

An Atmosphere of Truth, Part 2

Ephesians 5:19-21

July 26, 2015

We've come to the end of what's turned out to be a three-month series on membership and involvement in the local church. I didn't start out intending a three-month series; I started out intending a one-month series. But now you know me, okay? That's the way I go. But we're going to wrap up the series this morning. Next week we're going to get back into the Gospel of Luke. We've been away from Luke's Gospel for a bit, so I'm going to provide a bit of review just to get us back in the flow, and hopefully that will be a good reminder but also a real blessing to you as we kinda try to highlight some of the high points, the truths that we rejoiced in in that study of Luke.

So for this morning, we are going to conclude our series on the local church, and I hope you've enjoyed it as much as I have. I, I really have, I love the church, I love this church.

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There is just, there's no institution like the church on this earth. Last week we talked about the fundamental importance in the local church of assimilating the truth. Assimilating the truth, taking it in, imbibing it, drinking it down deeply. That is the main purpose of the week-by-week ministry of the Word. We teach to equip and to edify the saints. We need the truth of God's Word to saturate our church, to go deep, to go broad. God's voice is to echo in our halls. His words are to resound throughout our fellowship.

Last week I focused on the role of leadership in disseminating the truth. We do that from the pulpit. We do it throughout all the classrooms. We do it on all the teaching platforms. We also talked last week about your role in assimilating the truth, in taking it in, your responsibility. This week we're going to be talking about our collective responsibility, well both the corporate level and the individual level, but our responsibility together to reinforce the truth with one another, to take the truth that's taught, the truth that we're learning, the truth that we're assimilating, and then to work that in, like kneading the dough, like working it in at all levels.

But I want to start with a basic question this morning. Why should we? Why should we? Why do we need to reinforce truth with one another? I mean, aside from the fact that it's commanded, that should mean something to us, right? That it's commanded in Scripture. Many of the, one another, commands in Scripture have to do with reinforcing the truth. Remember a few weeks ago, we talked about that? We're to speak, to encourage, to instruct, to exhort, to admonish, practice the truth with one another, all that. When we do all of that, we are reinforcing the truth with one another, and those things are commanded. Those things are what we're to do just because it's right, just because it's our duty.

But why is this so important? What's the concern, here, in the fact that we need to be reinforcing the truth in and among the body of Christ? Well, there are two issues I'd like to raise, just to give you a, "so what", about why this message is important to you. Two issues, two concerns I have and I want to raise about our obedience to these, one another, the need that we have to undergird the one another by teaching, assimilating, reinforcing the truth in our church.

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The first concern has to do with the changing world around us. In one sense, the world has changed, and it has changed dramatically, fundamentally. The recent decisions coming from the US Supreme Court have signaled the triumph of erotic liberty over religious liberty. The free exercise of religion used to be inviolable in this land. No longer. The official sanction of same-sex sin is unprecedented in this country. By celebrating immorality and calling all Americans to do the same, this government has charted a collision course with the church of Jesus Christ. Public policy from here on out will not be favorable to Christians. It will not tolerate biblical morality. Our nation is now officially anti-Christ. Christians no longer get a pass. There's no more sympathy for biblical morality, and not only is it no longer tolerated. It's considered the height of lunacy, total insanity. Christians are the real terrorists. They are the purveyors of intolerance and hatred. They are the dangerous element to be watched, and censured, and silenced. So in one sense, a lot has changed.

But in another sense, nothing has changed. If you go back into Paul's first letter to Corinthians, he said, "The gospel is

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foolishness to those who are perishing.” It’s foolishness to those who are not believing. It’s utter insanity, worshiping a crucified man. Nothing’s changed. Even the recent US Supreme Court decisions, those decisions simply acknowledge the love of sin, the rejection of God, that this country has displayed for many, many years. We’ve been sowing the seeds of this nation’s demise for centuries. We’ve been offending God the entire time. We’re now reaping the crop.

God has been patient, yes, but his patience has come to an end. He’s turned us over to sexual immorality. He’s turned us over to homosexuality. He’s turned us over to a debased mind. He’s turned us over to do things that ought not to be done, defiling ourselves with one another, and then suffering the consequences of a debased mind. It’s going to get worse, folks, not better. Degrading passions and debased thinking will join together to produce offspring more vile and violent than anything we’ve seen, yet. So buckle up.

