

## **Singing and Making Melody for God's Glory**

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Culture of Grace: Practices & Habits of GracePoint Church / Ephesians 5:18-19 / January 14, 2024

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### **Introduction:**

Jesus told the woman at the well that God the Father is seeking people to worship Him in spirit and truth. When Isaiah and the apostle John are given glimpses of God's throne room, both see angels and the saints worshipping God. We cannot understate the importance of worship. Today, in our "Culture of Grace" series, we are considering how and why worship, and more specifically corporate worship in song, is a means of grace we want to prioritize at GracePoint Church. When we think of worship and singing, we typically view it as a personal and individualized experience. However, God's word reveals that our worship and singing isn't primarily individualistic but communal. Throughout the Bible we find around fifty commands to sing and over four hundred references to singing. Many of those commands and references are specifically related to the assembly of God's people. When we recognize this, we will begin to understand the value of corporate worship or praising God in the assembly of His people. Why does God desire for us to sing? And why are those desires expressed as a communal activity? I hope to answer those questions today by unpacking Ephesians 5:18-19, and have this passage move us deeper into singing and making melody for God's glory. I want to consider two truths together and what these truths call us to pursue. Starting in verse 18, where we see how,

### **Being Full of the Spirit is Far Better than Drunkenness**

As we look at verse 18, we should consider the context surrounding it. Right before this, in verses 15-17, Paul charges us to walk carefully, making the best use of our time, not being foolish, and understanding the will of the Lord. Look at verse 18, "And do not get drunk with wine." Pause there for a moment. The "and" signifies this is a continued thought, showing what he is about to say is connected with the charges of verses 15-17. Continue in verse 18 with me, "And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit." Paul gives two imperatives, or commands in verse 18, with the word "but" signifying they form a comparison or contrast, "do not get drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit." This means we find the primary meaning of these commands in the comparison or contrast. So, we need to understand the comparison between getting drunk with wine and being filled with the Spirit to understand Paul's main point. The question we need to ask is, is Paul pointing us to similarities or contrasts? I believe the answer is both. Martin Lloyd-Jones correctly observes, "We cannot get a true conception of the Christian life unless we bear the element of similarity in mind as well as the element of contrast" (D. Martin Lloyd Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, p. 13). Consider the similarities with me. First, both involve being full of something. When you are drunk with wine, you are full of wine. In a similar way, we are called to be full of the Spirit. Second, both involve being controlled by something. When you are drunk, you are controlled by the substance as it depresses aspects of your brain's communication pathways. Likewise, when you are full of the Spirit, you are controlled by the Spirit. However, we will see the result of that control is vastly different. Third, both lead to certain actions. Paul says being drunk is debauchery. This term is used in Luke 15:13 to refer to the prodigal son's reckless living as he squanders his inheritance. The idea is that being drunk with wine leads to an excessive, reckless life of sin. Just as being drunk leads to certain actions, Paul will show how being filled with the Spirit leads to certain actions in verses 19 and following. Before we get there, let's consider the important contrasts. First, when you are drunk, your brain's control over your mental activities is weakened, leaving your sinful passions in control of you. However, the Spirit stimulates your control over your flesh as you are filled with Him. Second, in the immediate context, being drunk leads to not walking carefully, not making the best use of your time, not understanding the will of God, and foolishness. Being full of the Spirit, however, leads to heeding all of God's commands. Third, in the context of this whole letter, being drunk is part of the old self and its corrupted way of life, while being filled with the Spirit is part of the new self and its renewed way of life.

Finally, being drunk ultimately leads to sorrow and regret, but being filled with the Spirit leads to joy and life. Church, the media's common presentation of drunkenness suggests it is the pathway to freedom and joy, but the reality is that path leads to nothing but a dulling of your senses, lack of freedom, and ultimately pain. Yet, we need to understand Paul's purpose is not primarily to speak against drunkenness. If we stopped there, we would miss his point entirely. His goal in this comparison is to push us to see the supreme value of being filled with the Spirit. Lloyd-Jones says it better than I can, "Christianity," he says, "is stimulating, Christianity is exhilarating, Christianity is thrilling! That is what Paul is saying, 'Do not be drunk with wine, wherein is excess' — do not go and take drink if you are looking for a thrill, or for a stimulus, or for some exhilaration — 'but be filled with the Spirit', and you will have all that and more" (Lloyd-Jones, *Life in the Spirit*, p. 19). The primary command of verse 18 is "be filled with the Spirit." We will consider what this means and how to do this in a moment, but I want show first how Paul relates this to our singing, as that is our purpose today. Immediately following this command, Paul moves into what the Spirit's control leads to. In verse 19, he shows how,

