ways the three participles are understood. Let us now turn to these four groups.

#### TRANSLATION GROUP 1 (ESV, NET, NAB)

All of these translations see the participles as coordinate with each other, not imperatival, and move “singing” forward in the syntactical order.

*English Standard Version (ESV)*: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *teaching* and *admonishing* one another in all wisdom, *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

*New English Translation (NET)*: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *teaching* and *exhorting* one another with all wisdom, *singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*, all with grace in your hearts to God.”

*New American Bible (NAB)*: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *as in all wisdom you teach and admonish* one another, *singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

### TRANSLATION GROUP 2 (HCSB, NIV)

These translations do not view the participles as imperatival, they do add “and” before translating the third participle “singing,” and, like Group 1, move “singing” forward in the syntactical order.

*Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)*: “Let the message about the Messiah dwell richly among you, *teaching and admonishing* one another in all wisdom, **and** *singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs*, with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

*New International Version (NIV, 1984)*: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly *as you teach and admonish* one another with all wisdom, **and** *as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs* with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

### TRANSLATION GROUP 3 (NRSV, RSV, NJB, NLT)

These translations view the participles as imperatival. The first two also add “and” before the translation of “singing” (like Group 2), and all four place “singing” with the datives “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs,” moving it forward in the syntactical order, before the three datives.

*New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)*: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; *teach and admonish* one another in all wisdom; *and\** with gratitude in your hearts *sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* to God.

*Revised Standard Version (RSV)*: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, *teach and admonish* one another in all wisdom, *and\** *sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* with thankfulness in your hearts to God.”

*New Jerusalem Bible (NJB)*: “Let the Word of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. *Teach* each other, and *advise* each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts *sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs* to God.”

*New Living Translation (NLT)*: “Let the message about Christ, in all its richness, fill your lives. *Teach and counsel* each other with all the wisdom he gives. *Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs* to God with thankful hearts.”

### TRANSLATION GROUP 4 (NASB, KJV, NKJV, TNIV, NIV 2011)

These translations do not take the participles as imperatival, but rather, broadly speaking, as circumstantial participles (like Groups 1 and 2), and do not grammatically connect “singing” to “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”

*New American Standard Bible (NASB)*: “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.”

*King James Version (KJV)*: “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** (variant).”

*New King James Version (NKJV)*: “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**.”

*Today’s New International Version (TNIV) and New International Version, 2011 (NIV, 2011)*: “Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly *as you teach and admonish* one another with all wisdom *through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit*, *singing* to God with gratitude in your hearts.”

### GRAMMAR

As you can see, there is quite a bit of variation among the translations, and my analysis here does not even note the differences when it comes to the phrases “with all wisdom” (*en pasē sophia*) “with gratitude” (*en [tē] chariti*), and “in your hearts” (*en tais kardiais humōn*). In fact, other than the NIV 2011 and TNIV on which it was based, *there are no two identical translations above*. The major differences concern: first, whether the participles are imperatival or not; second, what the phrase “singing ... to God” modifies; and third, whether the phrase “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” modifies the two previous participles before it (*didaskontes kai nouthetountes heautous*) or the following participle

(*adontes*). Grammatical analysis is needed in order to come to a decision.<sup>10</sup> Let us now turn to that analysis and specifically let us focus on three grammatical issues which must be answered.

First, are the participles imperatival,<sup>11</sup> modal,<sup>12</sup> (means or manner) or something else? Barth and Blanke conclude with confidence that these are all imperatival participles. They write, “The participles can hardly be translated as modals here. After the elucidation about sovereignty over the world, it would be difficult to agree on a statement according to which the dwelling of this word is brought about through human action.”<sup>13</sup> Yet we should take seriously the word of caution raised by A. T. Robertson and Dan Wallace, who note that such a grammatical category should be reserved for truly independent participles and not those connected to a finite verb. In fact, Robertson flatly states, “no participle should be explained in this way (imperatival) that can properly connected with a finite verb.”<sup>14</sup> Wallace notes, “This is an important point and one that more than one commentator has forgotten.”<sup>15</sup> To be sure, these participles have an exhortative “flavor” to them, but that is because of their grammatical dependence on the main verb, which is an imperative (*enoikeitō*). As such, these three participles are not likely imperatival (contra RSV, NRSV, NJB, NLT translations). Following the counsel of Robertson and Wallace, we look to other categories.<sup>16</sup>

