

Walk in Wisdom

Ephesians: Display of God's Glory

Ephesians 5:15-21

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Worship Wars

Why should we sing in church? Who should sing in church? To whom should we sing in church? What should we sing in church? How should we sing in church? Have you ever thought about these questions?¹ These are some of the questions we'll be answering this morning.

What causes worship wars in churches? Basically wars over worship are wars over music. And wars over music in the church generally arise when people have different answers to these questions. We're not immune to this battle at First Free. Thankfully, we've never had a church split over something like music and I pray that we never will. But people have left this church over music. And I would say that in my short time as a pastor, almost half of the complaining I've received is related to music.

Does the Bible address the topic? Or are we left to our own devices when it comes to the topic of singing and music in our corporate worship services? Our passage this morning deals deeply with this topic. Actually it is one of two passages in the New Testament that deals specifically with singing in church (cf. Col. 3:16). And it's a short passage. But it's amazing how much we learn about singing in church from this short passage.

Ephesians 5:15-21²

¹⁵Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. ¹⁷Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

This is the Word of the Lord.

The main thing we're going to talk about this morning is singing in church. But I think we'll see this morning, God's view of singing is much bigger than our view of singing. Singing in church is a part of God's great and glorious plan of salvation. And the principles God gives us for singing in this passage are much broader than most people think. So this morning I want to begin by looking at how our singing as a church fits into God's plan of salvation. And then I want to consider how the principles we're given for singing should inform our actions and attitudes as we gather together for worship.

SINGING ACCORDING TO GOD'S PLAN.

There are three main commands in this passage.

1. To walk as wise (not unwise) (vv. 15-16).

¹ These questions are asked and answered in Thabiti Anyabwile's book *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church*.

² Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

2. To understand the will the Lord (not to be foolish) (v. 17).
3. To be filled with the Spirit (not filled with wine) (vv. 18-21).

These three commands are pointing us backward to God's big plan for the church. Notice the three key words in these commands: wise, will, filled. These three words are referenced so much in the book of Ephesians. Essentially, these three commands are calling us to live according to God's plan for our lives. They are calling us to walk in a manner worthy of our calling (4:1).

In order to show this, I want to review God's plan for the church. I want to review what we've learned so far in the book of Ephesians. I think this will help us understand how these commands fit into the topic of singing in the church.

Turn back with me in your Bibles to Ephesians 1:7-10.

Ephesians 1:7-10

⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, ⁸which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight ⁹making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and on earth.

Verses 9-10 give us the summary of God's plan for the church.³ And notice the key words in these verses are linked with our commands in chapter 5. God's plan is a plan grounded in wisdom. God's plan is God's will.⁴ So when we're told in chapter 5 that God wants us to walk as wise (5:15) and that God wants us to understand his will (5:17), we're being called to live lives consistent with God's plan.

What is the wise plan? What is God's will? It's a plan to unite all things in heaven and on earth in Christ. God's plan is a plan to deal with a major problem in the universe.

People on earth are not "united" with God and his ways; they are in rebellion against God, in their sins. As a result they are dead in their sins and separated from the life of God. They are under the wrath of God and will face the judgment of God apart from Christ.

Also, people on earth are not "united" to one another; they are constantly fighting with one another.

But not only are people on earth not "united" with God or one another. There are powers in the heavenly places—the devil and his demons—who are certainly not "united" with God or his ways; they are in rebellion against God *and* his people.

God's plan is to "unite" all things in heaven and on earth—both people on earth who are in rebellion and powers in the heavens that are in rebellion. We'll talk about the evil powers in the heavenly places in a few weeks (6:10-20). But for our purposes this morning, let me summarize God's plan for the church.

God is in the process of uniting people to himself in Christ from among all peoples on the earth, both Jews and non-Jews. In Christ, those who were separated from God are being brought near. And this is all for the praise of his glorious grace (1:6, 12, 14).

³ Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*.

⁴ Ibid.

