

Heart of Worship, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: Singing and Teaching One Another

Ephesians 5:18–19

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

The doctrinal matter in this lesson is the church's worship in song, and especially the New Testament pattern for it. Paul presents singing as the natural overflow of a Spirit-filled heart, directed both to one another, as mutual teaching and admonition, and to the Lord, as heartfelt praise. The parallel passages, Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, consistently describe the worship of the church in song as congregational singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in the heart, with the word of Christ richly within and thankfulness overflowing. This is the authorized pattern: the people of God singing from the heart, every member engaged.

Handle the question of mechanical instruments respectfully but clearly, and ground the discussion in the New Testament's positive pattern rather than in personal preference or mere tradition. The point to make is not first what is excluded, but what is commanded and modeled: singing, from the heart, by the whole congregation, teaching one another. When the apostles describe worship in song, this is what they call for. We follow that pattern gladly, because we trust the One who gave it, and because heartfelt congregational singing keeps the focus where it belongs, on engaged hearts offering praise and building one another up, rather than on performance. Teach this with warmth and confidence, not as a battle to win but as a pattern to treasure.

Keep the lesson aimed at formation as well as doctrine. Paul's concern is not merely the form of singing but the heart behind it: a heart filled with the Spirit, grateful, engaged, singing truth into the lives of others. Many believers stand silent or sing absently, missing both the joy and the ministry of song. The aim is that your students take up congregational singing as real worship and real service, with full hearts and ready voices, letting the word of Christ shape them as they sing.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul contrasts being "drunk with wine" with being "filled with the Spirit," and says the Spirit-filled overflow is singing (vv. 18–19). What does it tell us about the place of singing in worship that Paul presents it as the natural expression of a heart filled with the Spirit?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start with Paul's striking contrast. He sets being filled with the Spirit over against being drunk with wine. Both involve a kind of overflow, but they run in opposite directions, one to debauchery and ruin, the other to song and praise. Singing, then, is presented as the natural expression of a Spirit-filled life.

Help the class feel the implication. Singing is not a preliminary to worship or a filler before the sermon; it is itself a chief expression of a heart full of God. When the Spirit fills a people, they sing. A silent, song-starved worship suggests a deeper problem of the heart.

Apply it gently. This does not mean every Christian must have a fine voice or always feel like singing. It means that the church's song flows from fullness, and that we do well to tend the heart, so that praise has something to overflow from.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Singing as the natural overflow of a Spirit-filled heart (Ephesians 5:18–19).
- The contrast between worldly intoxication and Spirit-filled praise.
- Singing as a central expression of worship, not a preliminary.
- The connection between a full heart and a singing church.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul connect being filled with the Spirit to singing?
- What might a song-starved worship reveal about the heart?
- How can we tend our hearts so that praise overflows?

Question 2

Student Question:

A heart full of the Spirit overflows in song, while an empty or distracted heart sings only with the lips. What does the way you sing, or fail to sing, reveal about what is filling your heart these days? Name one thing that tends to keep your heart from singing.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make this personal and honest. The way we sing often reveals what is filling us. A heart full of God and gratitude tends to sing; a heart full of distraction, resentment, or spiritual coldness tends to fall silent or sing absently.

Invite self-examination without shame. Ask students to notice their own singing as a kind of spiritual thermometer. Reluctance to sing is not mainly a music problem; it is usually a heart problem, and naming it is the first step toward change.

Offer hope. The cure is not to fake enthusiasm but to fill the heart, with the word, with gratitude, with remembering the gospel, so that song has a source. Encourage one concrete step toward a fuller heart this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The way we sing as a window into the state of the heart.
- Reluctance in worship as more often a heart issue than a music issue.
- The cure of filling the heart rather than faking feeling.
- Self-examination as a path to renewed praise.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the way you sing reveal about what fills your heart?
- What tends to keep your heart from singing?
- What would help fill your heart so that song has a source?

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says we are “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (v. 19), and the parallel in Colossians 3:16 speaks of “teaching and admonishing one another” in song. How is congregational singing a form of mutual teaching, and what responsibility does that place on us when we sing together?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Draw out the horizontal direction of singing. Paul says we address one another in song, and Colossians calls it teaching and admonishing one another. When the church sings, it is not only praising God; it is instructing, encouraging, and exhorting the people in the room.

Show how this works. The truths we sing lodge in memory and travel from heart to heart. A grieving believer is steadied by the faith in the voices around her. A wavering brother is admonished by the words he sings with the body. Singing is a ministry of the whole congregation to itself.

Press the responsibility. If our singing teaches and encourages, then how we sing matters for others, not just ourselves. To sing heartily is to serve the body; to withhold our voice is to withhold a gift. This lifts congregational singing from personal preference to mutual ministry.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Singing as mutual teaching and admonition among believers (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
- The horizontal as well as vertical direction of congregational song.

- The way sung truth lodges in the heart and travels between believers.
- Singing as a ministry of the whole body to itself.