It is best to understand the participles as modal participles,<sup>17</sup> or, more clearly, *adverbial participles of means* describing how the action of the imperatival finite verb is carried out.<sup>18</sup> This yields the translation, “Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you ... by means of teaching and admonishing ...” The term “modal” can be a bit misleading, since “modal” encompasses *both* manner *and* means, when there is usually a difference. The difference here is mainly one of terminology and not substance.<sup>19</sup> Here, the “message about Christ” is to dwell richly in the Colossian believers, and a primary way or *means* that this is done in the faith community is by teaching and admonishing (cf.

Col 1:28 where the order is reversed). O’Brien notes, “As the word of Christ richly indwells the Colossians, so by means of its operation they will ‘teach and admonish one another in all wisdom with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.’”<sup>20</sup>

The second grammatical issue which must be resolved is related to the first, and it surrounds the question of what the participial phrase *adontes ... tō theō* (“singing ... to God”) modifies. Does it modify the two preceding participles *didaskontes kai vouthetountes* (teaching and admonishing), or the main verb, the imperative *enoikeitō* (“dwell”)? This is how the HCSB, RSV, NRSV, and NIV (1984) translations take it. If this is correct, then “teaching and admonishing” is parallel to “singing,” and both are ways in which the word of Christ indwells the community of faith. However, these translations are guilty of adding an extra and unnecessary *kai* (“and”) before the participle “singing,” though there is little justification for doing so, or even a textual variant to suggest copyists understood it this way. Further, while the first two participles are clearly coordinate and joined with *kai*, the absence of *kai* (“and”) before *adontes* (“singing”) seems to support the point that these three participles are indeed *not* to be understood as parallel to one another.

While that option is grammatically possible,<sup>21</sup> I suggest that there is a better way of understanding *adontes*. To be sure, as most Colossian scholars note, a firm decision is difficult here, since Paul’s use of participles can sometimes be a challenge to pin down. Instead of seeing “singing” as parallel to the other participles and directly dependent on the main verb, it should be seen as modifying, and thus subordinate to, the participles “teaching” and “admonishing.” Again, the absence of “and” before “singing” in the Greek text seems to support the point that these three participles are indeed *not* to be understood as parallel to one another. Moo agrees and sees them “loosely connected” and writes, “Paul wants the community to teach and admonish each other *by means of* various kinds

of songs, and he wants them to do this singing to God with hearts full of gratitude.”<sup>22</sup> O’Brien is persuasive here, noting that the phrase “with grace/thankfulness singing in/with your hearts to God” likely expresses the manner in which the action of the two preceding participles is done. Specifically, “they may denote the attitude or disposition which is to accompany the previously mentioned instruction and admonition, that is, as the Colossians teach one another in psalms, hymns, and songs inspired by the Spirit, so they are to sing thankfully to God with their whole being.”<sup>23</sup> This makes good sense of the passage, especially given the parallel with Ephesians 5:19 and as well as the third and final grammatical issue to which we now turn.

The third grammatical question is perhaps the most relevant to the present discussion: Does the phrase “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (*palmois, humnios odais pneumatikais*) modify the two previous participles before it “teaching and admonishing” (*didaskontes kai nouthetountes*) or the one following it “singing” (*adontes*)? The commentators and translations are quite divided on this issue (note the translations above), and some have discussed it while others have not. On the one hand, it makes a certain level of logical sense to put “singing” with what is sung, i.e., psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as many translations (ESV, NET, NEB, HCSB, NIV 1984, RSV, NRSV, NJB, NLT) and commentators (Wilson, Bruce, Melick, Still) do. This yields the translation, “teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, *singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*” But to do so one must, as Wilson puts it, do a fair amount of rearranging of these phrases.<sup>24</sup> This is a defensible translation.

