

Singing in the Spirit

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[0 : 00] Now we're going to turn to the epistle to the Ephesians chapter 5 and verses, well we'll look at verse 19 but we'll read verse 18 as well.

Ephesians chapter 5 reading from verse 18. And be not drunk with wine wherein a success, 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.

Now you know that we have been going through this book in our prayer meetings and I've decided to take the last part of this book, at least part of it, at the evening service.

And last Lord's Day we looked at verse 18 and we want to continue the thought of that and look this evening at verse 19. Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart.

To the Lord. Now the New Testament doesn't say very much about what we've to do in worship. It does give sort of general principles of the spirit in which we've to worship God.

[1 : 20] But it doesn't give details at all about exactly what we've to do in worship. And you might think that for that reason this verse was particularly important.

And that the question that confirms us here is, how should we worship? But I think really we've got to bear in mind that Paul isn't talking just about worship.

And he's certainly not mainly talking about worship. The question is this, how should the believer behave? He's speaking of the distinctive way of life that characterises the believer.

He's not to be filled with wine. But he has to be filled with the spirit. And that will make itself felt. That will show itself in outward conduct.

He'll have a distinctive style of life. And how is that seen? Well it's seen partly in this description of worship. So the real question is, what does the spirit teach us to do?

[2 : 28] And the answer given is the words of our text this evening. Now you'll notice, I think, that there is really just one activity that's in mind here.

He speaks about speaking. He speaks about singing and making melody. But although there are these three words described, there's only one activity that's really in mind.

And this one activity is directed in three different directions. It's got an effect upon others.

It's got an effect upon ourselves. And it's got a relationship to God. This is three-dimensional, we might say.

It goes out to others. It goes into ourselves. And it goes up to God. And that's what I would like to look at this evening.

[3 : 27] These three ideas. The spirit-filled life that shows itself in worship towards others, towards ourselves, towards God.

Now the most obvious, first of all, is how our worship affects others. Worship that helps others. That's what spirit-filled worship really is.

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Speaking to yourselves. That doesn't mean that each one is speaking to him or herself.

It means that when we speak, we're all speaking to each other. In singing in the worship, I am speaking to you, and you are speaking to me.

We're all speaking to each other. That's what this verse says about the singing that goes on in worship. Now that's not something that we often emphasize.

[4 : 34] What we emphasize is that our worship is towards God. When we're singing, some folks think, we've got to think about the people around us. We've got to think about God.

But what this verse brings to us is an idea that I think is probably new to most of us. Indeed, it was new to me before I looked at this verse. And it's simply this. That when we are singing, we are speaking to one another.

We are directing the truth of God to one another's heart and conscience. Now, let's think of it this way.

The words that we sing, they're not just something that we use to present our feelings to God. They're not just a vehicle that we employ to tell God what we think about Him.

The words that we sing are words that are given to us to instruct us. We have to say them to ourselves, first of all.

[5 : 42] And these words are designed to instruct our heart and our conscience. The words that we sing are designed to stimulate a proper spirit of worship.

To awaken a proper sense of God's presence. To give to us a vivid appreciation and awareness of who He is and of what He's done for us.

Of what penitence means and gratitude means and adoration means. The words that we sing are designed first and foremost, or first of all, to instruct our hearts as to what worship really means.

And because that's the purpose of the words that we sing, it means that as we sing these words, we are not only instructing ourselves, but we are instructing one another in what true worship involves.

God is our defence. That's what we've been singing. And when you sang that, I heard you saying it to me. And when I sang that, you heard me saying it to you.

[6 : 58] We told each other this. And that was designed to make us say, hey, if God is our defence, there's nothing to worry about. What are all these fears I've got about tomorrow?

They're nothing. Because God is our defence. And these words with which you instructed me and I instructed you, these taught us humility before God and confidence in Him and joy in the knowledge that He's with us and around us and working in daily life.

And by having that thought put before us, our hearts, if we used it properly, our hearts were humbled and our hearts were made to rest upon Him and our spirits were enlivened and invigorated and made joyful.

And because of that, these words instructed us what worship really means. That's the way that we've got to see our worship.

In singing these words, we are talking to one another so that the Word of God comes home to our heart and to our conscience and we realise what it means and we're given a vivid appreciation of the things of God and we're put in a proper spirit to praise Him from the heart.

