

# **SINGING**

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## **Colossians 3:15-16**

### **Intro**

We all sing in church every week. It's just one of those things we do right? I wonder, have you ever stopped to think about Why? Whats the point? Why do we do it? What are we aiming to do? Who is music for? Is it for all of us? Or just the musical among us?

Perhaps you are one of the musical among us, perhaps some are even involved in music and singing in church, have you stopped to think about why we are singing? Or what things might shape your approach to leading and organizing music in church?

I feel like I'm learning as I go along in many ways, I'm sure that many of you would have things to teach me, but I've collected together some of the lessons I've gleamed so far, BUT most of all we're going to look together at the Bible to see what God has to say about this matter.

### **Terminology**

One of the problems we face when we begin to talk about singing and music in church has to do with terminology. Which words do we choose and use to describe certain things? You might think this sounds pedantic or nit-picking, but the way we talk about things is important. Words are important, well chosen words can mean the difference between understanding and not understanding.

The word 'worship' is one that Christians tend to use lots and lots when we talk about singing and music. Let me put it to you that we often use the word 'Worship' in a profoundly unbiblical way. You'll often hear phrases like, 'lets move into a time of worship' - by which we mean singing together. Or we might say Jenny is a really good worship leader - by which we mean Jenny is good at leading our music and singing.

A good question to ask is - How does the new testament talk about worship? Well Romans 12 is very useful here.

**1**Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.

**2**Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

we are to offer our bodies, our whole selves as living sacrifices. This is our worship. In other words we are to give over our whole selves to God. This

is, note verse 1, in view of God's mercy, or we might say, in response to God's mercy. Put simply now that we are Christians there is nothing in our lives which cannot and should not be considered as part of our worship to God.

We are to be like living sacrifices, it's a costly 'giving up of ourselves'.

and so how we use our time, how we use our money, what we teach our children, how we treat our families... are all worship decisions.

The conclusion is this, worship is always much more than singing. So when we use the word worship only to refer to singing we are subconsciously teaching what is unbiblical.

## **2 mistakes**

Look, I think that what I've been saying is probably not new news to any of you. I say it because I reckon there are two mistakes that people commonly make. 2 mistakes when talking about and thinking about music and about worship.

(1) The first mistake is the one I've already been alluding to, that's the mistaken idea that *worship is only what we do when we sing*.

(2) There is a second mistake though, it's kind of the opposite of the first mistake. We might understand the the idea of Romans 12 - y'know everything we do is worship. but then become so paranoid that we almost downgrade our singing. *We might start to think of our singing as if it were not really part of our worship at all*. We invest no time and energy into engaging with music and singing, we might begin to see it as basically unimportant and so we will end up singing wonderful things about God with no passion, no emotion, no real engagement with the wonderful things we are singing.

What we must do is avoid the big pendulum swinging between these two mistakes! We must find a balance in the middle. We must be people who understand Romans 12 and see our every thought, word and deed as part of our worship to God. But this understanding should make us relegate music and singing to a level of unimportance, but rather if we are people who 'in view of his mercy' living everyday to please and honour God, when we come to sing to him, how much more passionate will we be...!?

The well known Christian songwriter Matt Redman put it like this in one of his songs. He said, talking about our sung worship to God he said,

'its the overflow of a forgiven soul and now we've seen you God, our hearts cannot stay silent'.

The idea of singing as an overflow of praise from our lives, strikes me as a very helpful one. If we are living, in view of God's mercy, our whole lives to please and honour God, our singing will be like an overflow of praise and worship to God.

**But Look** lets take a step back, and think about why we bother singing in our churches at all. Why do we do it, what should it be like.

Colossians Chapter 3 will help us to get a better understanding. We'll read from chapter 3:15-17

In Chapter 3 Paul is painting a picture of what life for the Colossian Christians should look like. He says since they have been v1 raised with Christ..... since they have v10 Put on a new self ... since they are v12 God's chosen people ...

Basically, since they have been born again as Christians, since they have a wonderful fresh new start they should live in a way which reflects this.

There are lists of things which the Colossian Christians are not to be involved with (sexual immorality, impurity, lust evil desires, greed.. and so on) And there are lists of things which they should be doing (they should be humble, kind patient, gentle, forgiving.. and so on).

As Paul is describing what should characterize the Christian life, he finishes up this section, saying v15...

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.  
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.

So in other words, Paul is describing what the Christian life should look like and one of the things he says is ... sing. In fact, so confident is Paul that singing is part of what the Colossian Christians are doing, he doesn't even command the Colossians to do it, Look carefully at verse 16, 'as you sing Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs'. 'As you sing... Paul assumes that they will be singing.