The culture will be utterly insensitive to its own corruption, and we get that, we understand that. Of course, it

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won't recognize its own filthiness. Of course, it won't smell its own stink. But those who profess Christ, those who profess Christ and yet are unfamiliar with the holiness and the purity of God's thinking because they don't know his Word, those people are going to stray from the truth and they're gonna wander into apostasy, and beloved, it's already happening. Churches, evangelical churches, evangel, which is a word that means gospel. Gospel preaching churches are embracing homosexual marriage left and right. Why do they do that? Because they don't know his Word.

And that's why it will be so vital in these dark days here at this church to reinforce the truth with one another. The perversions and subversions that surround us, you gotta understand this, they can also affect us. They can leave their mark, and that's why, you, when you read about, 2 Peter, calls Lot, righteous Lot, whose righteous soul was tormented day by day as he saw the ungodly behavior of ungodly sinners. You read about him living in the wicked city of Sodom back in Genesis. He was willing to allow the vile men of that city, who surrounded his house and wanted to rape angels, he was willing to allow his own daughters to go out there and satisfy those wicked passions.

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How does that happen? Because Lot was living in Sodom. His thinking had been infected by the sins of that culture, by the world around him. Listen, beloved, that ought to be instructive to us. We need to be on our guard to keep ourselves unstained by the world, James 1:27. We need to reaffirm with one another the truth. We need to teach one another the truth that has been revealed from heaven, lest we be swept away in the world's moral corruption and its intellectual confusion, we need to preach the Gospel to ourselves every single day, over and over again. We need to reinforce it with each other. We need to instruct the ignorant, and we need to remind the redeemed, we need to protect all of God's people.

Now, not only do we need to reinforce the truth, to stand firm against a changing world, second reason we need to reinforce the truth is for the sake of our own souls. It's for the sake of us. As the world changes, and we might say as the world stays the same, the stakes go up for everyone who identifies with the church of Jesus Christ. This past Tuesday night I had the privilege of teaching the students, our middle-schoolers, our high-schoolers. Wonderful time! And you've got awesome kids! I mean, the future in the church with those kinds

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of kids their just, their minds are just popping, their questions are sharp and insightful. You've got to know the future's really bright when people like that, young people like that are growing up into maturity. They're going to take over the reins of the church one day. We're going to train them for that. You've got to be encouraged from what I saw.

But we were learning together about the significance of Christian perseverance, the doctrine of perseverance. It's not those who start well who will be saved, but only those who endure to the end. They will be saved. There are so many who seem to embrace Christ, who seem to enter the Christian race, very few make it to the end, to finish well. Many will stand before Christ on Judgment Day thinking all is well, expecting to pass through the gates of heaven, only to be turned away by the most terrifying words that Jesus may have ever spoken, "I never knew you. I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." Those are haunting words. Those whom Jesus will turn away, those are people who attend churches. They attend evangelical churches. They, they even attend this church. But because they refused to self-examine, because they refused to come to Christ on his terms, not their own, because of their

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lackadaisical attitude about the things God cares passionately about, they reveal they don't really belong to Christ. He does not know them as his own.

We're going to be coming before the Lord's Table today. It's a table that calls for self-examination. It calls for us every time we celebrate this to examine ourselves, to think about sins we've been committing, confess them, have a clear conscience before God. They call us to examine ourselves even to see, Man, if I've been in a pattern of sin, am I even in the faith? We should do that today. There are many, man, beloved, who are superficially attached to the vine. They're like a branch that been grafted in, but it never took root. The graft never really took, John 15.

These people show up in our church, they go through the motions, their kids are in AWANA, youth group, whatever. Some of them even serve. They get active in and around the church. They take ownership of things. But they have no real substantive relationship with Jesus Christ. The truth never really takes deep, permanent root in their hearts. There's no change, there's

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no transformation, no passion for Christ and his people, no concern for preaching the Gospel to the lost. Pretty scary, isn't it?

You know that's why Peter, 2 Peter 1:3-11, he outlines the nature of a vital, real, and, by the way, a normal, Christian life. A true Christian is one who is regularly partaking of the divine nature, immersed in Scripture. At the same time, he's keeping himself separate and unstained by the world. His striving for holiness requires constant attention. And the true Christian is giving himself to that pursuit. A true Christian adds to his faith continually. He's never satisfied by leveling out on a plateau. A true Christian is saying, I need to add to my faith, virtue and to virtue, knowledge, and to knowledge, self-control, and then steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and love. That's 2 Peter 1. The true Christian knows the possession and growth of those fruits of the Spirit are going to keep him, again, 2 Peter 1, "from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," 2 Peter 1:8.

