

Singing in Worship

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INTRODUCTION

Singing is one of the most vital and vibrant elements of Christian worship, allowing expression of the soul's deepest emotions. In this lesson, we want to examine the parallel passages in Ephesians and Colossians that address the subject of singing (Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16-17).

Ephesians 5:18-19, NASB	Col 3:16, NASB
And do not get drunk with wine	
but be filled with the Spirit	Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom
speaking to one another	teaching and admonishing one another
in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs	with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,
singing and making melody with your heart	singing with thankfulness in your hearts
to the Lord	to God

AND DO NOT GET DRUNK WITH WINE, FOR THAT IS DISSIPATION

Paul, the inspired apostle says, "Do not get drunk." The Greek verb *methuskō*, the causative form of *methuō* [to be drunken], is defined as "to make drunk" [Thomas 3182]. BDAG say it means "get drunk, become intoxicated with wine." This word occurs 5x in the NT (Luke 12:45; John 2:10; Eph. 5:18; 1 Thess. 5:7; Rev. 17:2). Such behavior may be common among unfaithful servants (Luke 12:45-46), and those who exchange their souls for material gain (Rev. 17:1-2), but not of the saints in light (Eph. 5:18-19; 1 Thess. 5:7-8).

Why? Drunkenness leads to dissipation. Thomas defines *asōtia*, translated "dissipation," a compound of the negative prefix and *sōzō* [to save], as "unsavedness, i.e. wastefulness" [810]. BDAG say the verb *sōzō* refers to preservation, hence *asōtia* generally denotes 'wastefulness,' then reckless abandon, debauchery, dissipation, profligacy, especially exhibited in convivial gatherings." Louw & Nida say it refers to "behavior which shows lack of concern or thought for the consequences of an action." This word occurs 3x in the NT (Eph. 5:18; Titus 1:6; 1 Pet. 4:4).

Sinful men often live lives of reckless abandon, engaging in unrestrained wantonness, being given over to profligacy and prodigality (Luke 15:11-13, 29-30; 1 Pet. 4:1-4). In contrast with the coarse and vulgar songs of those drunk with wine, those who are Spirit-filled sing praises to God. Consider how the conduct of Paul and Silas differed from typical prisoners when they were jailed at Philippi (Acts 16:23-25).

BUT BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT/LET THE WORD OF CHRIST RICHLY DWELL WITHIN YOU, WITH ALL WISDOM

How can one be filled with the Spirit? Depending upon the context, the expression can have a miraculous or non-miraculous meaning. In reference to the craftsman Bezalel, it refers to his artistic talent used in constructing the tabernacle (Exod. 31:1-11, esp. vs. 3-4; 35:30-35, esp. vs. 31-32). In regard to the prophet Micah, it refers to his prophetic calling and gift (Mic. 3:5-12, esp. vs. 8; cf. 1:1; Jer. 26:18). For the apostles on the day of Pentecost, it identifies their baptism in the Holy Spirit, and subsequent supernatural empowerment (Acts 2:1-4). For Peter and John before the Sanhedrin, it refers to Jesus' promise of divine guidance (Acts 4:5-10; cf. Matt. 10:17-20). Although Paul was the last of the apostles, born out of due season, he enjoyed similar divine gifts (Acts 9:15-16; 13:1-12; Eph. 3:1-7). At other times, the expression, "filled with the spirit," generally refers to the fruits of a spirit led life (Acts 13:48-52; Eph. 5:18-20).

The Holy Spirit and the Word of God both perform the same agency in convicting and converting the sinner. Both give life (2 Cor. 3:6; James 1:18). Both sanctify (John 17:17; 1 Cor. 6:11). Both are said to indwell believers (Rom. 8:11; Col. 3:16). Both are instrumental in the salvation of our souls (Titus 3:5; James 1:21). We are born of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8) and also of the word of God (1 Pet. 1:23).