And God is also in the process of uniting those diverse people to one another in his church. He has broken down the wall of hostility between Jews and non-Jews (2:14). And this too is for his praise. The multi-ethnic church is a display of the glory of God (3:10).

But not only is God reconciling people to himself and to others; he's also uniting them to his ways, to his likeness (4:24). While we are not saved *by* works, we were saved *for* good works (2:10). To cite a few examples: Those who have come to know the love of God (3:19) are called to love others (4:2). Those who have been united together in Christ (2:13) are called to maintain unity (4:3). Those who have been forgiven by the blood of Christ (1:7) are called to forgive others (4:32). We're called to be imitators of God (5:1) and to walk in a manner worthy of our calling (4:1).

But how does this happen? How do we as the church become united to God's ways? There are two ways.⁵

God does the work. In Ephesians, the church is described as a holy temple, a dwelling place for God (2:21-22). And *God* is building this temple.

He builds his church on Christ. Christ is the cornerstone of the church (2:20). But we're also told that we are being built into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. So the Spirit is also at work in building the church. It is the Spirit of God that fills the church with the fullness of God (2:22). And when we his church become filled with the fullness of God, we come to full maturity (4:13).⁶

That's how the church becomes united to God's ways. God does the work. And that's why we are commanded in our passage this morning to be filled by the Holy Spirit (5:18). Only as *God* fills us and builds us will we become a display of his glory.

But at the same time, **God uses us to do the work.** We're told in Ephesians that each of us has a role of building the church. Each of us has a role of building up the body of Christ.

The pastors and teachers build up the body of Christ through preaching and teaching the Word of God and by equipping each member of the body of Christ for the work of ministry (4:11-12). And then we're told that each member of the body also has a role in building up the body of Christ. And the main way they build up the body of Christ is through speaking the truth in love. As each member in the body speaks the gospel to one another, they are building the body until it reaches full maturity (4:13).

And as the body builds itself up in love, we become more and more like God (4:16; 4:24; 5:1). And the plan of God continues to advance!

This is God's plan. To unite sinners to himself in Christ. To unite us to one another in Christ. And to unite us to his likeness in Christ. And this is all for the glory of God! God does this work, let there be no mistake. But God also uses each of us to accomplish these purposes.

That's why we must pray fervently for God to do his work in our lives. And that's why we must marinate in the Word of God, and speak the Word of God to one another in the body. This is how God accomplishes his plan for his church!

Okay, now back to our main passage this morning. When we're commanded to walk in wisdom, to understand the will of the Lord, and to be filled with the Spirit, we're being commanded to live our

⁵ These two ways are a constant tension in the book of Ephesians. See Peter O'Brien, "Introduction" in *The Letter to the Ephesians*.

⁶ Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*.

lives according to God's glorious plan—according to his wisdom and will, through God's power in the Spirit.

That's the plan. But how will we know if the plan is at work among us? How will we know if we're walking in wisdom? How will we know if we understand God's will? How will we know if we're being filled with the Spirit? We've already seen a lot of evidence in chapter 4 and in the first part of chapter 5. But now we're given more information.

In verses 19-21, Paul gives us five participles. These participles describe what the church that is being filled with the fullness of God by the Spirit will look like.⁷ These participles describe what a spiritually mature church looks like.

1. They address one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.
2. They sing.
3. They make melody to the Lord with all their heart.
4. They give thanks to God.
5. They submit to one another.

The last participle on submitting is covered in the rest of chapter 5 and the first part of chapter 6, which give us three ways Christians submit to one another.⁸ Wives are to submit to their husbands (5:22-33). Children are to submit to their parents (6:1-4). And slaves are to submit to their masters (6:5-9). We will cover the substance of this last participle over the next two weeks. This week we'll discuss the first four participles.

The first four participles have to do with what we do in our weekly worship services.⁹ They all have to do with singing, in one way or another. There is a very important point to make before we go on. I've gone into detail about God's plan for the church for a reason. God's plan to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth, is a really big plan.

