

Please turn in your copies of God's Word to Ephesians chapter 5. This morning we transition in our sermon series on worship from looking at those foundational truths of what worship is, why worship is necessary, how do we worship, and when do we worship. This morning we begin to take up the individual parts and aspects of worship in greater detail. It is here that we will consider why we worship specifically the way that we do, seeking to apply those foundational truths to the individual parts. Some of this may be a review to many of you, but I pray that everyone here will be edified and encouraged by the Word in our worship practice. Hear now the Word of the Lord from Ephesians chapter 5 beginning at verse 17.

Read Ephesians 5:17-19

Pray

Unfortunately, we live in a day and age in which if someone were to walk in our front doors and visit with us for the first time, the first thing that they would notice that is different about us is our sung praise. However, this was not always the case. In fact, for most of history since the Protestant Reformation churches sung the 150 Psalms of the Bible exclusively. The shift away from psalm-singing to hymn-singing didn't really begin to make ground in Protestant churches until the beginning of the 19th century, and by the end of that century it had become the dominant position. Ultimately this led to the writing of contemporary worship songs which have taken the church by storm and have caused what's known as the worship wars. There are brothers warring, fighting, bickering, and even churches splitting over the issue of whether to sing the modern songs or the traditional hymns. But in reality both sides of this worship war are but two sides of the same coin. Both hold to the position that songs of human composition ought to be sung in the worship of God. The war isn't necessarily one of principle but of preference. If you recall our sermon from a few weeks ago where we considered the regulative principle of worship, you will remember that it does not matter what your preferences are when it comes to the elements of worship, but what matters is what God commands. Whatever has

not been commanded by God to be done in worship is forbidden. W.I. Wishart says, “The vital question at issue is not so much between inspired and uninspired hymns as it is between authorized and unauthorized hymns.” Does God command the composition and inclusion of man-made songs in worship? The answer to that question is a resounding no. While many who advocate for man-made songs do so by pointing to our passage of Scripture this morning, this is done so with a false understanding of what Paul is saying here in our text. This passage is no warrant for the inclusion of hymns and modern songs into worship, but in fact, it is a clear command that it is the 150 Psalms of Scripture that are to be sung in the worship of God. So our theme this morning is that the Psalter is the only acceptable manual of praise for the New Testament Church. We will consider this theme in three ways: first, considering the command to be filled with the Spirit; next, considering what is meant by psalms, hymns, and songs; and finally, we will conclude by considering psalm-singing as a Christian duty.

Let us first consider the command to be filled with the Spirit. Look with me at verses 17 and 18, “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit.” This is an interesting contrast that Paul is highlighting here in the text. There is this contrast between being drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit. Why is it that Paul does this? He does so in order to highlight the effects of the two on the individual. We all know what the effects of being drunk with wine are. Someone who is intoxicated loses much of their self-control, losing inhibitions, and being unable to function in a proper manner. We’ve all seen that drunkard who is stumbling down the street, barely even able to hold himself up well enough to walk. His speech is slurred; he’s unable to make a coherent sentence. What’s worse is if he gets into a car and attempts to drive home. He swerves all over the road, runs red light and stop signs, and very often gets into a wreck which injures himself and others. This is what Paul is describing here. One who has given up control of himself to allow the intoxicating drink to have control

over him. But his point isn't simply to warn the believers in Ephesus of the dangers of being drunk with wine. No, he sets that in contrast with being filled with the Spirit. Where the drunkard loses his self-control and inhibitions, one who is filled with the Spirit has his mind captivated by the things of the Spirit. He is that blessed man of Psalm 1 whose delight is in the law of the Lord. And where drunkenness oftentimes leads to debauchery and sexual immorality and all other sorts of sins, the opposite is true of one who is filled with the Spirit. Calvin writes, "He whose 'delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates in it day and night,' (Ps. 1:2) will triumph over every obstacle which Satan can oppose to his progress."

Paul is saying that just as being drunk on wine controls you, takes over you thoughts, words, and deeds, and leads you down a path of sin; so let the Spirit of God fill you, controlling your thoughts, words, and deeds, and lead you down a path of righteousness. Those who are filled with the Spirit will be carried out in acts of devotion, and all the proper expressions of it. You are called to not be unwise "but understanding what the will of the Lord is." Where are you to find what the will of the Lord is? That can only come from the Word of God. If you are not in the Word regularly, daily, then how can you expect to know what the will of the Lord is? You are being influenced everyday whether you want to be or not. This world, through the influences of the prince of the power of the air, is trying to tell you what is the right thing for you. It is trying to push all kinds of wicked and vile things onto you so that you will walk down the path which leads to destruction. To neglect the Scriptures in your personal life is no better than being drunk with wine, for the world will take control over you and lead you down a path of sin. But if you are to be filled with the Spirit, if you are to be wise, if you are to know what the will of the Lord is then you must search out the Scriptures. This is one reason why the singing of psalms is so crucial to the spiritual wellbeing of the believer. This is why Paul commands that we sing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, because it is in them that the will of the Lord is found.

Most people know that one of the greatest tools for teaching someone is through song. Even the heretics of old understood this. In fact, that is where the introduction of man-made hymns came into the church. It was through the songs of the most famous heretics of old like Arius and Donatus that heresy was spread so rapidly in the early church. This is why at the Council of Laodicea in AD 364 the church determined, “Let no private psalms nor any uncanonical books be read in church, but only the canonical ones of the New and Old Testament.” This was later confirmed at the famous Council of Chalcedon in AD 451. What are you being taught by the songs that you consume? Are you being taught the will of Satan, the ways of the world, the sin and wickedness that is pervasive in our culture, or are you being taught the will of God? The only guarantee that the song on your lips is teaching you the will of God is if that song is the inspired Words of Scripture. Take up the Psalms, let them be on your lips daily, and you will truly begin to experience what it means to be filled with the Spirit.

This being filled with the Spirit is the underlying foundation for Paul command to sing psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs. “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” You may be sitting there in agreement with everything that has just been said, but confused as to how this passage commands the use of the Psalter exclusively in worship. Does Paul not use three distinct words here? Yes, he does, but you must rightly understand what is meant by these three words. To do that you must throw off your 21st century understanding of what these words mean and look at them with the understanding of a 1st century Christian. You already know that at the time Paul is writing this epistle the Bible is not complete. Perhaps the Gospel of Mark has already been written, but that is likely the only portion of the New Testament outside of Paul’s letter that was even in existence at this time. The Scriptures that these saints used was that of the Old Testament. The Old

Testament was originally written in Hebrew, but these saints in Ephesus were Greek converts to Christianity. They did not read Hebrew, but instead they used the Greek translation of the Old Testament called the Septuagint.

People often come to this text and see the word psalm and attribute that to the 150 Psalms of Scripture. Then they see the word hymn and think that is speaking of the man-made hymns of the church today, like those of John Wesley or John Newton or Isaac Watts. Then they see the words spiritual songs and say that is speaking of the other songs that Christian write. But that is not how the Greek-speaking believers at the church in Ephesus would have understood these terms. We cannot impose this modern understanding of these words onto the text. The words psalms, hymns, and songs in Greek are psalmos, hymnos, and odes. In reading their Greek Old Testament these saints would have been very familiar with these terms. But you don't even have to understand Greek to see this because the English terms are in your Bible as well. These are all words used in the inspired titles of the psalms. All three of these words are used throughout the Psalter in the titles of the psalms. 63 times the word psalmos is used in the title of a psalm. An example of that is found in Psalm 3, "A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son." In 6 different places you can find the word hymnos in the title, which in our English Bibles we see the transliterated Hebrew 'on Neginoth,' but in the Septuagint is rendered hymnos. And example of this is in Psalm 55. In 45 psalms you have the word ode in the title, such as in Psalm 45, "To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah, Maschil, A Song of loves." On 12 occasions the psalm actually contains two of these words together. In Psalm 6 we read, "To the chief Musician on Neginoth [the Septugint reads hymnos] upon Sheminith. A Psalm of David." Then in Psalm 48 we see both song and psalm used together, "A Song and Psalm for the sons of Korah." And finally, in Psalm 76 we see all three of these words used together, "To the chief Musician on Neginoth, A Psalm or Song of Asaph." When understanding these words in the context in which

they are written it becomes clear that Paul is referencing the 150 Psalms of Scripture.

I have heard the accusation that this is an absurd argument because it makes Paul out to be saying ‘sing psalms, psalms, and psalms.’ But to make that accusation is to not understand how Biblical writers from both the Old and New Testaments wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. What is being used here is a literary device known as a hendiatis. It is a figure of speech in which three words are used to express one idea. It’s a way of placing emphasis on what is being said. We see this in various places through Scripture. Exodus 34:6-7, “And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.” No one would say Jehovah Himself is being absurd by using this form of speech. We all understand that iniquity and transgression and sin are not speaking of three distinct things but the one idea of violating the law of God. Or we can look at Deuteronomy 30:15-16, “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the Lord thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.” Everyone understands that His commandments and His statutes and His judgments speak of the singular idea of the law of God. And we see that this is not unique to the Old Testament either. In fact, Paul uses this form of speech in 2 Corinthians 12:12, “Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.” Signs, wonders, and mighty deeds all speak of the miracles that were wrought among the saints.