Therefore, what the Spirit does to convert and save men, He does it through the revealed word, the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16-17). Whatever is declared of the Holy Spirit is also declared of the Word of God. This does not mean that they are the same, but the Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17), the instrument by which God operates upon the hearts of men. Therefore, we must heed God's word (Matt. 13:9), handling it rightly (2 Tim. 2:15), hiding it in our hearts (Psa. 119:11).

SPEAKING TO ONE ANOTHER/TEACHING AND ADMONISHING ONE ANOTHER

Singing is a wonderfully effective tool for mutual edification (Eph. 4:29), enabling us to express sentiments and thoughts that might otherwise be difficult to articulate, empowering us to be teachers of God's word (Col. 1:28). The same Greek word that appears in Colossians 3:16 translated "teaching and admonishing" is rendered "warning every man and teaching every man" in Colossians 1:28. Through singing, we exhort and admonish one another, and also praise and honor the Lord.

IN PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS/~~WITH PSALMS AND HYMNS AND SPIRITUAL SONGS~~

Psalms

Thomas defines *psalmos*, derived from *psallō* [to pull, twitch, twang, play, sing], as “a striking (of musical strings), a psalm.” BDAG say “in our literature, [it is used] only [of a] song of praise, psalm in accordance with OT usage, (1) of OT Psalms; (2) of Christian songs of praise.” This word occurs 7x in the NT (Luke 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

This word may be used in two senses, referring to (1) the book of Psalms, the third section of the Hebrew OT, following the Law and the Prophets (Luke 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33); or (2), generally, of songs of praise by believers in the Christian era (1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary says, “The Book of Psalms is a collection of prayers, poems, and hymns that focus the worshiper’s thoughts on God in praise and adoration. Parts of this book were used as a hymnal in the worship services of ancient Israel... With 150 individual psalms, this book has the most chapters of any in the Bible. It is also one of the most diverse, since the psalms deal with such subjects as God and His creation, war, worship, wisdom, sin and evil, judgment, justice, and the coming of the Messiah. Through these hymns of praise, we come face to face with our Maker and Redeemer. In the glory of His presence, we are compelled to exclaim along with the psalmist, ‘O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Your name in all the earth!’ (8:1).”

“We may think of the psalms as a description of our human response to God. At times God is presented in all His majesty and glory. Our response is wonder, awe, and fear: ‘Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth’ (68:32). But other psalms portray God as a loving Lord who is involved in our lives. Our response in these cases is to draw close to His comfort and security: ‘I will fear no evil; for You are with me’ (23:4).

“God is the same Lord in both these psalms. But we respond to Him in different ways, according to the specific needs of our lives. What a marvelous God we worship, the psalmist declares — One who is high and lifted up beyond our human experiences but also one who is close enough to touch and who walks beside us along life’s way” [R. F Youngblood, F. F. Bruce, & R. K. Harrison, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995), s.v. “Psalms, Book of”].

Like Old Testament psalms, Christian songs express a wide range of themes and feelings. We address God on different levels, singing “A mighty fortress is our God,” and also “Lead me gently home, Father.”

Hymns

Thomas defines *humnos* as “a hymn” [5215]. BDAG say it refers to “a song with religious content, hymn/song of praise especially in honor of a deity.” Louw & Nida define it as “a song with religious content.” This word occurs 2x in the NT (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Praise offered to God is a major theme of the Bible. A NASB concordance search on “praise AND (God OR Lord)” yields 117 results. God’s people must continually praise Him (Psa. 7:17; 34:1; 69:30; etc.). Kittel says, “Christ’s word lives in the church’s songs to God, which extol from the heart his saving work (Col. 3:16). In Ephesians 5:19 praise is addressed to the Lord with God’s saving work again as the theme. Emphasis is given in v. 19 by the verbs ‘singing and making melody’ (cf. Psa. 27:6).”