And how do we know if this plan is taking place in our church? How do we know if we're being filled with the fullness of God by the Spirit? Well four of the five pieces of evidence have to do with our singing as we gather together weekly for worship! Singing is a big deal for the church of Jesus Christ in God's plan of salvation. That's the first main point I want to make this morning. Our singing is according to God's grand, cosmic, glorious, plan of salvation. Our singing is a bigger deal than most of us realize.

Sermon in a sentence: Our singing is according to God's plan; therefore, our singing should be according to God's principles.

Let's now look at God's principles for singing in the church.

SINGING ACCORDING TO GOD'S PRINCIPLES. (VV. 19-20)

I see God's principles in these two verses divided into two categories. There is a horizontal direction to our singing in church—it's toward other believers. And there is a vertical direction to our singing in church—it's toward God. Let's look at the horizontal direction first.

⁷ The participles are the result of the main verb. Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*.

⁸ This participle is not calling us to mutual submission in the church. The submission in mind in Ephesians is spelled out in the three spheres covered in the rest of Ephesians 5 and the first part of Ephesians 6.

⁹ See Graham Cole, *He Who Gives Life*. These participles have a corporate application not merely an individual application. Contra Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*.

Sing to one another.

The first evidence that we are a Spirit-filled church that is living according to God's plan is seen when we address one another by singing to one another.

But what's the purpose of singing to one another? And what should we sing to one another?

We should sing to one another to build one another up! All of our life is worship. In Romans 12:1 we're told to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. In 1 Corinthians 10:31 we're told that whatever we do we are to do for the glory of God. And that is no different when we come together to worship. We're called to worship God. But when we come *together* there is another goal. It is to build up the body of Christ. We do that by speaking the truth in love. And one way we speak the truth in love is by addressing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; by singing.

The parallel passage, in Colossians 3:16, commands us to let the Word of Christ dwell richly in us. How do we do that? By teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom. How do we do that? By singing to one another psalms, and hymns and spiritual songs.

The first way we know we're a Spirit-filled church is by singing to one another for their instruction and edification. Have you ever thought about your singing in this way?

Who's called to this ministry? Is this just a ministry for those who like to sing or for those who are gifted singers? I don't think so. I think this passage teaches us that all of us are called to a singing ministry.

Remember, God builds his church, but he also uses each of us to build it! In the Old Testament, the choir of Levite priests was the main group who had the ministry of singing. But in the New Testament, all believers are called a priesthood. And we're all called to address one another through singing.¹⁰

At First Free, we are committed to participatory singing. We don't want to listen only to gifted professionals sing, though that is certainly edifying! The entire congregation is a choir that is called to sing to one another. We want everyone to participate.¹¹

At First Free, we have also determined that the voice of the congregation will be the primary instrument in our worship.¹² It's not that we shouldn't have other instruments accompanying and adorning our singing. But we don't want any instrument drowning out the voice of the congregation.

As I've done some travelling in the last number of years, it is a shame to see how little congregations sing.¹³ The rock band on stage drowns out the voice of the congregation. And the people stand and listen to the "pros" on stage, singing and playing their instruments. I'm thankful to be in a church where I can hear the Hollanders singing behind me in first service and I can hear the Logans singing behind me in second service. And where I can hear the choir singing to me in both services.

We're all called to sing to one another. That's a practical action we learn from this passage. And if that's the case, then what should our attitude be when we come together to worship? We should sing out of a great desire to build up other people. It is ironic that, in God's plan, our singing is a

¹⁰ Thabiti Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church*.

¹¹ See the [Worship by the Word](#) document.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Thabiti Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church*, and Michael Raiter, "The Slow Death of Congregational Singing."

way we build unity, but music is so often the thing that divides us in the church because we want music to be done our way! But in the church, singing is not really about us. It is primarily a time for us to worship God and build up other believers.

It's horizontal and vertical. Toward God and toward one another. It's primarily outward, not inward. Do you need better directions when it comes to singing?