Music and singing is simply assumed to be part of the Christian life, part of the Christian experience. As an aside we have been studying Nehemiah recently at our church. You may know the story of Nehemiah, who at the end of the exile of the Jewish people from Israel, goes back to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The whole book is packed full of choirs and musicians and singers. In fact when the wall were finished Nehemiah appoints three groups of people. He appoints gatekeepers who's job it is to keep out enemies, but also to bring in those returning from the exile - drawing

people back into the city, almost like evangelists drawing and welcoming folks into the people of God. Nehemiah appointed levites who were priestly with responsibilities for Sacrifice and the teaching of the law... and thirdly he appointed singers. Singers! So important was singing for praise and celebration that Nehemiah appointed evangelists, teachers and then singers.

Look its just one example of how packed full the Bible is of music being used to praise and thank God. And Paul assumes singing will be part of our lives as Christians.

I want to suggest three things that could and should mark out our singing and music in church, three characteristics, if you want to jot them down then here they are - peace, God's word, and thankfulness.

### 1. Firstly **Peace**

Look with me at v15 if you would...

Peace is the context into which Paul talks about singing. Good and peaceful relationships between Christians are very important. Notice that the 'peace' Paul talks about isn't just any peace, it's not a case of us all wandering around in some zen like state trying to stay calm and not get irritated with one another. No, Paul says it is the peace of Christ that should rule in our hearts. What is the peace of Christ, well it's surely the peace that Christ brings to us in the gospel. In his death and resurrection Christ is able to make peace between us sinful people and God, but he also restores our relationships with each other. There is a unique and strong bond between all of us here. It's this peace of Christ that Paul is concerned for us to uphold.

Can I say that when it comes to music specifically, we should all be doing our utmost to make church music a uniting force and not a dividing force, something that brings us together as, as Paul puts it 'one body' rather than something which drives us apart.

It is very very sad that in many churches singing together has become a battleground. The arguments and the politics in many churches about what kind of songs we sing, what kind of instruments we play have been pretty undignified. This is so sad because there is such potential for unity in music, we can all quite literally be singing off the same hymn sheet, reflecting and celebrating our unity in the goespel

But how do we achieve this? people have such different tastes! such different ideas about what music is good music. Turn to your neighbour and tell them what the last record/CD/download was that you bought.

Pretty different right?!!

We are united in singing together when we follow Jesus example as Paul says in Phil 2:4 - each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.'

### Our philosophy at Fulwood

2. Secondly Paul says **God's Word** should dwell in us richly when we sing

Singing songs which are crammed full of truth about God is essential. for two very obvious reasons, if we are singing partly as response of thankfulness to God we should make sure that we are responding to the right God.

To show you what I mean, let me read you a love letter I've written to my wife.

*O Charlotte, I love you very deeply. Your brown eyes and red hair are so unique I dream about them all day long. It's wonderful that you are so brilliant and tennis and basketball. Thankyou for making my lunch for me every day and for always walking our dog Rover when it rains  
Love and Kisses  
Peter*

This might be a great letter to receive, except my wife won't be very please with it. She won't be very pleased because She is called Morag, has green eyes and blonde hair, she doesn't play tennis or basketball, in fact she prefers swimming and we hae a cat called Ewan not a dog called Rover. The whole thing is quite meaningless, in fact its a little bit insluting because I've responded to someone who isn't my wife at all. How much more with God should we respond to what he has revealed to us about himself in his word.

There's another obvious reason why we should sing songs crammed full of truth about God and that's because we learn a good deal about God from what we sing. What we sing, we remember and it shapes our knowledge of God - how important is it then that what we sing about God is true and Biblical. What we sing, we remember

I'm a case in point, have you seen the TV adverts for Shiela's Wheels car insurance?

I can tell you that.... QUOTE SHEILA's wheels

Why do I know that? only because I've heard it sung a thousand times, it

has shaped my entire view about Shiela's Wheels. As far as I was concerned it was all lurid pink cars and bleech blonde Aussie women - incidentally imagine my disappointment when I found out the Shiela's wheels are owned by the Halifax. The point is this - I remembered it and I learned from it because I had sung it and that is true for our church music too.

This has implications for our whole repertoire of songs, we need to sing songs that, across the board give us a balanced view of who God is. It's no good if we always sing about one aspect of God's character - we'll end up with a distorted theology of who he is.

3. The third characteristic Paul draws our attention to **Thankfulness** to God

Our singing must be marked by a real and profound sense of thankfulness, of gratefulness to God. look at verse 16

READ v16

Y'know I've heard our sung worship described, very helpfully as both horizontal and vertical. There is a horizontal aspect to our singing and a vertical aspect. To put it simply, when we sing, we are singing to each other, as I've already said we are teaching each other, helping each other to learn things about God. AND we're encouraging each other, encouraging each other to believe and to trust these great truths about God that we are singing.

But there's also a horizontal aspect - put simply we are responding to and addressing God directly too.

If we have even begun to properly understand the Good news of Jesus, God's son come to earth to rescue lost and hopeless sinners like you and me then our response will be thanks and praise to God, we will want to address him directly and praise and thank him.

It's my observation that it's often the songs and hymns which combine these horizontal and vertical elements well which are the best - they seem to work. Songs which devote some time to telling us or reminding us of something about God, helping us to encourage and teach one another ...and then giving us a chance to respond.

(Light of the World).