Discussion Prompts

- How is congregational singing a form of teaching one another?
- How has the singing of the body ministered to you in a hard season?
- What responsibility does mutual ministry place on the way we sing?

Question 4

Student Question:

If our singing teaches and encourages those around us, then to withhold our voice is to withhold a gift from the body. When you stand in the assembly, do you sing for the sake of others as well as to God, or do you hold back? What keeps you from singing wholeheartedly, and what might change if you saw your voice as a service to the body?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the personal counterpart to question 3. If singing serves the body, then silence is not neutral; it withholds a gift others were meant to receive. Many hold back from self-consciousness, distraction, or habit, not realizing what their voice could give.

Reframe singing as service. We sing not to showcase a voice but to strengthen a brother, to encourage a sister, to add our part to the church's praise. The quality of the voice matters far less than the heart and the willingness behind it.

Encourage a concrete step. Challenge each person to sing, this week, for the sake of those around them as well as to God, to lift their voice as a deliberate act of love for the body. Often the heart follows the voice into fuller worship.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Singing as a service to the body, not a performance to be judged.
- Silence in worship as a withholding of a gift meant for others.
- The willing heart as more important than the skilled voice.
- Love for the body expressed through wholehearted singing.

Discussion Prompts

- Do you sing for the sake of others, or mainly keep your voice to yourself?
- What holds you back from singing wholeheartedly?
- How might seeing your voice as service change the way you sing?

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul speaks of “singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart” (v. 19), and Colossians adds “with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Where does Paul locate the instrument and the melody of Christian praise, and why does he stress that it is offered with the heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Focus on where Paul locates the melody: in the heart. We sing and make melody to the Lord with the heart. The essential instrument of Christian praise is the heart of the worshiper, and the music God seeks is the music of grateful, engaged hearts lifted to him.

Stress the vertical direction here. Whatever else singing does for the body, it is finally offered to the Lord. We sing to God. This guards singing from becoming mere sentiment or entertainment; it is praise directed to a Person who hears.

Connect heart and thankfulness. Colossians ties the song to thankfulness in the heart toward God. Heartfelt praise and gratitude belong together. The melody God delights in rises from a heart that knows what it has received and sings its thanks back to him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The heart as the instrument and seat of Christian praise (Ephesians 5:19).
- Singing directed to the Lord himself, not merely for our own benefit.
- Praise offered with thankfulness in the heart (Colossians 3:16).
- Worship in song as an offering to a God who hears.

Discussion Prompts

- Where does Paul locate the melody of Christian praise?
- Why does he stress singing with the heart?
- How are heartfelt singing and thankfulness connected?

Question 6**Student Question:**

Thankfulness is named as the wellspring of song (Colossians 3:16). How is the health of your singing tied to the gratitude in your heart, and what specific mercies of God could you bring to mind this week to fuel more thankful, heartfelt praise?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Tie singing to gratitude. Paul names thankfulness as the wellspring of song. A grateful heart sings naturally; an ungrateful heart finds praise a chore. The health of our singing tracks the gratitude in our hearts.

Help students cultivate gratitude deliberately. Gratitude grows as we recount God's mercies: salvation, forgiveness, providence, the cross, the hope of glory. Bringing these to mind primes the heart to sing.

Make it concrete. Ask each person to name specific mercies they could rehearse this week, so that they come to the assembly with a heart already full and ready to overflow in thankful praise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Thankfulness as the wellspring of heartfelt singing (Colossians 3:16).
- The link between a grateful heart and joyful praise.
- Gratitude cultivated by rehearsing God's mercies.
- Preparing the heart through thanksgiving before worship.

Discussion Prompts

- How is the health of your singing tied to your gratitude?
- What mercies of God could you rehearse to fuel thankful praise?
- How might a more grateful heart change your worship in song?

Question 7

Student Question:

Colossians 3:16 ties singing to "the word of Christ" dwelling in us richly, so that our songs carry biblical truth. Why does it matter that the songs of the church be filled with the word of Christ, and how do the songs we sing shape what a congregation believes and remembers?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Highlight the link between singing and the word of Christ. Colossians 3:16 sets congregational singing in the context of the word of Christ dwelling richly. The songs of the church are meant to carry the truth of Scripture, so that singing becomes a way the word lives in us.

Show how songs shape belief. What a congregation sings, it tends to believe and remember. Songs full of truth lodge sound doctrine in the heart; songs that are shallow or false teach error just as effectively. The church's praise is also its catechism.

Apply it. This is why the content of our songs matters, not merely their style. We do well to sing songs rich in the word of Christ, that teach the gospel truly and form the church in sound faith. Encourage students to attend to what they are singing, not just how it sounds.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Singing tied to the word of Christ dwelling richly (Colossians 3:16).

- Songs as carriers of biblical truth and shapers of belief.
- The church's praise functioning as its teaching and memory.
- The importance of sound, scriptural content in worship songs.