We've seen that we sing to one another to build them up. But what types of songs will build? What should we sing to one another?

We should sing to one another with Word-rich songs. We're called to sing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (5:19). It is difficult to know exactly what Paul means when he speaks of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.¹⁴ But we learn that at a minimum our songs must be rich with the Word of God.

"Psalms" undoubtedly refer to the 150 songs we have in the middle of our Bible; it refers literally to the Psalms which are God's Word.

"Hymns" probably refers to festive songs of celebration, which may have included songs straight from the Bible. But I'm convinced that some of the hymns referred to here would include songs that were composed by the people of God, using parts of the Bible. For example, look at the hymn in Ephesians 5:14. "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

This is likely a composite of a couple of passages in Isaiah and maybe Malachi. It's not a song straight out of the Bible. It's a song using parts of the Bible. The best hymns we have today are songs that are rich in the Scriptures.

"Spiritual songs" are the most difficult to nail down. Literally they refer to Spirit-inspired songs. But whether that is speaking of straight Scripture or songs composed by Spirit-filled people, it is hard to tell.

Some would make a case that the only songs the church should sing are the Psalms.¹⁵ But I think it is a stretch to draw that conclusion from this passage. But at a minimum, the songs we sing must be saturated with the Word of God. And the reason why is because it is through the Word of God that the church of God is built up.

If you are in Christ, you are a part of God's great and glorious plan of salvation. Singing is a part of that plan. Therefore, I encourage you to be committed to singing to one another each week. Get here on time and come ready to minister to one another the Word of God through singing!

But we're not only called to sing on the horizontal plane, to one another. We're also called to sing on the vertical plane, to God.

Sing to God

There are two principles we learn here.

We should sing to God with all of our hearts. We are called to make a melody to the Lord with all our hearts. I love the hymn that says, "Tune my heart to sing Thy praise!" It's not just the words

¹⁴ Cf. Thabiti Anyabwile, *The Life of God in the Soul of the Church*; Peter O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, and Edmund Clowney, *The Church*.

¹⁵ E.g. [Reformed Presbyterian Church](#).

and the melody we sing that matter, though they certainly matter; the melody in our hearts matter too! In God's plan, he has united us to himself. When we sing about that plan, it should stir our hearts to worship him!

We are called to worship God in spirit and in truth. The content we sing should be rich with the Word of God—the *revelation* God has given us in his Word. That's how we worship God in truth. But our *response* to that revelation is where we worship God in spirit.¹⁶

Our worship to God must have a revelation-response rhythm. So we must start by paying careful attention to what we sing. And then as we hear the truths about God and what he has done for us in Christ, we must respond to God in praise and adoration, in confession and thanksgiving.

In fact, if we constantly hear the truths of God's Word in our music but aren't stirred in our affections for God, then it is questionable whether or not we are worshiping at all. Now that is not to say that we have to get all emotional in order to worship. (Although there's nothing wrong with that!) It's just to say, that our hearts should be moved as we sing the great truths of the Christian faith. And one way they should be moved specifically is toward thanksgiving.

We should sing to God with Christ-centered thanksgiving. Look at verse 20. "Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now when Paul says we are to give thanks for everything, I don't think he means everything generally. I think he means everything specifically that we have in Christ. He's referring to all the blessings we have in Christ.

- In Christ we have been chosen for adoption as sons.
- In Christ we have been redeemed by his blood.
- In Christ we have been given an eternal inheritance.
- In Christ we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit.
- In Christ we have been made alive.
- In Christ we have been brought near to God.

When we see everything we have in Christ, it should cause us to give thanks to God the Father. Does the gospel cause you to overflow with thanks to God? That is a mark of a Spirit-filled Christian.

That's one reason we try to plan Christ-centered services at First Free. We want the work of Christ to be on display, not only in the preaching, but in everything we do. Have you ever noticed how we structure our services? They're designed to help us respond to God with thanks for all we have in Christ. Our services have a Glory-Grace-Go structure to them.¹⁷ We print that structure on the front of your bulletin each week. But there are actually two more Gs that aren't explicit on your bulletin but are always included in our service.

