

Ephesians 5:18-20 Sing!

Why do we sing in church? We're doing a lot of it today, why do we do it? What is the point?

Let's start with a few things that are **not** the reason for us singing in church, and for this first one I need your help. So, I want everyone to put up a number of fingers for how good they think they are at singing. 1 is rubbish, 5 is professional quality. Ready, go! (*Bit of banter*) But the point is, we're not a room full of fives, so firstly we don't sing because we're great singers.

Ok, put your hands down, and put them back up again if you find singing fun! I find singing fun! Put your hand up if you find baking fun. Put your hand up if you find playing games fun! And finally put your hand up if you find sport fun! You get the point, there are lots of things that are fun, but we don't do them in church. So we don't sing just because it's fun.

And one more reason. We don't sing because we're practicing for something. Church isn't like a music lesson, we're not practicing for something else. This is the real deal, this is the end goal. Singing in church.

So it's not because we're great singers, it's not because it's fun, and it's not because we're practicing. So why do we sing in church? And maybe an even bigger question – why did we bother having music in church when we weren't allowed to sing? Was that not just a waste of time?

Well hopefully this morning, we're going to see in the passage that Bethany just read why we sing in church, and why we continued to have music in lockdown, why that wasn't a waste of time.

This book is not just a book, it's a letter. A letter from a guy called Paul to a group of Christians in a place called Ephesus, that's not the kebab restaurant on the high street, it's a place in modern-day Turkey. And Paul was writing to encourage them that they are real, genuine Christians, and to help them to live a life worthy of their calling. That means to live in a way that shows the world they belong to Jesus. And here he talks about singing! It's an important part of our lives as Christians.

We're going to see three reasons why we sing, and they're all directions, and they come with an action for each one, let's all do these actions together, and hopefully that'll help us to remember what we see in Ephesians today. We sing in, we sing out, and we sing up. Let's do that again. Sing in, sing out, sing up.

Sing in

So firstly, sing in. And by this I mean, we sing in church because we sing to ourselves. We sing to our own hearts, we sing in. v18 says, "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery, instead be filled with the spirit". Basically, Paul is saying "Don't be under the influence of alcohol, be under the influence of the Holy Spirit."

Now there's lots to be said about Christians and alcohol. It's definitely not wrong to drink alcohol, Jesus personally made sure everyone had enough wine at a wedding. But getting drunk is not right for a Christian. Instead of giving in to the temptations of the world, we must

let God's Spirit live in our hearts, and guide us to live in ways that please God.

Ok, so how do we get filled with the Spirit? Is there some sort of petrol station we can go to and say "I'll have 40 litres of Holy Spirit please, fill up the tank"? Well no, the Spirit isn't really like a liquid or a fuel that we can have more or less of. It's probably more correct to say "Be filled *by* the Spirit". The Spirit fills us with godliness, and Christlikeness. This is why Paul compares it to wine. If we're filled with wine, we'll live in ungodly ways, but if we're filled with the Spirit, we'll live a godly life.

So how does the Spirit fill us? Well that's what the rest of these verses are about. Do you see the only other reference to the word "Spirit" in these verses, is "Songs from the Spirit", or spiritual songs in other translations. In fact, the way the grammar works in the original language of this letter is that v18 is a command, "Be filled with the Spirit" and v19-20, and 21 too, are things that support that command. "Be filled with the spirit, speaking, singing, making music, giving thanks".