Discussion Prompts

- Why does it matter that our songs be filled with the word of Christ?
- How do the songs we sing shape what we believe and remember?
- How can we sing with more attention to the truth of the words?

Question 8

Student Question:

The hymns we sing lodge in our memory and form us over time, often more deeply than sermons. Which truths has God written on your heart through song, and how could you let the singing of the church teach and shape you more intentionally?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make this personal and warm. Most believers can name truths that a hymn fixed in their hearts more deeply than any lecture: the assurance of grace, the hope of heaven, the steadiness of God in trial. Singing is one of God's chief tools for writing his word on us.

Invite students to recognize this formation. Ask them to recall songs that have carried them through grief, strengthened them in temptation, or anchored their assurance. These are not mere melodies; they are truth lodged in the heart by song.

Encourage intentionality. Suggest that students sing attentively, learn the words, let the truths sink in, even meditate on a line through the week. The singing of the church can disciple us if we let it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Song as a powerful means of forming the heart in truth.
- Hymns and spiritual songs that anchor faith through trial.
- The discipling power of attentive congregational singing.
- Letting the word in our songs shape us through the week.

Discussion Prompts

- Which truths has God written on your heart through song?
- How has a hymn carried you through a hard season?
- How could you let the church's singing disciple you more intentionally?

Question 9

Student Question:

When the New Testament addresses worship in song, it consistently calls the church to sing, psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in the heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). This is the pattern the apostles gave for praise: congregational singing from the heart, in which every member teaches and admonishes one another. Why should we look to this authorized pattern of singing, rather than to personal preference or cultural trend, as our guide for worship in song? How does grounding our practice in what God has shown us guard the worship of the church and keep the focus on hearts engaged in praise rather than on performance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal heart of the lesson, and it deserves clear, respectful, text-grounded handling. Lead with the positive pattern. Whenever the New Testament speaks of the church's worship in song, it calls for singing: addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, making melody in the heart to the Lord (Ephesians 5:19), with the word of Christ dwelling richly and thankfulness overflowing (Colossians 3:16). This congregational singing from the heart, in which every member teaches and admonishes the others, is the worship in song the apostles authorized and modeled.

Frame the matter of instruments in that positive light, and ground it in the authorized pattern rather than in personal preference or mere custom. The question is not first what the church may not do, but what the New Testament actually calls the church to do in worship: to sing, from the heart, as a whole congregation. Our congregation practices a cappella singing because that is the pattern the New Testament gives for worship in song, and we follow it gladly, trusting the One who gave it. Present this as glad submission to God's revealed pattern, not as a rule imposed by taste.

Show how the pattern protects the church. Heartfelt congregational singing keeps the focus where the New Testament puts it: on engaged hearts offering praise and on every member building up the others, rather than on performance or spectacle. When the whole body sings from the heart, no one is reduced to an audience, and the melody God seeks, the melody of the heart, is offered by all.

Teach this with warmth, not as a battle to win against others. The aim is to treasure the pattern, not to disparage those who differ. Help your class hold the conviction humbly and joyfully, able to give a reason grounded in Scripture, and eager above all to sing to God and to one another with full and grateful hearts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The New Testament pattern of worship in song: congregational singing from the heart (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

- Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs as the authorized content of praise.
- Every member teaching and admonishing one another in song.
- A cappella singing as glad submission to the New Testament pattern, not mere preference.
- The pattern keeps worship focused on engaged hearts rather than performance.
- Holding the conviction humbly, with a reason grounded in Scripture.

Discussion Prompts

- What does the New Testament actually call for when it describes worship in song?
- Why ground our practice in the authorized pattern rather than in preference?
- How does heartfelt congregational singing keep the focus off performance?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over Paul's vision: a Spirit-filled people, singing to teach one another and to praise the Lord, with grateful and engaged hearts. Name one specific way Christ is calling you to sing more fully, and one concrete step you will take this week so that your singing becomes true worship from the heart rather than a habit performed with the lips.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Gather Paul's vision: a Spirit-filled people, singing to teach one another and to praise the Lord, with grateful and engaged hearts. Ask students where, honestly, their singing falls short of this, and what Christ is calling them to.

Press for one concrete step. For some it is simply to sing, to stop holding back. For others it is to sing attentively, with the heart, for the sake of the body. For others it is to fill the heart with gratitude so that praise has a source.

End by lifting their eyes to Christ, who himself sings praise in the midst of the congregation (Hebrews 2:12). When we sing, we join a song he leads. Encourage the class to take up their part gladly, with full hearts and ready voices, to the glory of God and the building up of his people.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Paul's vision of Spirit-filled, mutual, heartfelt singing.
- The call to sing with full engagement of the heart.
- Christ leading the praise of his people (Hebrews 2:12).
- The movement from absent habit to true worship in song.

Discussion Prompts

- Where does your singing fall short of Paul's vision?
- What one step will you take this week to sing more fully from the heart?

- How does it encourage you that Christ leads the song of his people?