

Spirit-filled Psalm Singing – *Ephesians 5:18-21*

Introduction – Having preached through 60 Psalms over the years, I am setting my sights on the next 10. I again want to remind us why we are singing the Psalms. Especially for those who are newer with us, psalm-singing requires developing an acquired taste, both in the lyrics God has chosen for us to sing, as well as the many older musical styles used in the Cantus Christi. In our day (instant gratification), it seems odd that we should be required to practice and learn a worship song, sing parts, and make congregational singing glorious, but there is something glorious in the learning and learning together.

During the Reformation, Luther, Calvin, and others led a dramatic shift in Lord's Day worship by reintroducing congregational singing, especially the singing of the Psalms. When considering what it is that we should sing in the public worship of God, it's as if the Lord said "I have 150 songs you could start with." Singing Psalms in worship was the standard feature of music in the church for most of its history (before Christ in the synagogues and in the early NT church). Consider again the deep and rich gift of Psalm-singing.

Under the Influence (v18) - There are certain signs that one can look for to reveal that a man is "under the influence." Here's a bit of Greek grammar: both "*do not be drunk*" and "*be filled*" are passive imperatives. They are things done to us and not things we simply do – they require means. The means of drunkenness is wine. The means of "being filled" is the Spirit. "*Be filled with the Spirit*" is obeyed through positioning ourselves and not so much producing for God. We don't fill ourselves; we yield to the One who does.

As dissipation issues from drunkenness, so singing psalms, giving thanks, and submitting to one another issue from being Spirit-filled. In these verses, three or four resultant characteristics of being filled by the Spirit are given.

Speaking (or Singing) to Yourself – The first stated evidence of Spirit-filled living is having a song in one's heart. And then it comes out in two ways. First, disciples of Christ are used by the Spirit to "*la-le-lo*" to themselves ("teaching and admonishing one another" – Col 3:16). While the Spirit works upon us as individuals, Spirit-filled living cannot be manifested simply in the individual. This is body-life, members ministering to one another ("*to yourselves*," not "to yourself") in song. In addition, note that music/singing has an implicit teaching/shaping affect in it. Therefore, be wise in your choice of what/who is "teaching" you (Phil 4:8).

In modern parlance, we use the term *psalms* to distinguish from what we call *hymns*, and that is fine. However, we must remember that that is not what Paul meant. Psalms (like Psalm 3), hymns (like Psalm 55), and odes (like Psalm 122), are terms pointing to the 150-psalm Psalter (Psalm 67 uses all three terms in the LXX title). These were regularly sung in the Jewish OT synagogue and the Gentile, NT church. This is the bread and butter of what the Spirit wants sung.

Singing and Plucking from your heart to the Lord – The human voice (and more importantly, voices) is universally employed to reveal the heart in all cultures. Instruments are universally employed to support the sound. Image-bearers who have been made new in Christ lifting up their voices to the Lord is quite an amazing gift. And when God pronounces judgment on the wicked, He makes clear there will be no music, no songs, no singing (Ezek 26:13).

Giving Thanks Always for All Things to God – This could be applied to being thankful in all situations and that is certainly what we are called to do. However, in this passage and book I believe Paul is emphasizing giving thanks for all we have come to realize that we have in God through Christ (i.e. all of Ephesians 1-3, see Paul's own "thanksgiving" in 3:20-21). This then spills out into all things, for God is sovereignly good in all situations and so, remember that giving thanks is not a matter of feeling thankful; it is a matter of obedience. The only person who can give God thanks in all things is the humble person. Lack of thankfulness comes from pride and not circumstances.

Submitting to One Another – We were baptized by the Spirit into one body. The Spirit oversees and fills the body and not just the members. The Spirit re-orient us in our relationships with one another. As members, we subject ourselves to the body, considering them as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3-4).

A Parallel Passage (Col 3:16) – "*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*" Putting this together with the Ephesians passage we can see that we are not to be "filled with the Spirit" as though we might be a quart low. Rather, we are filled with the Word of Christ by means of the Spirit – He is doing the filling. And so we also see the correct positioning of ourselves to be filled – it is to give ourselves to the Spirit-inspired words of Christ. And while all of the text of the OT and NT is the "word of Christ," Paul points us particularly here to the Book of Psalms and to the corporate work of using the Psalms to get us all dwelling richly in wisdom, singing with grace (thankfulness) in our hearts and all directed to the Lord.

Teaching and Admonishing – We are to teach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), and one of the experiences we have had in returning to the psalms is to see how broad our singing is to be with regard to topics, emotion, and purpose. We sing them to one another, stirring us up to call out for God to rise up (17), to pour out our feelings before Him (42, 47, 63). We are to admonish one another to pray with remembrance over God’s mighty acts (78, 105, 106), to pray when we doubt (13), when we are broken over our sin (32, 51), as well as to sing against our enemies (109, 137). We are to learn to identify with Christ in His crucifixion and resurrection (22), as well as His ascension and reign (2, 72, 110). It goes on and on, which is why Calvin called them, *“The Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul...there is not an emotion of which anyone can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror...In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book.”*

Sometimes the Psalm is our cry to God, sometimes it is the Son’s cry to the Father (22:1), or the Father speaking to us or to His Son (2:7-9). Sometimes, the Son seems to join with us in praise to the Father (22:22) – and all of this is breathed-out by the Holy Spirit. We are joining together in a holy, Trinitarian conversation over the future of the world (98). This is the power of Spirit-filled Psalm singing. Be under His influence, filled with His glorious love and devotion to the Father and the Son. Sing.