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So continuing, Peter exhorts us, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. And in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

Boy, I want to make my calling and election sure, don't you? I want that door to be wide open when I get there. We don't have much time, folks. As Mike read, "All flesh is like grass. Its glory is like the fading flower of the grass." The way God preserves those he elected and he called into salvation, it's through their own self-examination. That's how he preserves them. He preserves them by causing them to be diligent to attend to their spiritual growth. That is the means that he uses to cause us to persevere, to cause us to endure to the end.

Contrary to the many false gospels that thrive in the evangelical world, it is not easy to get to heaven. It's hard. It's painful. It's a fight. That's why Jesus exhorts us, "Strive to enter through the narrow door," Luke 13:24. "For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able." The word, narrow,

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refers to something extremely small. It's constricted. It's confined. It's very difficult and painful to squeeze through it. And it's so hard to find it, and then to fit through it, that many turn away, and they opt instead for the wide gate, to walk the broad road. It's a lot easier. It allows them to pursue their spirituality on their own terms, in ease and comfort.

Listen, folks, we're all tempted that way, aren't we? We're all tempted that way, which is why we need to strive to enter in through that narrow door. The word "strive" is *agonizamai*. You hear the word, right? Agony, agonize, it's a fight. It's a fight against the world and the flesh and the devil to enter the narrow gate, to enter into salvation, and to stay on the road, the narrow road. That's why Jesus said, "From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force."

Those who are pacifists in this fight against the world, the flesh and the devil, they're going to be casualties in the war. Some of those are even going to be the cause of other casualties as they lead others by their example through the wide

gate, along the wide road, along the non-violent path to salvation, paved by the enemy himself, leading directly into the fires of eternal hell.

Peter knew that, and it concerned him that anyone who might read his letter would fall short of persevering to the end. And that's why a significant aspect of Peter's pastoral ministry was, and Paul's ministry, and all pastoral ministry, all of our elders' ministry is to reinforce the truth with other Christians, to repeat it, to remind, to exhort. 2 Peter 1:12-15, "Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder... I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things."

Listen, it's an abiding apostolic priority that we reinforce the truth with one another. We need daily encouragement to stay on this narrow road, enduring in this hard, confined, constricted way to persevere to the end. Listen,

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if you're not finding the Christian life to be very hard, then perhaps you need to examine yourself. Are in the faith at all? Are you faithful in living out the reality of your faith? because Jesus said that when you do, you will be hated by the world, just as he was.

Beloved, it's for those reasons that we reinforce the truth with one another, because the world around us is so enticing and defiling, and because we ourselves can be so easily deceived, we so easily forget. We need to speak the truth to one another. We need to encourage one another, "and all the more as you see the day drawing near." We can't afford to let one another slide by in spiritual mediocrity. The stakes are so high. The implications are very real. They're eternal. And love compels us to warn, to remind, to encourage, to admonish.

Well, with all that in mind, just a bit of introduction, why this is important, the so what, of today's sermon, let's turn back to Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians chapter 5. We're going to continue with the passage we looked at last time. I also want you to turn over a couple of books toward the end, the

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book of Colossians. Go to Colossians chapter 3 as well. Stick a finger in there, and look at, we're going to look at both passages. You, member, remember from last week, Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16, they're parallel to one another. I'm going to draw from both passages to talk about how we reinforce the truth with one another, and as we begin, let me read those passages; set them before our eyes.

Ephesians 5:18-21, Paul writes, "do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ."

Now flip over quickly to Colossians 3:16. Colossians 3:16 parallel, "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. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the

name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Now if, as we said last week, if the Spirit fills us with the Word of Christ, and if we are to attend to the filling work of the Holy Spirit regularly, putting ourselves under the teaching ministry of the local church so the truth dwells in us richly, what’s the result? What’s the result? The effect of God’s Word in our church is nothing short of dynamic, dynamic, lively. Look at the participles, there, in verses 16-17, teaching, admonishing, singing, thanksgiving.

Flip back over to Ephesians 5:18-21, look at the participles there, addressing (or many translations say speaking); Addressing, speaking, singing, making melody or even, making music, giving thanks, and submitting.

