

Heart of Worship

Lesson 5: Singing and Teaching One Another -- Ephesians 5:18-19

There is a sound that rises when the people of God sing together, and it is unlike anything else in the world. Not a performance, not a concert, not a soloist drawing eyes to himself, but a whole congregation lifting one song, the new convert and the gray-haired saint, the off-key and the gifted, the grieving and the rejoicing, all blended into a single voice of praise. Paul knew that sound. From a Roman prison he wrote to the Ephesians and told them what a Spirit-filled church does: it sings. It addresses one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with the heart.

Notice where Paul begins. "Do not get drunk with wine," he says, "for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." He sets two fillings side by side. The world reaches for the bottle to lift its spirits and loosen its tongue, and the result is ruin. The Christian is filled with something better, the Spirit of God, and the overflow is not slurred folly but song. A heart full of the Spirit cannot stay silent. It sings. Singing, for Paul, is not a warm-up before the real worship; it is the natural voice of a soul filled with God.

And this singing does two things at once, which is one of the most beautiful features of the passage. It is directed to one another, and it is directed to the Lord. We address one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; that is, we teach and encourage and admonish each other as we sing. And in the same breath we sing and make melody to the Lord, lifting our praise to God himself. In its parallel in Colossians, Paul says the word of Christ dwells in us richly as we teach and admonish one another in song, with thankfulness in our hearts to God. The hymn we sing is at once a sermon to our neighbor and an offering to our King.

Most of us have felt this without naming it. A hymn has carried truth into our hearts that a lecture could not. A song has steadied us in grief, stiffened our resolve, lifted our gratitude, taught us doctrine we will never forget. That is no accident; it is what God designed congregational singing to do. This lesson invites us to take up that gift with fresh seriousness, to sing not as spectators but as worshipers, with the heart engaged, the word of Christ rich within us, and our voices joined to teach one another and to praise our God. Read Paul's words, and listen for the sound of a Spirit-filled church.

Group Discussion: Paul says that when the church sings, we are addressing "one another," teaching and encouraging each other, even as we praise God. Think of a hymn or spiritual song that has taught or strengthened you over the years. How has congregational singing shaped your faith, and what does it mean to you that your singing is meant to build up the people around you?

Personal Reflection: Paul ties singing to "making melody to the Lord with your heart," not merely with the lips. When you sing in the assembly, where is your heart? Are you truly singing

to the Lord and to your brothers and sisters, or going through the motions while your mind wanders? What would it take for your singing to come from a fuller heart?

Read Ephesians 5:18–19

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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.
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. 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?

10. 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.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Colossians 3:16, the word of Christ dwelling richly as we teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; Hebrews 2:12, Christ singing praise in the midst of the congregation; Hebrews 13:15, offering through Christ a continual sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess his name; Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas singing hymns to God in prison at midnight; Psalm 95:1-2, coming before the Lord with singing and joyful song.