We start with the **glory** of God. But after seeing the glory of God we become aware of the **guilt** of our sin before a holy God. And we respond by confessing our sins. This then drives us to the cross of Christ, where we see the **grace** of the gospel. Christ died for our sins! But after we have been reminded of the gospel we must respond. And our response should be one of **gratitude** for what

¹⁶ See John Piper, *Desiring God*.

¹⁷ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship*.

God has done for us in Christ. Then we should be motivated to **go** into the world to live lives that are consistent with this gospel and to proclaim this gospel to a lost and dying world.

This is our way of planning services that help us edify one another with Word-rich content and to stir our hearts to praise and thank God for all he has done for us in Christ. We hope it helps you to engage in Spirit-filled worship.

God's plan for the church—a plan to unite people to himself, to one another, and to his ways—is a great and glorious plan. It's bigger than the universe. Can you believe that our singing to one another on Sunday mornings is a part of this plan? Have you ever considered our singing as a part of God's plan?

Do you come here to sing to other believers? Did you even know that we were called to sing horizontally? Do you come here to build up other believers? Do you take seriously the words that we sing to one another?

And do you come here to sing to God? Is your worship heart-felt or are you going through the motions? Does the focus on the amazing work of God cause your heart to be overcome with thanksgiving?

These are the marks of a Spirit-filled church that is living according to God's plan. Are these the marks of our worship at First Free? Is this our ethos: building up others and worshipping God? I think it is the dominant picture here at First Free. But I still have to ask the question. Is that *your* heart? I invite you to examine your heart this morning? Do your actions on Sunday morning and your attitudes give evidence that you are filled with the Spirit of God? Or do they give evidence of something else?

We are a dwelling place for God. We are commanded to be continually filled by the Holy Spirit. And when that happens, we will build one another up through singing and praise God with grateful hearts. And when this happens we will be what God planned for the church – a display of his glory!

As we come to this last song, may the whole song serve as a prayer for us as a church. Sing it to one another. May we be filled with the Holy Spirit. But especially make the last line of the song your prayer. That in unity the face of Christ would be clear for all the world to see!

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Only RUB 193.34/month. Ten Ways to Walk in Wisdom. STUDY. Flashcards. the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God. 6 For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding. pray for. wisdom. James 1:5-6. 5 If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. 6 But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. acknowledge the Lord. Walk in Wisdom. 413 likes. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things... This may sound gay af to some of y'all but I really dgaf to be honest. I'm tired of the state of humanity. I just want sooo badly to dance and sing in wholeness and unity with my brethren and loved ones...present and passed...I know it's to come but oh how I desire it now. My spirit needs rest and strength. Walking in Wisdom. In the New Testament, the word disciple literally means a learner. The Christian is called to be enrolled in the school of Christ. Careful study of the Bible is necessary for true discipleship. Jesus said to His own students: If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free (John 8:31-32). Our Lord calls for a continued application of the mind to His Word. A disciple does not dabble in learning. Walk In Wisdom walkinwisdom. Christianity. 5.0, 1 Rating. Listen on Apple Podcasts. If you need a dose of the Word of God, then you are in the right place. Please feel free to dive into the podcast displayed to get your fill of the Word straight from the Bible to your ears. If you find yourself in the Vista, California area you can consider yourself invited and welcome to our services starting at 10AM. We are located at 2135 Industrial Ct, #A, Vista, CA 92081. 1.1. The Goal of Walking in Wisdom. Wisdom is the use of knowledge to reach worthy goals. You can know lots of things be a Ph.D. and be very unwise. Having knowledge and using knowledge are very different. Wisdom aims at winning outsiders to Christ. There are two remarkable texts in the Old Testament that connect wisdom with this goal. Proverbs 11:30 says, "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who is wise wins souls." "He who is WISE wins souls."