Listen, wherever the truth is pervasive in a church, whenever the atmosphere is super-saturated with truth, there is a corresponding vibrancy, excitement, joy. The church is filled with life. It’s bursting with activity; it’s abounding in

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productivity. Take the truth away, like a tree without water, everything dies. Oh, sure, you can manufacture excitement. You can fake life and health just like you can paint a dead tree green. They're doing that a lot in California, spray-painting the lawns. But listen, you cut into the bark, you find no sap. When the fire comes, that tree's going to burn. And in the same way, a church without the truth coursing deeply through its corporate veins, it's a dead place. I don't care how many people are there. You make a cut into a member of the congregation, just a superficial cut, and instead of godliness, you're going to find worldliness, sinful reactions and responses, gossip and backbiting, jealousy and grumbling. And when the fires of trial come, make no mistake, they will come, beloved.

When the fires of trial and persecution come, if there is no life-giving truth inside, you're going to watch people wither, burn, and eventually fall away.

But with the truth, with the truth permeating the church's atmosphere, filling every room, echoing down the hallway, there's life, health, growth, productivity. There's teaching and

admonishing. There is singing and making music. There's thanksgiving and submitting. Can I give you just one word that sums all that up? One word. A truth-saturated church is filled with worship. Worship. Vibrant, joyful, life-giving, transformative worship. That's where I want to be, don't you? That's where I want to raise my family. That's where I want to invest my resources, my time, my money, my energy, laying up treasure for heaven that will yield eternal dividends, heavenly reward.

So what's our part in reinforcing the truth to one another? Let's get into our outline. I think you have it there in your bulletin. We reinforce the truth when we teach the truth, sing the truth, give thanks for the truth, and obey the truth, and when we do all that, together with one another. Let's take a look at the first point in the outline: We reinforce the truth when we, number one, teach the truth to one another, when we teach the truth to one another.

As Colossians 3:16 says, we're to be "teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom." The Greek text actually

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emphasizes that final phrase in our translations, it puts it up in front of the sentence. That is, "In all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another." You know what that means? You know what this represents? Every single member of the congregation makes it their personal, individual responsibility to make sure the Word of Christ is richly indwelling them so that every single member is growing, is thriving. It's not just about growing in knowledge. Knowledge is absolutely vital, but it's more than that. It's about wisdom. Wisdom. You understand the difference, right? Knowledge of the truth, facts, propositions, doctrine, theology, you can't grow without it. It's a Christian's duty to learn the breadth, the depth of Christian truth. Knowing is one thing; applying is another. That's wisdom. Wisdom is the right, the effective, the proper application of knowledge, putting it into practice, being obedient to the truth that you see there. And by being obedient, you learn wisdom. Wisdom bespeaks maturity. It indicates godliness, experience in applying biblical truth in the trials and the triumphs of life. Those who are pursuing wisdom, walking in wisdom, which ought to be all of us, even if we vary, we're at different stages of growth and maturity. All of us nonetheless are pursuing wisdom together, walking in wisdom together. Why? Because we fear the Lord; we revere him. And those who are pursuing that together,

they are reinforcing the truth by teaching and admonishing one another.

Teaching, teaching is imparting the truth. It's doing what I'm doing right now. It's disseminating the truth of the Bible, explaining, helping others to understand. Whether you're teaching biblical passages or principles from Scripture or explaining doctrine and theology, or even teaching the applications of those things in some form of discipleship, teaching, or evangelism training. Whatever it is, at some level, we are all to be striving for maturity so we can teach others. So as you learn, share it with somebody else. Maybe you're not an official teacher in the church; maybe it's not your gifting. But at some level, we're all teachers. We're all priests to this culture. We get to bring them to God. As you learn, share it with somebody. Verbalize it. Discuss what you're learning through listening to preaching.

You know, I can tell very quickly in conversations with people where they are in their maturity with Christ. If they don't talk very much about the truth or talk at a very deep

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level about the truth, it tells you a lot. "Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks." Listen, folks, pass on what you're learning through Bible study. Pass it on to others. Recommend good preaching, books, articles, that's the idea. Talk about it.

What about admonishing, what does that mean? To admonish means we are to correct others; sometimes strictly. Contrary to the tolerant, judge not spirit, that has pervaded the evangelical movement over the past 50 or 100 years, we are responsible to correct professing Christians when they're wrong. As Paul said, it's not our responsibility to judge the world. God has already judged the world. They're already under his condemnation and wrath just as we were before God saved us.

So we're not to judge the world, but we are to judge one another in the church. You say, Prove that, biblically. Okay. Go to 1 Corinthians chapter 5. Thanks for asking; I wanted to read this anyway. 1 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 9, Paul says there, "I wrote you in my letter," that's a previous letter, not, not this one here, but he says, I wrote you in my letter "not to

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associate with sexually immoral people, not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world or the greedy or swindlers or idolaters since then you would need to go out of the world.