### **Being Full of the Spirit Leads to Singing and Making Melody for God's Glory**

To be clear, this is not the only thing being full of the Spirit leads to. It leads to heeding the commands of verse 15-17, along with verses 20 and following. Yet, I do believe its place in Paul's flow of thought is significant. Notice that with me in verses 18-19, "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." Verses 19-21 are filled with participles that modify the command to be filled with the Spirit by showing what happens when you are full of the Spirit. Do you see what the second half of verse 19 shows? Being full of Spirit leads to singing and making melody. However, this isn't just the act of singing, it is singing "to the Lord with your heart." One way the Spirit of God works in us is by moving us to sing to God with our hearts. I want to say this very carefully. If you are full of the Spirit, being controlled by His desires, your heart will delight in the opportunity to sing any song that declares truth about Christ, because the Spirit longs to glorify Jesus Christ. Church, I know different types of songs reach different people based on musicality that personally connects to us. I experience this, just like you do. However, I have discovered this to be true as I have laid down my preferences and pressed into heartily sing any song that declares truth about God. This is part of what Paul is recommending through the first half of verse 19. Notice the connection of the beginning of verse 19, "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." Paul speaks of three types of songs. I wish I could give you exact definitions of these, but scholars have struggled to come to firm conclusions. Psalms are most likely the Biblical Psalms, and hymns are probably psalm-like compositions by the early church. Let me give an exhortation here. This is not a proof text for the church to prioritize singing mostly psalms or songs we classify as hymns. For one, most of our hymns were written a couple of hundred years ago and wouldn't have been what Paul is referencing. More importantly, notice how Paul lists three types of songs, ending with "spiritual songs," which are likely Spirit-inspired songs that may be spontaneous song. And note that there is no indication of any priority. In fact, each are linked closely together in the grammatical structure of the Greek. I believe Paul's intent is to say, "use every kind of song at your disposal to sing to the Lord with your heart." Church, if a song declares truth about God, sing it to the Lord with your heart. Now, look at the way verse 19 begins and ends, "be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another... singing and making melody to the Lord." Oh, how our corporate worship would be transformed if we can truly grasp this. Worship in song is never only about you and God. That is part of it, as your singing is "to the Lord with your heart," but your singing is always intended to be directed at those around you who are blood bought children of God. Think about this letter to the Ephesians with me. Paul spent the first four chapters unpacking the riches of our salvation and a call to love on another. In chapter 1, he shared the blessings of our adoption through Christ's redeeming work on the cross and the forgiveness of our trespasses.

He also shared the amazing reality of the Spirit's sealing as the guarantee of our inheritance, ending with the church being the body of Christ, "the fullness of Him who fills all in all." In chapter 2, he shows how those united to Christ have been taken from spiritual death to spiritual life, saved by grace through faith alone. Then he reminded both Jews and Gentiles that we are one new man in Christ, and even though Gentiles were once alienated from God's promises, both of us have been brought near as fellow citizens, members of the household of God, and a holy temple in the Lord. In chapter 3, he declared how this was a mystery hidden for ages but realized in Christ Jesus and his prayer for all to understand the depths of Christ love and God's power at work within us. In chapter 4, he calls us to humility and unity, striving for mature faith, putting aside our old self, and putting on our new self after the image of Christ that includes living in patience, sacrifice, kindness, and forgiveness towards one another. Then in the beginning of chapter 5, he calls us to walk in love as Christ did. Paul consistently reminds us of our great salvation and need to be mindful that we are one body in Christ, designed to walk in love towards each other. Church, addressing one another in song is one aspect of that love. When we learn to sing this way, we will realize that while a song may not be connecting to our hearts, it is likely blessing someone else in this room, and our purpose may be to address others by heartily singing its truths. That kind of singing glorifies God as hearts are drawn to Him through it. See, when I sing with you in mind, while singing to the Lord, my heart is overwhelmed with desires for you to experience the joy and presence of Christ with me. Have you been blessed when you heard the people of God singing in this room? What would happen if we all were constantly pressing into addressing one another and singing to the Lord with our hearts every week? Church, Paul isn't telling us this is optional, he is telling us this is what it looks like to be filled with the Spirit. There are two charges I see coming from this. First,

### **1) Strive to Be Filled with the Spirit**

We cannot miss the fact that this only comes from being filled with the Spirit. What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? And how do we accomplish that? The scriptures speak of the Spirit's filling in three ways. First is the initial filling at salvation. When we ask God to forgive our sin, trust in Christ's death as the sufficient payment for it, and His resurrection as the guarantee of our new life, the Bible tells us we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. An initial filling of the Spirit comes at the moment of salvation. Second, the scriptures speak of the Spirit's filling as receiving special power to fulfill a particular calling. Think of Pentecost where the apostles receive a particular powerful filling to bear witness to the truth of Christ. We see this throughout the book of acts, sometimes as simply a strange boldness. Third, the bible speaks of people being full of the Spirit. Think of Steven and those chosen to help with the distribution to widows in Acts 6. This isn't the initial filling or a special filling, but a distinguishing mark. Paul is talking about being full of the Spirit in this way. So, what does it mean to be full in this sense? On the word "filled," the Thayer's Greek Lexicon says, "What wholly takes possession of the mind is said to fill it" (Lloyd Jones, p. 47). The structure of the final command in verse 18 shows this to be true, bear with me as I get a little technical. John Stott notes how "be filled with the Spirit" is in what is called the imperative mood, indicating a command, passive voice, indicating it is something done to us, and present tense, indicating a continuous action (John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*, 208). So, the idea is that every believer is commanded to continually let the Spirit take full control of your mind. But how do we do this? How do we have something happen to us? We do this through prayer and saturating our minds of the truth of Christ. It is no coincidence that Paul records two prayers in this letter. Notice the request of Paul in his first prayer in Ephesians 1:17-18, "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened." Paul is praying for those who have been sealed with the Spirit, yet he asks God to give them the Spirit to enlighten their hearts.

In his second prayer, found in Ephesians 3:16-19, he prays for them, "to be strengthened with power through his Spirit... that Christ may dwell in [their] hearts," and they "may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is... the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge," and "may be filled with all the fullness of God." This is the filling described in Ephesians 5:18, and Paul shows it comes through prayer and the power of God. Yet, this also comes through a renewal of the mind on the things of Christ. Paul's first prayer requests "wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God." His second prayer requests comprehending and knowing the love of Christ. And throughout this letter, he consistently speaks about knowledge and the mind. This connects with John 16:13-14, where Jesus says, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." The Spirit's role is to glorify Christ by guiding Christ's people in the truth through proclamation of the things of Christ. Praying for the Spirit and filling your mind with the things of Christ is what leads to being filled with the Spirit. But there is one more way I see implied by our passage. This moves us to the second charge I see,

## **2) Sing and Receive to be Full of the Spirit**

Some suggest the participles in verses 19-21 modify the command "be filled with the Spirit," by showing how to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This would mean addressing one another in song and singing to the Lord with your heart are ways to be filled with the Holy Spirit. While I am not persuaded that is how they modify that command, I don't believe those who suggest this are entirely wrong. Think about this with me. As you address others with song, and they address you with song, your mind is saturated with the things of Christ because you are singing truths about Christ, which we have seen leads to being filled with the Spirit. Also, as you are singing to the Lord with your heart, you are often singing prayers for more of Christ, which we have seen leads to being filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the act of singing to the Lord and others, along with receiving song from others does aid in being filled with the Spirit. So, church, press in to sing and receive for your heart and others, letting that fill you with more of the Spirit, leading to you singing and making melody for God's glory. I cannot tell you how often God has met me when I have pressed into corporate worship. There have been many times when I arrive to church with nothing to give. I am distracted and feel spiritually dull. Instead of simply going through the motions, I ask God to meet me as I sing to Him and hear others singing, praying for my worship to encourage those around me. Then, I sing with all my heart, engaging my mind and body in worship, and time after time the Lord has flooded my heart with His Spirit. Seek him in our gatherings through this means of grace and watch Him pour out His grace on you.

### **Conclusion:**

As the worship team is coming to lead us in a time of extended response the encouragement is to press into this time of singing. Church, I know there are lots of thoughts about what we sing and how we sing at GracePoint. We prayerfully consider all the feedback we have received. At this time, we believe God is leading us to continue with how we are doing things as they are accomplishing the goals we believe God has for us when we gather together. I am not saying this to condemn in any way, but I want to encourage you to consider pressing into this means of grace. Press in to singing for your heart and others and see if God will honor that with more of His Spirit. Maybe you don't have His Spirit at all because you haven't placed your trust in the finish work of Christ on the cross. Today can be the day of your salvation. Seek His mercy and trust in Him today. As always, you are welcome to come and kneel before Him, sit and reflect, or stand and sing. We also have a team of people ready to pray with you and for you who will be worshipping on the front rows or at the bottom of the stairs at the back. Let's seek His grace together. Will you pray with me as we move into this time of response?