[8 : 21] Worship involves helping one another by speaking to them the words that we sing. The words that we sing. That's new, I think.

We usually think of singing as being an act that the priest performs. Now, what is a priest? A priest is a person that offers up sacrifices to God and that's the way that we've been taught to think about our singing.

It's a means of presenting the sacrifice of praise to God. And we've been emphasising all along that in singing we're acting as priests.

But this verse tells us that we're not just acting as priests, we're also acting as prophets. The prophet is a person that says this is what God's Word is.

The prophet announces God's Word. The prophet takes God's words and repeats them in the hearing of men. According to this verse it seems to me that too is what we are doing in worship.

[9 : 31] Speaking to each other. I'm bringing before your mind and you are bringing before mine ideas that will humble me and enliven me and cause me to rejoice in God.

Words that instruct me in what real worship means. Now I wonder if we understand the importance of that. Sometimes we don't give a thought to the people that are around us.

We don't care if there are people within a hundred yards of us or not when we're worshipping. Because all our minds are set up in God. That's the theory of it at least. But if we took this to heart we'd realise the importance of being together in the service of praise.

That's why our praise as well as our singing is so much better down here in the hall. We're all together. So it's easier to speak to one another when we're all together.

When we're wanting to converse with somebody we don't usually stand at a distance of ten yards and shout at them. We usually come close to them and sit beside them and speak to them that way.

[10 : 46] And that's what we're doing here this evening. That's why our singing is better when we're set out like this. Of course we could have that upstairs as well if we'd all sit together and if we'd all move into the centre of our pews and take a delight in sitting near people and not be all scattered over a large area of a big building.

Being together counts because we're speaking to one another. What's the point in standing twenty yards away from somebody else to try and have a conversation with them?

Ridiculous. Let's sit together and sing together and speak to one another as the word of God has commanded us to do. Well that's that definition.

Now we'll go on from there to something else. Speaking to one another in what? What else is Paul here? Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.

Now this is not the main part of Paul's teaching here. But obviously as soon as we in the free church read this or at least as soon as folks outside the free church read this they've got questions to ask us.

[12 : 06] And the question that we can't avoid asking ourselves indeed when we face this sort of passage is if Paul told us to sing hymns why do we only sing psalms?

And we can't avoid addressing ourselves to that sort of question even if it isn't the one that Paul was actually dealing with on this occasion. It's obvious to us what psalms, hymns and songs mean.

Psalms to us are the 150 things that we've got in the Bible in the book of Psalms in the Old Testament. Hymns probably are the sort of thing you sing in the Church of Scotland and songs are the sort of thing you sing in the Baptist Church or in the charismatic churches where you sing these simple little choruses.

That's what we understand by these words probably. But that just isn't the question. The question is what did Paul understand by these words?

That's always what we've got to do with the scriptures. Not take our own ideas of what it means but ask what did the writer mean when he used these words? One thing we can be very certain of is that Paul didn't mean by psalms, hymns and songs the sort of thing that naturally occurs to our minds when we hear these words used today.

[13 : 30] For myself I don't think we can be very sure of what Paul meant but I could say this about it. All these words could be used about the psalms that we find in the Old Testament.

They're psalms they're called out constantly in the Bible but they're also frequently called hymns. You may remember that on one occasion after the last Passover the First Lord's Supper wasn't it?

That they went before they went out they sang a hymn that wanted to sing. the sort of thing they sang in the Church of Scotland to be. No, it was a psalm that they sang.

It's called a hymn in our version and in the Greek too it's called a hymn but we know fine that it was one of the psalms because in those days the psalms could also be called hymns.

Same with the word song. In the titles of the Old Testament psalms the word song frequently occurs and when Paul talked about a song he could perhaps be referring to the psalms of the Old Testament.

[14 : 47] What I'm saying is simply this. Don't think that when we read psalms, hymns and songs that Paul was reading what we mean by these words today. Each of these words are capable of referring to the psalms of the Old Testament.

I think what is of far greater importance to us is to ask what he meant by spiritual psalms, hymns and songs. The word spiritual goes with the three things psalms, hymns and songs they're all spiritual.

And I think here is where we've got to bring in the sort of background that we dealt with last Lord's Day. Here he's making this contrast don't be filled with wine but be filled with the spirit.

I think perhaps in regard to singing you've got that contrast in mind. Don't be singing that secular sort of song that the drunkard delights in.