“But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone,” get this, “who bears the name of brother.” What’s that? A fellow professing Christian. You’re not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother, “if he’s guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reveler, drunkard, or swindler, not even to eat with such a one.” Wow! Don’t even have lunch, even a burger over at Carl’s Jr? No, not even a burger at Carl’s Jr. Don’t do that! “For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge. God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.” Wow!

Now listen, we’re not talking about nitpicking people on every point of doctrine, picking apart every little issue that you think you see. That’s contrary to wisdom. That’s not mature. But when someone is characterized by a pattern of sin, characterized by sinful habits, when someone is going off the

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rails in some aspect of their life, if someone is in significant error on some key point of doctrine, you know what? It is loving to correct them. It's loving to admonish them.

Letting sin and error continue unchecked in a fellow brother or sister in Christ just to avoid a conflict, that's the height of selfishness, beloved. If you're unwilling to help somebody out of their error, you might as well push them over the cliff all the way, just speed them on their journey to the rocks below. Because that's what's going to happen, same thing. Folks, we need to love one another.

And this isn't the job of the pastor or the elders to go around nitpicking everybody's life, you people are to admonish one another. This ought to be happening all the time. The first step of church discipline, Matthew 18, ought to be a regular part of church life. And it stays at the first step because the person, a true Christian, really wants to grow. You come to me and you say, hey Travis, man, the way you interact with people... I watch, I watch this you pattern, see the way you're kind of harsh in this, or your, your unkind in this, and I just see a

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pattern in you, and I just wanted to point it out. You know what? I need to say, you know what? I see your point. Or if I don't see it right way, I need to say, Listen, I need to think about that and pray about it. Get back to you. We need to be willing to receive correction, receive admana, admonishment, and willing to give it. We're responsible for each other. We care for each other.

So we reinforce the truth, point one, by teaching the truth to one another. Teaching it. That is, teach and admonish. A lot more we could say, but we need to keep moving. Second point: We reinforce the truth when we sing the truth to one another. When we sing the truth with one another. Now Paul emphasizes this aspect of reinforcing the truth in both Ephesians and Colossians, but let's focus our attention on Ephesians 5:19. Okay? Take a look. We're to be addressing, or I said, speaking, "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," we're to be "singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart." Three of the five participles in Ephesians 5:19-21, three of the five, the results of the Spirit's ministry to fill us with truth, three of those effects are right here in this verse. Addressing one another in elevated, exalted language of

music, singing and making melody, this is talking about the vital role of music in the corporate body life of the church.

Now I want you to get ready, brace yourself, because I'm about to do a little teaching and admonishing, okay. Notice, first of all, that the target audience in the corporate music of the church is two-fold. Two-fold: On the one hand, we're addressing one another in song; and on the other hand, we're singing and making music to the Lord. One another and the Lord.

Pause there for a moment. I don't know about you and your experience in churches, but most of the evangelical churches I've been to, those that are, those are not the two audiences that are targeted in the music ministry. There is a lot going on in evangelical singing that's supposed to cater to the visitor, cater to the seeker, cater to the unbeliever, the person who's checking out the church. Churches want to try really, really hard to make sure that the music is appealing so that people will like them and they'll come back.

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Not only that, but almost without exception, music in the church is not just about providing appealing music to unbelievers, but it's about providing an individual worship experience. The, the song leader, the music minister, all the musicians, their job is to create an atmosphere of worship, whatever that means. I've even heard it as describe, described this way: We are ushering in the Holy Spirit. Really? You mean the ever-present, ubiquitous Spirit of the living God, pervades the whole earth, you're going to usher him in? Good luck with that!

Those who serve up front playing instruments, leading the singing, they're there to lift you up or to bring God down. It's all about you. It's all, it's all about you as an individual connecting with God, worshiping with God, feeling good. Music is oriented toward getting either people hyped up, elevating their emotions, or making them feel soft and cuddly, or whatever. It's about putting them in a mood. When that's the goal, music becomes very individualistic, very self-focused. It treats people like consumers rather than fellow slaves of Jesus Christ, existing to serve those around them.

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This goes in two directions in churches. In some congregations, people who are self-focused in the corporate song service, they take the opportunity to do whatever they want. They're unrestrained, ecstatic, loud, charismatic. I've even seen, personally seen dancing, swaying, hopping, some people look like they're doing an aerobics routine right in the church. What is that?