A better option is to take the datives “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” as datives of means and modifying “teaching and admonishing,” not “singing.” Following O’Brien, Moo, Sumney, Fee, and Lincoln, it should be understood that these three all-encompassing types of musical worship are an *essential means of teaching and admonishing*, such that the word of Christ richly dwells

in believers. Therefore, I suggest that the NASB, KJV, NKJV, TNIV, and NIV 2011 better capture Paul’s intention when they translate the passage as “*teaching and admonishing being accomplished in/with/by/through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*”

The reasons for this conclusion are several.<sup>25</sup> First, the two participial clauses “with all wisdom teaching” (*en pasē sophia didaskontes*) and “with thankfulness singing” (*en [tē] chariti adontes*) are symmetrically balanced with their prepositional phrases (both commence with *en*, “with”) at the head of each clause and the participles immediately following. The alternative (followed by the ESV, NIV 1984 etc.) yields a significant overweighting of the final participial clause. Second, several translations such as the RSV, NRSV, NIV 1984, and HCSB unnecessarily insert “and” before “singing” but this is neither original to the hand of Paul nor is it necessary or preferable, as argued above. Third, the objection made by some writers (whether stated or implied) that teaching and admonition would not take place in such psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is simply not valid. One needs merely to consider the teaching and admonition in the psalter itself, not to mention NT hymns such as Philippians 2:5-11 to know that the musical worship of the people of God has always been didactic and exhortative. This has especially been the case in the Church’s history, before the printed word became the norm. Such music was meant to function as a “vehicle not only for worship but also for instruction.”<sup>26</sup> Sumney correctly asserts, “The teaching and admonishing that gives voice to the word of Christ comes to expression in worship through ‘psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.’”<sup>27</sup> In short, *corporate musical worship is an essential means by which the people of Christ are taught and admonished.*

Finally, as Lincoln notes (as well as Moule), it is significant that this is clearly the sense given to the parallel passage in Colossians’ sister letter Ephesians.<sup>28</sup>

*Colossians 3:16*: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, by teaching and admonishing one another *in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*, singing with grace in your hearts to God.”

*Ephesians 5:18-19*: “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, 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.”

These texts are clearly parallel: they are the only places in the New Testament where *humnos* (hymn) occurs; the term *ōdē* (song) is only used here in all of Paul’s writings; the three datives are only found together in the NT in these two Pauline texts; and both are preceded by a present tense participle and reflexive pronoun. In short, when faced with making an exegetical decision on Colossians 3:16, should not a parallel passage by the same author “break the proverbial tie” for us? These two passages are remarkably similar, and one should be used to help understand the other. These four parallels lead us to conclude that O’Brien, Lincoln, and Moo, among others, have the syntax and exegesis right. The Colossian and Ephesian churches are to instruct one another by means of all manner of musical praise. This is to characterize their worship. It should also characterize ours.

Moule is both helpful and exasperating when he writes, “On the face of it, it is not obvious how one instructs and admonishes with psalms etc.; but there is no denying that Eph. v. 19 leaves no choice but to ‘speak to one another in psalms’ etc.; and presumably the use of music and utterances of praise *may be didactic*.”<sup>29</sup> I would agree that Ephesians 5:19 is clear. And, I would agree with Moule when he suggests that all things being equal, Ephesians 5 should be a reliable pointer to the meaning in Colossians 3.<sup>30</sup>

Yet such a statement is exasperating! Psalms “*may be didactic*”? “It’s *not clear* how a psalm

instructs and admonishes?” What of Paul’s use of Psalm 32 in Romans 4? Psalms 2, 8, 45, 95, 102, and 110 in Hebrews? Why would Peter cite Psalm 16 in Acts 2? Of course they are didactic! Of course they instruct and admonish us! This is even further reinforced in the New Testament if we can agree to the *hymnic* nature of Pauline texts such as Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20. Further, the teaching and exhortative nature of music was part of Israel’s history at least as far back as the exodus.<sup>31</sup>

### THE MEANING OF COLOSSIANS 3:16 AND IMPLICATIONS FOR OUR CORPORATE WORSHIP

Like the Ephesian believers, Colossian believers, and the Old Testament saints, our worship is to be characterized by all manner of musical praise that teaches and exhorts, such that we will be full of the word of Christ. How does this view of *psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs* in Colossians 3:16 affect our corporate worship? I conclude with six implications, which is by no means exhaustive.