But your praise should be spiritual in its content. don't you be singing these worldly sensual songs that the drunkard likes to sing when he's lost control of himself.

[16 : 08] You've got to sing about spiritual realities not sensual earthly ones like he does. He sings what's appropriate to him because he's filled with wine.

you've got to fill you've got to sing what's appropriate to you because you're filled with the spirit. And just as you are filled with the spirit the songs the psalms the hymns that you sing they've got to be songs that are full of the spirit's power and influence.

They've got to be songs that are written under the full inspiration of the spirit of God that they're spiritual in content that they're spiritual in nature that have come from the full work of the spirit's power working through mankind.

That's the sort of song that's appropriate to you. You are spirit filled. Therefore the songs that you sing they are to be spirit filled as well.

That it seems to me is what Paul is saying here. He's saying you sing things call them psalms call them hymns call them songs call them what you will. But you make sure that what you sing is really the voice of the spirit is really material that has been given to you by the spirit of God himself and that comes with all the authority of the infallible spirit of God behind it.

[17 : 33] That's the nature of the songs that you've got to sing in worship because you are spirit filled people. You've got to sing songs that are full of the spirit's influence and power.

That's why we only sing from the Bible. There's no book like the Bible for being spirit filled. Yes Isaac Watson and a good number of other men John Calvin and John Knox and all the fathers of the church when they wrote hymns or when they wrote other material the spirit was at work in them.

But the spirit wasn't at work in them to the same degree as he was at work when he wrote the scriptures. scriptures. The scriptures are spirit filled like nothing else is spirit filled.

The scriptures have been given by the power and operation of the spirit of God in a way that nothing else has been given in that way. And there is no praise that so fully comes up to the standard that Paul is putting forward here than the psalms and hymns and songs that are contained in the scriptures themselves because they are uniquely inspired by the spirit of God so as to be absolutely infallible in every aspect.

That it seems to me is the teaching that we take from this passage here. Paul calls them psalms, hymn songs but the basic quality that characterized them all was that they were given under the inspiration the infallible inspiration of the spirit of God.

[19 : 10] And that is what I believe our church stands for. You may read from time to time that there is a bit of a difference of opinion as to what we actually do believe as the free church.

And most folks perhaps think that our position is psalms only. But some of us think that that's not our position at all. Our position is the songs of the Bible only.

And nothing else but that. And I think that that is the true position of our church. And I think that that is what Paul is speaking about here.

Your songs, the songs of a spirit-filled people, will be spirit-filled songs. Songs with the full inspiration of scripture behind them.

And I think that that is what our church believes. If you listen at an ordination, induction to what a minister is asked to accept, it is that they will not use uninspired materials of praise.

[20 : 14] That's what we are committed to. To the use of inspired materials of praise. Whatever songs or hymns or psalms were written, so long as they were written with a full inspiration of the Spirit of God, that is the praise that we use.

You can't beat the Bible. That's why we only sing the songs that come from the Bible. And that's the sort of thing that Paul is speaking to here.

So that's the sort of thing that he's referring to. And you see something very important here. What counts is the spirit-filled life.

You'll sing spirit-filled songs if you get a spirit-filled life. You'll come back to the scriptures and sing them if you get a spirit-filled life.

That's the key to speaking to one another in a proper way. That's the key to true worship. Worship falls on naturally from the sort of people we are.

[21 : 32] The more we're filled with the Spirit, the more we'll want to come back to the Bible and the Bible alone as being the spirit-filled word of God.

Now that's worship in regard to others. Speaking to one another in spirit-filled songs. Now what about worship in regard to ourselves?

Well that's the second part of the verse. Singing and making melody in your heart. In your heart. In the first part we've seen worship that is helpful to others.

Here we see worship that comes from the heart. Singing and making melody in your hearts. words. Already the outward act of worship has been spoken of.

It consists in using words that come from the mouth. Speaking in other words. That's the outward form of worship. Words that come from the mouth.

[22 : 43] That's the true nature outwardly of praise to God. words that come out. That's not the only element that there is in it. Indeed that's not the most important thing that there is in it.

The thing that really counts is the inward aspect. Praising and making melody in your heart. The outward act of speaking, of presenting words that come from our lips, has to be accompanied by something that goes on inside ourselves, in the heart.