In other congregations, probably most non-charismatic congregations, people express their self-centeredness by just refusing to sing, or singing without any passion at all. They retreat into themselves. They may be singing, sure, but you can hardly hear them. There's no energy, no passion, no zeal. And that stands to reason, doesn't it? If the singing time is all about you, and you don't feel like singing, maybe you don't like the song selection, maybe you don't like the style of music, maybe you don't like the person leading, or the people up here, whatever! Do whatever you want. Don't sing. Walk out. Go get coffee. If it's all about you, and you're not satisfied, then you as the consumer can choose to participate or not, right? Listen, according to this passage, that is a sinful, self-centered attitude. You can't do that.

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As we sing, we need to be mindful of both audiences. There are two recipients of our ministry in song: other Christians around you, and the Lord. And I know this is a strong statement, beloved, but you are sinning if you take either one of those for granted. Your singing in church is not about making you feel good, feel better, more connected to God, closer to him, or whatever. That may be the result of your singing in church but it's not the goal.

The goal is exactly what Ephesians 5:19 says, to address others with the truth. Firstly, you're addressing the human audience in the seats around you. Secondly, you're addressing the God who watches over the worship service. Addressing one another with truth in this way, there's something special about that. This isn't just quoting Bible verses to each other though we could do that. It's not just quoting Bible verses, but this is elevated language. It's exalted language. We take the revealed truths of Scripture, we put them in the form of poetic, rhythmic verse, we accompany those words with fitting, appropriate music, and we join our voices together in unison,

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singing loudly. And when we sing, we're to sing robustly, exultantly, jubilantly.

We're to sing, as it says there, "Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." Let me break that down for you. Psalms are essentially divinely inspired poetry, poetic verse breathed out by God himself, okay. That's what you see in the book of Psalms, the psalter, many of them penned by David. The Greek word *psalmos* translates a Hebrew word, *mitzmor*, or it's from the word *zamar*, the verb *zamar*, which basically means to play a musical instrument in the context of a worship service. Usually, on a musical instrument, singing with a musical accompaniment. That's the idea.

The word, psalm, has always meant "singing to musical accompaniment." That's the word. Which is why when you find people who take pride in the fact that they don't have any musical instruments in the worship service, the word psalm means sing with music, accompaniment. By the way, no sin to plug in some of those lyres and harps and everything to electricity, it's totally cool. You can see in the Old Testament a rhythm

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section, drums, totally cool. Holy Spirit gave poetic revelation to the psalm writers.

The psalmists wrote those verses down; the musicians put them to music. You can even see in some of the psalms the musical instructions, right, to the music leader. And then God's people sang those psalms together, most often in the context of a corporate assembly. I love that picture, don't you? I love that! This reveals God as the church's greatest hymn writer, the chief musician. He has written the verses, gives us the music, uses us and equips us with people who can produce music. And then he uses us as his instruments to make music. He's like an orchestra director, choir director. Beautiful, beautiful picture of our God. Oh, yeah, he has an interest in our music.

If a psalm puts God's words to music, a hymn puts biblical theology to music. The word, hymn, comes from the Greek word *humnos*. It's a more general word than psalm, and it refers broadly to a song with religious content, especially a song of praise to a deity, a god; Christian context, we're obviously talking about a song to our deity, our God, our triune God, a

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song of praise to him. So a psalm is divinely inspired poetic verse, we're to put to music and sing. A hymn is the theology of the Bible, the doctrines of the Bible, that we sing to musical accompaniment.

Third word, the word *ōdais*, from which we get the word English word, *ode*; *ode* like a song. You can find the word *ōdais* in classical Greek tragedy as a song of mourning or lamentation on the one hand, or on the other side of the emotional spectrum, it's a song of joy or praise. There's a deeply emotional aspect to this word *ōdai*, song, which gives expression to the full range of human emotion. Both sadness and mourning are appropriate in church, as well as joyful celebration and praise. It's okay to sing both. Sometimes very appropriate to sing either one depending on the occasions, plenty of examples in Scripture, but notice that Paul adds an adjective to the word song. We're to sing spiritual songs. We're to put boundaries around our emotion. The songs we sing are to reinforce spiritual things: truth.

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We're to reinforce truth to one another. So while the songs we write, compose, what we sing, it comes out of our experiences, our reactions to divine truth, revealed truth, revealed theology. While these are responses, these are experiences, emotions, they are to correspond to the truth. They're to be bounded in the truth. Our experiences are to be informed by, guided by, interpreted through, restrained by truth; spiritual in nature, never fleshly, never worldly. And now you understand what the term means, back to the point.