1. *It means that what is sung must have as its purpose to teach and admonish. Therefore, there are songs that we will do, and there are those that we cannot do.*

This is where godly wisdom and pastoral vision must be applied. But one need only to consider the teachings in songs such as Wesley’s “And Can it Be?,” Luther’s “A Mighty Fortress,” John Newton’s “Amazing Grace,” Isaac Watts’ “Jesus Shall Reign,” Keith and Kristyn Getty’s “Communion Hymn,” “By Faith,” and “In Christ Alone,” Gateway Worship’s “God Be Praised” and “O the Blood,” Hillsong’s “Cornerstone” and “Beneath the Waters,” or Sovereign Grace’s “Our Song from Age to Age,” “Now Why This Fear?” “All I Have is Christ,” and “O Great God,” among so many others. There has never been a time where there is more theologically rich and biblical music for the Church to sing than now. Yet there has also never before been a

more pressing need for pastoral oversight of what is sung in the gathered worship meeting of the local body.

*2. It means that whenever we sing (and preach for that matter) we are teaching **something**.*

Those charged with choosing a local church's songs should carefully consider what that is. This also has implications for the role of (and need for) a true pastor of worship who meets the pastoral criteria of 1 Timothy 3 as well as possesses an appropriate level of musical competence and skill—a pastor whose teaching is primarily musical. Further, sometimes song choice can be more of a choice of what is “better” over what is “good.” Lastly, this point also needs to be made to parents, especially if you consider the truth and gravity of Martin Luther's teaching that every home is like a little church. As parents, and fathers in particular (where present), we have a great responsibility to teach our children the word of God and its teachings by means of both the spoken and sung word.

*3. It means that when we are taught and admonished by biblical songs, we are building a greater capacity to suffer well.*

Good theology can bury its way into our souls when it is put to song. How many of us have been upheld by the truth of Horatio Spafford's “It is Well” or the more modern Matt and Beth Redman song, “Blessed Be Your Name” when faced with suffering and trials?

*4. It means that if Christ-centered worship teaches and admonishes us to love and live out the word of Christ that richly dwells within us, then the other side of this is that Christ-less worship aids and abets drifting away from the gospel.*

The word preached with accuracy feeds the believing soul and fuels perseverance and

endurance. The word preached haphazardly and inaccurately does the opposite. So also with the doctrines taught in the songs that we sing. Again, rest assured that every song is teaching something.

*5. It means that many churches and many pastors need to give thought to how this portion of the gathered worship can come in line with the preached word such that both aspects of the service seek to accomplish the same goal of teaching and admonishing.*

Perhaps there are a number of pastors reading these pages who have neglected to see that a large segment of their church's gathered worship needs to be refined and redeemed. The act of singing in corporate worship needs to be seen as yet another way to pastor and lead God's people—via musical worship whose goal is the same as preaching and all discipleship, namely, that the people of God be full of the word of Christ.

*6. It means that content is primary and there will and should be a variety of music with no one style mandated.*

I have been in a church that split over music style, and it was ugly. It did not honor Christ. I would therefore argue, with most commentators, that “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” refers to a wide variety of types of music. This text teaches us that biblical worship should consist of music that focuses on content rather than style, since all types of music are represented and intended when Paul writes of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” There is freedom in Paul's words here, and we must see the differences between style, content, and our own preferences.

## **CONCLUSION**

The God of the Bible loves musical worship. It is our delight to praise him as his redeemed people. Through Paul, he has commanded us to make use

of this means to teach and admonish one another, such that his people are full of the word of Christ. *As translators* let us rethink how this text ought to be translated; *as members* of local churches let us make diligent use of this medium; and *for those of us who are pastors* in our local churches, let us wisely shepherd our people through and by means of congregational worship.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Terry L. Johnson, "Restoring Psalm Singing to Our Worship," in *Give Praise to God: a Vision for Reforming Worship* (eds., P. Ryken, D. Thomas, and L. Duncan; (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 271.