So by doing all that v19-20 say, we are letting ourselves be filled with the Spirit. We receive the holy Spirit when we become a Christian, but every day, we can let Him fill us more and more. And one of the ways we do that, is by singing! As we sing, we sing *in*. We sing to our hearts, reminding ourselves of the wonderful truths we know about God's word, and encouraging ourselves to go and live the lives God wants us to live. The more we let our hearts engage with singing in church, the more we will let the Spirit fill us, and the more we will be able to live a godly life on a Monday morning. These songs are songs from the Spirit. The Spirit has given us these words and this music to encourage us and help us be filled by Him. So sing in! Sing to your heart, "Before

the throne of God above, I have a strong, a perfect plea" "I won't be shaken, I will not be moved" "The Lord is King, he's going to look after everything"

They're not just empty words, they're songs from the Spirit, helping us to be filled with Him. So when we sing, sing in. Sing to your heart, be filled with the Spirit

Sing out

So, sing in. And secondly, sing out. And by this I mean, sing to everyone else. This is what the first half of verse 19 is about, let me read it again. "Speaking to one another with psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit." It sounds strange, doesn't it, speaking with songs. But that's what we're doing when we sing in church, we're not just making a nice sound, we're communicating truths about God. In our words, we're telling each other wonderful true things about Jesus, about God our Father, and about our relationship with Him.

There's that list of three things in the verse. Psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit. It's not clear what the difference is between these types of song, but one thing we can probably be sure of is that Paul expects Christians to sing a variety of different songs. Sing Psalms, yes, like the one we read earlier. We can also sing lyrical versions of the Psalms, in fact many of the songs we sing in church are indeed based on the Psalms from the Bible. But also sing old traditional hymns, sing new, modern songs.

But one thing should be common to all these different kinds of song. No matter what sort of a song it is, it should teach others. Personally I'm wary of songs that have little going on in the lyrics, and rely on musical feel to stir up our hearts to praise God. I also think we should

be cautious that what our songs are saying lines up with what the Bible says about God and about Jesus. I won't go into bad examples, but the songs we sung today serve as some good ones. Before the throne of God above tells us truths about Jesus our great high priest, like we heard in that verse from Hebrews at the start of the service. God is For us is taken right out of Romans 8, reminding us that nothing can separate us from God's love. Christ our hope in life and death tells us of our hope beyond the grave, 1 Peter 1 as an example, takes us there.

We could come to church and read Bible verses to each other, but Paul tells us to speak to one another in songs. I think that's because songs engage with our emotions in a strong way, and also because they're memorable. I guarantee tomorrow morning some of us will wake up with a song from church stuck in our heads, but I highly doubt anyone will wake up with the words of my talk ringing in their ears.

So sing out! As we sing in church, tell each other what's true about God! When you sing, tell me – “God who gave his son to free us holds me in his love”, tell the person next to you “Our God is all in all”, tell everyone at Christ Church Huntingdon “The Lord is good and faithful, he will keep us day and night.”

Sing up

So we've had sing in, and sing out, and finally sing up. That is, lift your eyes to heaven, and sing to God! Let me read the last bit of verse 19 and 20 “Sing and make music from your heart *to the LORD*, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

When we sing, we sing to God. God wants to hear us sing. God doesn't care if we're tone deaf, or professional quality. He wants to hear the music made from our heart. That's why some of our songs address God as “you”. We're not just singing about him, we're singing to him. We're praying, it's a song to God.

We sometimes sing songs that are asking for God's help, like the one we'll sing in just a minute “Oh great God of highest heaven, occupy my lowly heart.” and sometimes we're not asking him anything, we're just lifting our voices to praise Him, to tell him how amazed we are and how thankful we are for his goodness and grace to us. “No other love that I've ever known compares to you God”. “Oh thank you, thank you that all through history you are faithful” “You are worthy to be praised with my every thought and deed” “Thine be the glory, risen conquering son”

So sing up! Remember God is listening, and focus on him!

The wonderful thing about these three directions of singing, is we can do all of them at once. As we sing, “No power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand”. We're singing in, reminding ourselves that we belong to God, letting the Spirit fill us with the knowledge of that truth. We're singing out, telling each other of the confidence we can all have in Jesus, speaking to one another with a song. And we're singing up, rejoicing in how amazing God is and how secure we are in him.

Why not make it a habit this year to come to sing in church with a heart that is ready to do these three things? I'm going to try and do that. It'll be great for us, it'll be great for our church, and it will bring God glory. Sing in, sing out, sing up!