Whether it's a psalm, a hymn, or spiritual song, whether we're singing words of divinely inspired poetry, words of biblical theology, or words of human emotion that are informed and bounded by the truth, what we sing is meant to speak truth to one another, to each other. We're reinforcing the truth that way. We're doing together, in unison, loudly and robustly.

Not only that, but Paul pivots our attention from the human audience in the first part, verse 19 to the divine audience in the second half of the verse. And we've become mindful that the manner of our singing is noted by God. The way we sing. Folks,

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as we sing, as we speak, as we live, the Lord is watching. He's listening. When we sing, we worship him collectively. We praise him together. The Spirit fills us with divine truth, and we sing that truth back to God, honoring his word by singing it back to him in elevated language.

Our expressions of creativity, they reflect the excellence and the beauty of our Creator. Our songs, our music, like everything else we do is to glorify God. We need to be thoughtful about that over-arching purpose of music when we come into the church. As Christians, we participate with God's Spirit to bring glory to God in everything we say and do, and that includes our music; what we play on our instruments, how we play it, why we play it. The goal in ministering to our human audience is to communicate the truth in excellent, transcendent, memorable ways. The goal of ministering to our divine audience is worship, singing, making music out of our love for God. We worship him in spirit and in truth: heart, soul, mind, and strength, all invested to bring praise to him.

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Listen, the recognition we are singing to God, should dictate the level of energy and effort we expend in singing to him, should it not? Can you imagine, you go to heaven, you're standing there with the throng of the redeemed of every tribe, tongue, and nation; you're surrounded by the holy angels and you're mumbling your way through a hymn. "Then sings my soul...[yawn]..." How great thou art. What is that? You're not gonna do that there! So why do we do it here? Why do we do that here? Why are we acting like, well, almost like unbelievers, living by sight and not by faith.

Why do we think so little of ministering truth to one another in song? Well, I think it's because of how we've been influenced. I think we've all been taught this, whether it's not, whether it's maybe, it's not by teaching overtly, but maybe it's just by experience. I've been to so many churches, growing up in churches just like you have, and you just see it; you just feel it, nobody takes the time to explain it to you. Well, may God give us grace to excel still more, here, right, in the way we sing. Don't you want to sing more robustly?

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Teaching and singing the truth to one another, two ways we reinforce the truth. Third point, third point in your outline: We reinforce the truth when we give thanks for the truth with one another. When we give thanks with one another for the truth. Ephesians 5:20 says we're to be "always be giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father." Colossians 3:17 says, "giving thanks to God the Father through him."

We need to keep this really brief, but it's such an important point. Having a sincere heart of gratitude toward God is one of the clearest dividing lines between a believer and an unbeliever. God's indictment of humanity in Romans begins with this, "For even though they knew God, they didn't honor him as God or give thanks." Romans 1:21. Listen, it is very serious to fail to give thanks, either ignoring divine grace in your life, taking credit for what you don't deserve; or on the other hand, to complain and grumble about things you don't like, forgetting that, "God ordains all things for our good and his glory." Romans 8:28, right?

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So that's why Ephesians 5:20 says we're to "give thanks always for all things." Do you give thanks always, for all things? Or do complaints slip out of your soul? True Christian gratitude is expressed when things are going well, but also when things seem to not go so well. Anyone can express praise and thanks and gratitude when all is well, right? You see the football player interviewed after the game. Hey, how'd it go? Well, I just wanna give thanks to God and my family and everything else for the touchdown I scored and for everything. Hey, you, losing side. Losing player, you who fumbled the ball and cost the game. I just want to give thanks for losing the game there, for fumbling the ball right into the team's hands, and they scored the winning touchdown. We lost miserably. Because I realize that God formed all things for my good. Turn the camera off! Stop! Cut! Let's not broadcast live!

Anyone can express thanks and praise when everything's going well, right? Only Christians can praise God sincerely, deeply, meaningfully when they go through trials, when they lose a loved one, when they lose a job, when they can't find a job, when things are tight, and they're looking at kids to feed and they don't have money, when they're persecuted for doing what's

right. Gratitude in those circumstances, evidence of true conversion.

And that's why thanksgiving plays such an important role in reinforcing the truth with one another. You know why? It sets a tone. It creates an environment in which bitterness and rancor and grumbling and complaining and all those other sins of the heart and the tongue, when thanksgiving is the dominant tone in the church, those sins of thought and speech are utterly out of place. They stand out as unfitting and even as immoral.