And what is this? Well the word here says singing, well that really means praising. It speaks of an attitude of praise that is found not just in our outward expression, but it is found in our inner feelings.

words. And it refers to making melody. Now that's a word that means to play in a musical instrument. And what place is there for that in worship?

And Paul says none. He says the melody that you've to make is the melody of the heart. It's not the outward making of noise that counts.

[24 : 03] it's the inner spirit of melody that comes from the heart that counts. The word used to play in a musical instrument is here used to speak of the inner attitude of heart and mind in regard to the things of God.

That's the music that we make. The inner music of a heart that is tuned to the things of God. Now that's something that's of first importance in our way of looking at things.

This is what pure worship really means. I think that this passage not on its own but along with other passages of the scripture plainly indicates to us that there's no need for musical instruments in worship when you've got the spirit of God to lead you.

You don't need instruments to stir up a spirit of thankfulness if the Holy Spirit's at work to do that. I think that's the general teaching of the scriptures. But I'm not going to go into that.

All I want to say is this. Never think that in the mere absence of an organ or the guitar or whatever. Never think that just because these things aren't there we'll get through worship or pure worship.

[25 : 32] That's the sort of bad habits that we've lapsed into. And the spiritual pride that has characterized us. We've said we have pure worship because we don't use an organ.

We don't have these worldly guitars that's the reason. We don't have these things. So our worship is pure. Let's just remember this that the word of God never puts pure worship in these negative terms.

It isn't the absence of these things that makes our worship pure. It's the presence of praise in the heart that makes it pure. And it's the presence of that melody within ourselves that really counts in the sight of God.

That's the thing about which Paul is speaking here. The Holy Spirit has to be so at work within us as that our heart praises God.

When we sing these psalms of sadness and penitence, our heart responds. And we are saddened by a sense of our sin. And from the depths of our hearts, we feel broken because of our sin.

[26 : 50] And we sing these words with meaning, with a penitent song in the heart. And when we think of the great things that God has done, our heart responds to that.

And within us we feel an upsurge of gladness. And we say to ourselves, that's a God that is worth praising. And there is within us a spontaneous outflowing of a sense of the majesty of God and how outfitting it is that we should sing praise to him.

That's the melody in the heart that really counts. And the speaking that we do with our lips is nothing compared to that. And the absence of external stimuli that whip up enthusiasm, that's nothing in comparison to this.

Without this, all worship is empty. Without this, whatever worship there might be, however correct in form, it's empty and devoid of meaning, unless there is praise and melody in the heart.

And that's something that's very searching to us. I think that by coming together in this way, or by sitting closer together in the building upstairs, we will be able to speak to one another in songs an awful lot better and more effectively.

[28 : 16] And that would greatly help us in our worship. But even so, even that is to some extent touching the outward things.

And the thing that counts is this. Are you moved when you sing these words? Or are you just mouthing words without realising what you're seeing, or without having a heart that correspond to the words that you're speaking?

That's the sort of praise that God delights in, where there's melody, not produced by outward things, but by the spirit in the heart of the believer.

Then the last thing that we mention here is the upward direction of this. In regard to others, we speak to one another, and so we have a worship that is helpful to each other.

In regard to ourselves, we have a worship that comes from the heart. And then the last thing is that worship is to be done for God. That comes in at the end of the verse.

[29 : 24] Making melody in your heart to the Lord. Now this may appear to have a very unimportant place in Paul's thinking, because he confines it to two words at the end of the psalm at the end of the verse.

But that's not so at all, because this thought has already been running through the verse. That this is something, yes, involving speaking with others, involving something within ourselves.

But even in the way he's been dealing with this, there's the idea that in the last analysis, worship is directed towards God. You see, speaking to one another, we've said that that involves instruction.

We need guidance. We need something from out with ourselves to set us straight and to guide our thoughts and make us feel what we ought to feel.

And that simply teaches us very, very plainly that worship isn't us just doing what we want. us. It isn't us just letting off steam as it is in some congregations.

[30 : 39] It isn't us just letting our feelings go and having a nice happy time and pleasing ourselves. Worship is something that we need instructed in, that we need the word of God to instruct us in.

Worship is something that comes from the word of God coming home to our hearts. And that means simply that worship isn't done to please ourselves.

It's something done to please God. Similarly, what's the importance of emphasising the heart? It's not to please man, because man doesn't see the heart.

