

Intro. ‘Worship wars’ is a phrase that has been used to describe the turmoil in churches over the seemingly dramatic changes in church music over the past 30 years or so. As we may expect, often more heat than light has been generated as churches and church members try to sort out what it means to express our love to God with our voices and instruments. We have come to accept the fact that many decide on a church home more for the worship and music experience than the doctrine or ministry vision. This morning the tension of the church music conversation continues as several consistently find it a challenge to sing with joy to the Lord and each other. There are several forces at work to keep you from joining your voice, joyfully and enthusiastically, with those in this gathering to worship God from your heart. You may be convinced that you are not a singer, discouraged that your musical preferences are not honored, upset by the worldliness of the new way or bored into silence by the irrelevance of singing songs. This has become a battlefield for many that strains both the relational unity of the body and the advance of truth telling in love. The last thing God intended for you when he created you was that you would stand in a worship service and not express love for him from your heart in song.

We are encouraged and hopeful as we come to Ephesians 5:15-12 that there are truths to guide our music/worship conversation. Too often we settle for less than biblical thinking because our preferences and experiences ‘dwell richly’ in our hearts rather than the ‘word of Christ (Col. 3:16).’

Let’s consider three truths that should shape our thinking and participation in church music and worship. Here is the core of our response to the ‘worship wars’ that cause division, individuality and resentment. Rather than tension and turmoil, your singing the songs of God to and with the people of God is profound evidence that God is worthy and the gospel is powerful.

The truth about church singing . . .

1. Your singing is both a result of and response to fullness. 18-21

Note that the main command that carries the main action of 18-21 is ‘be filled with the Spirit.’ Following this command there are 5 participles used to describe the results of obeying this command. As a result of you allowing God’s Spirit to fill you with the fullness of God, you will engage in these behaviors. Further reference in 19 to your heart supports this.

The 5 descriptive terms are translated in the ESV as ‘addressing, singing, making melody, giving thanks and submitting.’ All of them point toward corporate behaviors or results rather than individual behaviors. They are intended to be practiced together in the body in the context of the teaching in 4:1-7.

Whether you are willing to acknowledge it or not, your participation and attitude about singing with your church family serves as a diagnostic tool that reveals your submission to the Spirit of God. Therefore, it is worth our effort to understand what it means to be filled by the Spirit and how we can subject ourselves to the Spirit’s control. ‘What fills your heart?’ is the basic question of church singing. All worship is a heart response to the majesty of God.

Let’s review and embrace what it means to be filled by the Spirit. This is crucial as we are repeatedly taught to walk in, be lead by, and live by the Spirit . . . what does that mean?

First, understand the word translated in the ESV ‘with’ – does it refer to means (instrument) or content?
Ex. – fill the bucket with the hose.

The command is to set your heart/submit your life to the Holy Spirit in a continuing way as the means or instrument of how your life is intoxicated/influenced by the fullness of God and his transforming you into the image of his Son Jesus.

The command is not to fill up your life with the Holy Spirit as some separate guide, presence or influence. But rather to cooperate with the Spirit as he does his job of magnifying the fullness of God and Christ in your life.

Second, understand what your heart or inner being is to be filled with.

The following references earlier in Ephesians to fullness give us 3 examples of the kind of heart dominating truths that motivate the singing of songs to God and each other.

1:22-23 – Christ’s fullness/supremacy is for the benefit of the church – his people.

3:19 – God’s fullness is for you to enjoy as expressed in his love for you in Christ.

4:13 – you are to grow into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

The Holy Spirit magnifies and energizes in you the truths of 1)Christ’s Lordship/supreme authority, 2)God’s endless love and 3)the richness of gospel blessings so that your resulting behavior takes on the glow of the supernatural mystery that has taken place in you by God’s grace.

Third, live your life in subjection to the work and ways of God’s Spirit. Your being filled by the Spirit is dependent on your regularly placing your heart and life under the controlling influences of God’s truth. Three basic habits that lead to Spirit influence are . . .

1. The indwelling word. Col. 3:16
2. Abiding prayer. Acts 4:23-31
3. Confession and repentance of sin. Eph. 4:30

The greatest hindrance to your involvement in corporate worship is not the music, choice of songs or order of service, it is the lack of private worship resulting from your heart being filled by so many other things than the Spirit of God.

2. Your singing is intended to address two audiences with thanksgiving. 19

Note the two directions that Spirit fullness addresses. Neither of the directions include your need to feel or experience something. This truth both reveals and removes the commonly held belief that singing and church music is for or about me. As good and nice as it is to feel comfort from your singing, it is a better feeling to encourage others and praise God with your singing. A core issue that we must all face is that of making church music/worship an idol that serves our need to feel, participate or experience something for ourselves. Your singing is giving something to your neighbor and to God.

First, you sing in a horizontal direction.

addressing – means to continually be speaking to one another. You are to affirm to one another the blessed truths of the gospel on a regular basis through your singing.

Cmp. Col. 3:16 teaching and admonishing takes place in our corporate singing.

Illustrate with ‘It is Well w/My Soul’

Second, you sing in a vertical direction.

Singing and making melody are two more results of fullness but these are directed ‘to the Lord.’ The Lord Christ is the audience – the object of the singers affections and devotion.

This is the antithesis of entertainment or performance for recognition.

With your heart points to the involvement of the entire person in contrast to the imbalance of singing being simply an academic exercise, a manipulative working up of the emotions or an emphasis on personal guilt or choice.

Rev. 5:9,13; 7:10; 12:10 Your singing is an expression of your love for Christ.

3. Your singing should embrace a variety of forms. 19

Note both the three descriptive terms for songs and the two descriptive terms for singing in verse 19. The three terms either refer to the full range of songs available to the church including the possibility of making up your own songs, or they refer to three specific types of songs. The weight of scripture leads us to take these as parallel terms that describe the range of songs available including praise, psalms and songs generated by the Holy Spirit in the heart of a person full of the great truths of the gospel.

The struggle for many regarding church music is defined in terms of what instruments are used for accompaniment, if the songs are old or new or if they are fast or slow. These types of issues can and should represent the variety available to express our fullness in Christ rather than cubicles that we choose to stay in with a divisive loyalty.

Variety in your singing should include . . .

First, the range of God-glorifying emotions.

Psalms . . . praise, confession, guilt, wonder, thanks, lament, sorrow, introspection, question

Second, the range of gospel united people.

Eph. 2:14ff followers of Jesus are a diverse group of people

Third, the range of truths reflecting God and the gospel. _

Eph. 1:1-14 mysterious/obvious transcendent/near comfort/rebuke mercy/wrath

Music impact story . . . Kauflin p.97 RSA Zulu women – If you boil the water, you won't get dysentery. _

Summary

- 1. Your singing is both a result of and response to fullness. 18-21**
- 2. Your singing is intended to address two audiences with thanksgiving. 19**
- 3. Your singing should embrace a variety of forms. 19**

Take Aways

- 1. Acknowledge and repent of what it is in your life that keeps you from singing from a heart full of God's love and grace.
- 2. Determine to change and obey. In the next few minutes, sing to God and sing to one another from a full heart.
- 3. Turn from your sin and ownership of your life and cry out to God for mercy in saving faith.