When we give thanks to God, our sovereign Creator, when we give thanks to our Father, our Redeemer, and our merciful Savior, you know something? When we are giving thanks to God, we cannot be at the same time and in the same moment grumbling, and complaining, and self-centered, and discontented, and conflicted, and restless, we're content in him. Quite the contrary, right? When we express thanksgiving to God, we're humble, we're satisfied in God, we're content in God, we're at peace with him, we're pleased in him, we're joyful in him. And reinforcing those truths with one another that changes things in

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the church, doesn't it? It changes things; it sets the right tone.

All right, reinforce the truth. We reinforce the truth when we teach each other the truth, when we sing the truth, we give thanks for the truth. Lastly, point four, we reinforce the truth with each other when we obey the truth with one another, when we obey it. Colossians 3:17, Paul says, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus." To do something in the name of somebody else, that means to conduct yourself in a manner that's consistent with that name, consistent with that person.

What is consistent with the name of the Lord Jesus? We'll keep it really simple. Jesus said, John 4:34, "My food," what feeds me, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work." John 5:30, "I seek not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." John 6:38, "I've come down from heaven not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me." To do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is to

do what he did. "Whatever you do in word or deed," your life is to be lived in obedience to God, to do his will.

Notice, Ephesians 5:21 in your Bible, last participle coming out of the Spirit's filling work in our lives is this: "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ." Submitting to one another. How do we do that? Paul doesn't leave us guessing. He goes right into the next section, Ephesians 5:22-24 "Wives are to submit to their husbands as to the Lord in everything." Ephesians 5:25-33: "Husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies, just as Christ loved the church and sacrificed himself."

How do we submit to one another? "Children are to obey their parents," Ephesians 6:1-3. "Parents are to raise their children in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." Ephesians 6:4. Ephesians 6:5-9 Employees are to obey their bosses, not with eye service as man pleasers, but doing the will of God from the heart. Ephesians 6:10 or 6:9, Bosses are to treat their employees with dignity and respect. Finally, Ephesians 6:10-20, All of us are to "be strong in the Lord, put

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on the whole armor of God, stand firm against the schemes of the devil." We're to pursue holiness and spiritual growth.

And you know what happens when all of us obey the truth? Each one of us, according to our role, whether in the family, in the world, privately or publicly, individual Christians or corporate body, you realize the effect of our obedience? Through obedience to the truth, we reinforce the truth to each other by setting an example for one another. Setting an example.

Each of us learns to apply the truth that we're hearing, partly by trying to work it out for ourselves, but also by looking at other people and seeing how they're putting it into practice. Asking questions of older Christians and saying, Hey, how do I do this? I've never raised kids before. You have. Help me to understand this. I'm trying to share Christ with a co-worker, and I'm kind of scared. Hey, maybe you can help me to understand what you've done to overcome that in your job. Each of us learns the truth, applying the truth by watching others apply it. And by applying what we're learning from the church's

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teaching ministry to our day-to-day lives, we grow in wisdom and understanding, right?

And we grow in the experience of the truth, which is what strengthens us and brings us to maturity. As we mature, we become even more effective in teaching others in wisdom to obey the truth and that takes us right back to point one, doesn't it? Teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom. Cycle continues, right? Reinforcing the truth over and over through teaching, singing, giving thanks, obeying. Then right back to teaching and singing and thanks and obeying, right?

So much more to say, but we have so much to learn about the church. Such a beautiful institution of the Lord revealed from heaven. This is unlike anything on earth. We're not to be like anything on earth, either. We practice a revealed culture right here in this church. It's not like any other culture you've known. We have to learn it; we have to practice it. And that's our joy and pleasure to put into practice what we've learned right here, right? Bow with me in a word of prayer.

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Heavenly Father, we just want to thank you again for your truth. We'd be at lost without it, and not just lost in the sense of stumbling in the darkness, though that's true. We'd be eternally lost. We'd be drowning in our sins along with the world around us. We'd be, have only the certain expectation of judgment ahead of us. And we ask, Father, that you reinforce these truths to us. Help us to remind one and another day after day after day after day "as long as it's called today." Let us "encourage one another toward love and good deeds."

Thank you for what you've taught us in this series on the church, and we just pray, Lord, that you would make us, we're not, we've not arrived, we're not there, we have so far to grow, we just ask for your mercy and your grace in helping us to grow, to change, to conform more and more as a church to what you've intended. We love you, and we give thanks to you in the name of Jesus Christ. He's the Savior of our souls. He's the Lord of our lives, and we want to honor him and glorify him. In Jesus' name, amen.