If there was no reference to the heart, you might think that worship was done for man. To please the onlooker with the beauty of our singing, or to impress people with the enthusiasm of what we're doing.

But the heart, no man sees that. I've got a good idea sometimes what is in people's hearts, by looking at folks' faces when they sing the psalms.

[31 : 50] But I can't really tell what you're doing inside yourself. And that means that worship isn't ultimately for the onlooker and for the person that's watching what's going on.

Worship is effectively for the one that sees our hearts and knows what is in us and understands what is in our minds when we sing the words.

And it's these ideas that have already been present in the rest of the verse that Paul brings out by making the statement making melody in your hearts to God.

Worship is directed to him. It's not for our enjoyment simply. It's not for our benefit. It's not simply to express the way that we feel.

Worship is directed toward God. The question of what is worship and what isn't is what is acceptable to him, not what is acceptable to us.

[32 : 57] Sometimes indeed I've encouraged it, folks come to church asking what they expect to get out of it. And of course I think that's a good question to come with.

What am I going to get from the word today? Is the seed going to bear harvest? That's a legitimate question for us to ask ourselves when we come together.

And it's right and proper for us to say, I hope I'll get something from the service today. But more important than that is the question, what can I give to the service?

What can I give to God today? It's not just a question, am I humbled and ready to receive his word in the preaching of it? Am I intending to be subject to the truth of God as I hear it proclaimed?

It's not just that the question that we've to ask. The question also is, is my heart in a fit state to honour God and to glorify God and to give him the worship that is his due?

[34 : 10] Ultimately, in our singing, in our praying, and in our reading and preaching, we're worshipping God. It's to him that our activity is directed.

In the singing, I hope that's obvious, we're singing about the things of God, we're doing so in the presence of the one that knows our heart. It's an activity directed to him.

It's the same way in listening to the sermon. It's not me that's serving God by making a sermon, it's you that's serving him and me too, by listening to the word of God and by being submissive to it.

And not only should we ask, what can I get from this service? We should also ask more particularly, what can I give to this?

Give our obedience to the priest's word. Give our response of reverence to the greatness of God revealed in the scriptures. Give our response of penitence and humility when we think of our sins.

[35 : 21] That's the sort of thing that we give to God in worship. Worship ultimately is directed to him. That's the sort of thing that the spirit-filled life will increasingly produce in us.

A worship in which we really do speak to one another with conviction him, the word of God that we're singing together. A worship in which our hearts will be so deeply moved as that we will have an attitude of praise within us and we will be making melody in our hearts to God.

That's the worship that comes from only one source, the work of the Holy Spirit within us. you can't cultivate this but by having the spirit at work within you.

You can't hope to manipulate yourself or manoeuvre yourself or to psych yourself up to doing this unless you've been born again by the spirit of God.

I hope that all of us would seek to try and sing better but that's really useless unless you've been born again. And that's the thing that really counts.

[36 : 38] What characterises your life? Are you still in your sin? Motivated by selfishness? Dominated by the power of evil?

Or have you been worked on by the spirit of God so that you are dominated by his spirit? That's what it really comes down to. Because the worship that we've sought to describe here, it's the worship that is the outward badge of the spirit-filled person.

And that's where really we've got to start. If you are outside of Christ, do not cease to seek him and to strive to trust in his promises and to rest upon him.

Do not be happy or think that you can achieve anything in worship or anything else until you've come to know that change of heart and life. The spirit alone can give.

Cry to God that he would take away your old heart and give you a new heart. Ask him for the power of the spirit without which nobody can ever worship God in the way described here.

[37 : 51] May God bless to us his own word. Let us pray. We pray Lord that these words that we've been thinking on might be of practical usefulness to us.

How little we have understood what true worship really involves. How mechanical we've become in it. How unthinking in what we do. We pray that these words that we've been thinking of might convict us of our sin in this respect and might stir us up.

To an awareness of the spirit's work within us. That we might be enabled in the future through his influence to praise God and to make melody in our hearts to him in a fitting way.

Help us to see that you are spirit and that those that worship you must worship you by the power of the spirit and in accordance with the truth that the spirit is given in the spirit filled word.

Bless to us then this passage of your scripture that it might be practically useful to us as individuals and especially as a congregation. That our worship might be enriched and that we may find your presence in it increasingly.

[39 : 08] We ask this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen.