

POST TENEBRAS LUX

Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16

Douglas Wilson

Christ Church - Moscow, ID

A.D. October 26, 2008

INTRODUCTION:

The title of this message is a phrase that has been used to describe the great work of the Spirit in the Reformation, and that Latin phrase means “after darkness, light.” It is the purpose of this sermon to focus on one particular manifestation of that transformation, which was the musical transformation which occurred. *Post silentium cantus*. After silence, song.

THE TEXTS:

“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; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 5:18-20).

“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” (Col. 3:16).

SUMMARY OF THE TEXTS:

We too often assume that this phrase “with the Spirit” means that the Holy Spirit is the substance with which we are filled. A better rendition of this would be “by the Spirit,” meaning that the Holy Spirit is the agent who does the filling, not the substance with which we are filled. But if that is the case, then what are we to be filled with. The answer to this comes from the parallel passage in Colossians, which tells us that it is the word of Christ. Putting this together, we are to be filled with the word of Christ, an action performed by the Holy Spirit, and this has certain observable results which follow. What are they?

The command is to be filled with the word of Christ by the Spirit, and then this command is followed by a series of participles—speaking, teaching, admonishing, singing, making melody, giving thanks, and submitting. The structure would be something like this: Cook the turkey (imperative), keeping the oven at 350 degrees, basting as necessary, and removing when done. The imperative tells you what is to be done, and the participles describe the doing. In this case, we are told to be indwelt by the word, and to allow the Spirit to accomplish this. *How* do we allow the Spirit to accomplish this? The answer is not limited to music, but the answer certainly *begins* with music.

DWELL IN YOU RICHLY:

The word of Christ is something that in its very nature is potent and pervasive. It will dwell in us richly unless we take active steps to prevent it from doing so. In order to remain unaffected, we have to develop some countermeasures, some workarounds, to keep God from messing with our lives. It is unfortunate, but many professing Christians do just this—and the opposite effect happens. That would be the real day the music dies.

The illustration may seem irreverent, but it is not intended that way. Picture the word of Christ in your life as a powerful and aromatic cheese. A workaround would be to wrap it in tin foil and put it in the back of your freezer. It is in your house, but it is not in your house richly. But if you bake a dish in your oven, using that cheese, the cheese is in your house, and it is in your house richly. What is that aroma? In these texts, it begins with the music.

GOSPEL REFORMATION:

There are a number of things that go together here. We begin with the objectivity and truth of the gospel—it has to be the word of *Christ*, and not the words of human traditions, or the words of some idol. The imperative has to be observed. But at the same time, the imperative cannot be observed “raw,” with no participles following.

Jesus told us that we were to evaluate whether teachers were false or true by means of the *fruit* that followed their ministry. This is because an evil tree cannot bear good fruit, and a good tree cannot bear evil fruit (Matt. 7:16). In these texts, what accompanies the work of the Spirit in causing the word of Christ to dwell in us richly? The answer is pretty plain in the text—singing with grace, mutual submission, musical instruction, giving thanks, and singing in your heart to God.

A LITTLE HISTORY:

Measured by these criteria, the Reformation was clearly a glorious work of the Holy Spirit. It exhibits signs of His characteristic work everywhere, and in particular we see this in the music that came out of the Reformation.

Before the Reformation, there was a sharp divide between the clergy and the laity. The clergymen did all the worship work up front (sometimes behind a *screen*), and the laity gathered out in the nave of the sanctuary to watch and listen. One of the fundamental movements of the Reformation was that of reincorporating the laity back into the life of the Church. This was done in numerous areas—for example, in the government of the churches, the ruling elders meant that the laity was now included. But one of the biggest and most obvious transformations was the explosion of music, and the inclusion of the congregation. Words were made plain, and put in the vernacular. The melodies and settings were made accessible so that the average Christian could learn to sing them. The publication of psalters and hymnals was extremely widespread. The people found a voice again, were included in the worship of God again, and they used their voice to sing.

WHEN YOU SAY “CALVINIST,” THEY SAY . . .?

How did you fill that sentence in? Was it with any words like *music*, *thanks*, or *grateful submission*? In the first century of the Reformation, at least, it was very much that way. But today, too many Calvinists or Reformed theology wonks are without musical soul. Their cry is “O for a thousand tongues to praise my great Redeemer’s decrees,” which doesn’t even scan or rhyme. When the Holy Spirit is present in a work or a movement, one of the first things that happens is a restoration of joy, and a restoration of joy in the music of the psalms. “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms” (James 5:13).

REFORMATIONAL MUSIC:

None of this means that the music floats in our midst mystically, or in a way that makes all the joys of earthly accomplishment moot. It is not the case that when Reformation arrives, the tone deaf will suddenly start finding their pitch. The thing that changes is the exuberance of heart attitude. The word of Christ dwells in us richly, and we *enjoy* the rough and tumble lessons that follow. When the Holy Spirit finds our hearts, we find our voice.



Published by: Canon Press • P.O. Box 8729 • 205 E. 5th St. • Moscow, ID 83843
www.canonpress.com • orders@canonpress.com • 800-488-2034 • Fax 208-882-1568