Spiritual Songs

Thomas defines the adjective *pneumatikos* as “spiritual” [4152] and the noun *ōdē* as “a song, ode” [5603]. Louw & Nida define *pneumatikos*, in its present usage, as “pertaining to a pattern of life controlled or directed by God’s Spirit.” Furthermore, *ōdē* refers to “a particular melodic pattern with verbal content.” BDAG say the former “pertains to spirit as [the] inner life of a human being, spiritual,” and the latter is used, in our literature, “only of sacred song, a song of praise to God.” The former occurs 26x in the NT (Rom. 1:11; 7:14; 15:27; 1 Cor. 2:13; 2:15; 3:1; 9:11; 10:3, 4; 12:1; 14:1, 37; 15:44, 46; Gal. 6:1; Eph. 1:3; 5:19; 6:12; Col. 1:9; 3:16; 1 Pet 2:5) and the latter occurs 7x in 5 NT verses (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:9; 14:3; 15:3). Obviously, singing in Christian worship must have a spiritual focus.

SINGING AND MAKING MELODY WITH YOUR HEART/SINGING WITH THANKFULNESS IN YOUR HEARTS

Singing

Thomas defines *adō* as “to sing” [103]. BDAG say it means to “sing (in praise).” This word occurs 5x in the NT (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:9; 14:3; 15:3). While dwelling on earth, Christians praise God and admonish one another by singing (with thankfulness) and making melody in their hearts to the Lord (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). In the heavenly realm, the redeemed sing a new song of praise (Rev. 5:9; 14:3). They also sing the song of Moses and the Lamb (Rev. 15:3).

Making Melody

Thomas defines *psallō*, derived from *psaō* [to rub], as “to pull, twitch, twang, play, sing” [5567]. Swanson says it means to “sing praises, make music with [the] voice.” This word occurs 5x in 4 NT verses (Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; James 5:13).

The 1979 Edition of Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich & Danker (BAGD) defines *psallō* as “in our literature, in accordance with OT usage, sing, sing praise of the one for whom the praise is intended... The original meaning of *psallō* was ‘pluck’, ‘play’ (a stringed instrument); this persisted at least to the time of Lucian. In the LXX, *psallō* frequently means ‘sing’, whether to the accompaniment of a harp or (as usually) not (Psa. 7:18; 9:12; 107:4; al.). This process continued until *psallō* in Modern Greek means ‘sing’ exclusively; cf. ψάλτης=singer, chanter, with no reference to instrumental accompaniment. Although the NT does not voice opposition to instrumental music, in view of Christian resistance to mystery cults, as well as Pharisaic aversion to musical instruments in worship, it is likely that some such sense as **make melody** is best here...”

Little Kittel offers the following comments “In Ephesians. 5:19 praise is addressed to the Lord with God’s saving work again as the theme. Emphasis is given in v. 19 by the verbs ‘singing and making melody’ (cf. Psa. 27:6). *Psallontes* [the form of the verb Ephesians 5:10 – i.e., present, active, participle, masculine, plural, nominative, from *PSALLO*, meaning, ‘to pull, twitch, twang, play, sing,’ MM] does **not** now denote literally playing on a stringed instrument, and the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs hardly refer to different kinds of texts.”

In summary, while *psallō* once included the use of instruments, the word changed over time; in the NT, it refers to singing. A careful reading of Ephesians 5:19 reveals the instrument under consideration. For Christian worship to be acceptable, we must pluck the heartstrings. In other words, we sing from the heart with genuine emotion and feeling.

TO THE LORD/TO GOD

Everything we do, including singing, is ultimately to glorify God (Rom. 14:7-8; Col. 3:23-24). This applies both to our worship assemblies and the activities of everyday life.

CONCLUSION

Are we worshipping God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24)? Is our singing a joyous expression of devotion and thanksgiving (James 5:13)? Self-examination is needed: Do we think about what we are singing, or do we find ourselves daydreaming? Are we more interested in technical precision of the music than in the sentiments of the song? For worship to be acceptable, we must sing with grace in our hearts, being empowered by a spirit of joy, faith and gratitude. Let us focus on our song service with a view to improvement!