<sup>2</sup> F. M. Spencer, "The Singing of Praise a Duty," in *Psalms in Worship* (ed., John McNaugher; Pittsburgh: The United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1907), 40. This can be found online at: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/pst.000008685315?urlappend=%3Bseq=46> or <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?u=1&num=40&seq=9&view=image&size=100&id=pst.000008685315>.

<sup>3</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and Philemon* (Pillar New Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 286.

<sup>4</sup> Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 632.

<sup>5</sup> C. F. D. Moule, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Cambridge: University Press, 1957), 125-26.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 126. So also BDAG, s. v. "χαρίς." Jerry Sumney agrees (*Colossians* [Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2008], 226). Within the NT, *charis* does not typically mean gratitude or thanksgiving when articular. Outside the NT, however, it does refer to gratitude or thanksgiving.

<sup>7</sup> Sumney, *Colossians*, 226.

<sup>8</sup> Comfort, *New Testament Text*, 632-33. See also all major commentaries.

<sup>9</sup> Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Word Biblical Commentary 44; Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 195.

<sup>10</sup> Contra R. McL. Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon* (New York: T &

T Clark, 2005), 266, who seems unaware of the sharp differences. See also Charles Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 230; Paul E. Geterding, *Colossians* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2003), 146-47. Each of these commentators eschews any discussion of the matter. Wilson only writes that it makes good sense to put "singing" with the three datives, and merely follows the punctuation of the NA<sup>27</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> For example see Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Anchor Bible Commentary; New York: Doubleday, 1994), 427.

<sup>12</sup> For example see Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 288; O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 208-10.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville; Broadman, 1934), 1133-34.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 650.

<sup>16</sup> Sumney too notes that these cannot be imperatival (*Colossians*, 223-24), and avers that they are temporal, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell in you *when you teach and admonish*." I think this is unlikely in that it too limits the application of the imperative.

<sup>17</sup> Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 288.

<sup>18</sup> See O'Brien, Moo among others.

<sup>19</sup> Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 627ff.

<sup>20</sup> O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 207. Cf. E. D. Martin, *Colossians, Philemon* (Believers Church Bible Commentary; Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 173; Richard R. Melick Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon* (New American Commentary 32; Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 304; Todd Still, "Colossians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon, Revised Edition, Volume 12* (eds., Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 334. Other suggestions have been made such as temporal, "when you teach and admonish" (Sumney, *Colossians*, 223-24), while others have not ventured to answer such as Moule, who raises the grammatical question while not positing (or discussing) a solution, other than to state the obvious that this is an anacoluthon.

<sup>21</sup>See M. J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament; Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 169-70.

<sup>22</sup>Moo, *Colossians and Philemon*, 288; emphasis mine.

<sup>23</sup>O'Brien, *Colossians*, 210.

<sup>24</sup>Wilson, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Colossians and Philemon*, 266-67.

<sup>25</sup>O'Brien, *Colossians*, 208-09, more than any other, deals with this issue.

<sup>26</sup>A. T. Lincoln, "Colossians," in *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 11; Nashville: Abingdon, 2000), 649. Cf. Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 427; Moo, *Colossians*, 287-88.

<sup>27</sup>Sumney, *Colossians*, 225. Even if one disagrees with this line of argument and sees the two participial phrases as coordinate, and both modifying the imperative, there is still a close link between the

church's teaching and singing (Still, "Colossians," 334). However, the specific emphatic thrust of the didactic and paraenetic importance of the church's singing is blunted, and must better explain the parallel in Eph 5:19.

<sup>28</sup>Lincoln, "Colossians," 649. James Dunn seems to agree concerning Eph 5:19 (see *The Epistles to Colossians and to Philemon* [New International Greek Testament Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 236).

<sup>29</sup>Moule, *Colossians and Philemon*, 125. Emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Note Exodus 14 and 15. Chapter 14 is prose telling the reader the events at the Red Sea, while chapter 15 is the same account put to the genre of music. This was to teach and worship the God who had brought them out of slavery. Cf. Judges 4 and 5.