It is plain to see that this hendiatrix of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs do not speak of individual items but speak of who singular whole that is found in the Psalter. If you were to adopt the way of thinking that many modern Christians have concerning this, then the absurdity would lie upon you. It is absurd to think that the Apostle Paul would list songs of human composition alongside the Psalms of Scripture as though to give them an equal standing with the Psalter in the worship of God. But perhaps you're not yet convinced. Then I hope this last note will be what brings you into agreement. Our text says, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." If we were to translate this literally it would say 'psalms and hymns and songs spiritual.' The way in which this sentence is structured shows that the term spiritual is a descriptor of all three words. Spiritual psalms, spiritual hymns, spiritual songs. The word translated spiritual is used in the New Testament 25 times, and in all but one it means by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. How are we to be filled with the Spirit? Paul says it is by singing the songs of the Spirit.

With all this in mind, I want to close with a more practical portion in this sermon by considering that psalm-singing is our Christian duty. "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." We are to sing these psalms and make melody in our hearts to the Lord. This is not a new duty specific to the Christian, but has always been the duty of the people of God. 1 Chronicles 16:7, "Then on that day David delivered first this psalm to thank the Lord into the hand of Asaph and his brethren." Psalm 95:1-2, "O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms." Psalm 105:2, "Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works." Nehemiah 12:24, "And the chief of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brethren over against them, to praise and to give thanks, according to the

commandment of David the man of God, ward over against ward.” The pattern is that the Psalms of Scripture was the only thing the covenant people of God used in worship. And so the pattern must continue. The Church is one in all ages, and any divine regulation affecting worship once made remains in force until it is repealed or in some way superseded. We see it continue in the New Testament. Christ Jesus Himself took the psalms on His lips in the night in which He was betrayed in Matthew 26:30, “And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.” These were the Hallel psalms, 113-118. We see it in the apostolic example in Acts 16:25, “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.” And we see it in the command of Scripture in James 5:13, “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.” Robert Shaw puts it masterfully, “The Psalms of David were especially intended by God for the use of the Church, in the exercise of public praise, under the former dispensation; and they are equally adapted to the use of the Church under the present dispensation.”

With this pattern presented to us, and in rightly understanding the regulative principle of worship, we must take up the position that the only thing to be sung in worship is the Psalms of Scripture. This means any form of worship. The regulative principle does not only apply to public worship, but to private and family worship as well. This also means that if you are out of town and visiting at another church that does not sing the psalms exclusively, you cannot join in with the singing of man-made hymns. It does not matter that the elders of that congregation have allowed it to take place. It does not matter that you may be the only one in the whole of the congregation not singing. You must not render unto the Lord in worship that which He has not commanded. You do not have to make a show of it, but simply stand there silently while the others sing. This will not cause trouble. It will not be a show of disunity. But instead it is an active and living testimony to the rest of the congregation against their improper worship practice. And more importantly, it is obedience to Jehovah who commands purity of

worship. When you come to worship God you ought to be free — free from everything that is of mere human origin. You ought to be free to worship God with words of praise and adoration that you know He will accept. Do not place yourself under the bondage of human tradition by singing man-made hymns in worship, but instead be free to worship in Spirit and in truth.

And lastly, worship the Lord from the heart. We are told in our text to sing and make melody in our heart to the Lord. Do not take upon your lips these psalms if you do not first take them up in your own heart. Your praises must not be merely on the tongue, as hypocrites, but from the heart. Matthew Henry writes, “They are to sing and to make melody in their hearts; not only with their voices, but with inward affection, and then their doing this will be as delightful and acceptable to God as music is to us: and it must be with a design to please him, and to promote his glory, that we do this; and then it will be done to the Lord.” Sing from the heart. Pour your heart out before Jehovah in praise to Him. Be able to say with the sweet psalmist of Israel, “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God... When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me.” Your worship can be externally the most pure of all, but if it does not come from a sincere and contrite heart then it is worthless. Presenting your sacrifice of praise before Jehovah in an insincere manner is no better than offering strange fire unto the Lord which He commanded you not. Take up the psalms and let them soak into your very soul. Bring them before the Lord in heartfelt praise, for this is your Christian duty.

Brothers and sisters, this is that acceptable form of worship which is instituted by God Himself. We cannot be flippant about it. We cannot be wavering in it. Exclusive psalmody must be the conviction of your heart, or else you will likely be tossed to and fro by your ever changing preference in worship. Do not substitute the perfect Word of God for the imperfect words of men. Friends, the Psalter is the only acceptable manual of praise for the New Testament Church.