

# What Does It Mean To Sing “To” One Another?

Tim Haile

Ephesians 5:19 says, **“Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”** Is Paul here requiring singers to “face” each other in their singing? Some say yes. Some churches have started the practice of having their members “face” each other while singing in worship. Some controversy has arisen over the practice, so I thought I would give it some consideration. Of course, since the Bible is our sole standard of faith and practice, it is understood that the practice must be examined from a biblical perspective. Our feelings in the matter are completely irrelevant.

## **Possible Categories of Authorization:**

All religious practices must be divinely authorized (Col. 3:17). So, under what category of authority does this particular practice belong? Is it authorized by direct statement or command? Some brethren do appeal to Ephesians 5:19 for their authority to face one another in singing. Let the reader carefully observe that if the phrase “speaking to one another” means “facing” or “looking at” one another, then all Christians would be required to do it on the basis of a “direct command.” It would not be optional – It would be required! For those who don’t classify this practice as a requirement of Ephesians 5:19, is it authorized by approved apostolic example? No, there is no example, or exclusive pattern of people facing each other in their singing. Is it authorized by necessary inference? If so, one must be able to find divine implications leading one to such a forced conclusion. Is it perhaps a matter of expediency? In order for the practice to be classified as

an expedient, it must be lawful and it must edify (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23). An expedient is an authorized liberty. It is something that **facilitates in the accomplishment of a thing**. An expedient is simply a better way of doing a thing. In order for the practice of facing each other during singing to be classified as an expedient it must be demonstrated that this is a better way of carrying out the command to “sing.” Can this be proven? (I shall have considerably more to say about this later).

It should be clear to the reader that this particular method of singing is nowhere proscribed in the New Testament. It belongs in the category of human judgment. That is, God did not legislate on the matter and it is simply a matter of personal and congregational preference as to what they do. No sin is committed when people face each other in their singing. Likewise, no sin is committed when people don't face each other in singing. No passage can be produced that requires that we face in any particular direction while singing. The Bible does not specify any "direction" that we are to face in our singing. None of the “singing” passages speak directly to this point (Matt. 26:30; Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9,11; 1 Cor. 14:15,26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:12; Jas. 5:13). We are simply told to “sing.”

My real concern is not so much over WHERE people face when singing, but over WHY some would think or say that it is better to face each other when singing. Please read Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16 and Hebrews 13:15-16 and consider the following questions. Does this practice of facing each other during our singing make a spiritual song more spiritual? Does it result in God being more praised? Are our brethren better taught and more admonished as a result of “looking” at each other while singing? Does it make the “fruit of our lips” more fruity? Does it make our sacrifice better? Does it make our sacrifice more

pleasing to God? The answer is “no” to all of these questions. Is it possible that some have taken up this practice because of the emotional aspects of it? Does it make them **feel** better when singing? Is it more **exciting** for them to sing while looking into other’s eyes and faces? Are some doing this **just to be different**?

As we have noticed, there is no command, approved apostolic example, or divine implications from which we may conclude that the practice of physically facing and singing “to” one another must be done. You may be thinking, “But what about Ephesians 5:19?” Let us consider the meaning of the passage.

**“Speaking to one another...”  
Ephesians 5:19?”**

Paul said, “Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

Yes, this verse says we are to speak "to one another." But what does this expression mean? Does it emphasize direction? Does it mean that we must “face” each other in our singing? Must we “look” at one another in order for our singing to be scriptural? Ephesians 5:19 employs a very common verb (speak) and a very common reflexive pronoun (yourselves) to show what action is to be done and who is to do it. **Paul did not say, “looking at one another,” or “facing one another.” He said, “speaking to (with) one another.”** Barnes says the expression means “speaking among yourselves.” Emphasis is upon the reciprocal nature of the singing action, not on the direction the singers are facing. Hebrews 2:12 provides some commentary on this matter. Christ would not be ashamed to call them brethren, saying, "I will declare Your name to my brethren: In the midst of the congregation I will sing praise to You." God’s name was

“declared” (apangello – published or announced) to His brethren, and praise was sung to God. Note, that this was to be done in the midst of the church. This agrees with Ephesians 5:19.

With this mind, let us enumerate and evaluate some of the logical and logistical problems with this position.

**1. If the expression “speaking to yourselves” means that we are to face each other when we sing, then does the expression “singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” mean we are to “face” the Lord when we sing? If so, where would you face? Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises UNTO GOD (Acts 16:25). Christians are to sing and make melody in their hearts UNTO THE LORD (Eph. 5:19). Christians are to sing with grace in their hearts UNTO THE LORD (Col. 3:16). Prophecy stated that the Gentiles would GLORIFY GOD for His mercy. How? They would CONFESS TO GOD, and SING TO HIS NAME (Rom. 15:9,11). Where did these Gentiles “face?” In the prophecy quoted in Hebrews 2:12, the Lord said, “In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” I wonder where he was facing? John 11:41 says Jesus “lifted up His eyes” to speak to the Father. For those who believe that Ephesians 5:19 teaches that worshippers are to face each other when singing, this presents a real problem. How can they face Heaven and their brethren at the same time! Obviously, both can’t be done. Of course, Paul was not emphasizing physical “direction” when he gave the singing command in Ephesians 5:19.**

**2. If the expression “speaking to yourselves” means that we are to look at one another when we sing, then it would be unscriptural to sing any other way! Honesty demands that we consider and be willing to accept the consequences of our argument and position. Based upon the argument some have made, it would be sinful and wrong for worshippers to all face**

**the same direction when singing. This interpretation disallows any other physical configuration of singing. By the argument, all other arrangements would violate the authority of the scriptures.**

**3. There are several logistical problems with this interpretation and application of Ephesians 5:19:**

**a.** This interpretation would require each worshipper to look at every other worshipper while singing. Since the command to “speak” or “sing” is to every worshipper, the command to speak “to yourselves” is to every worshipper. One would not be permitted to “speak to” just one other person, or even a few others. He would be divinely required to “speak to” **all other** fellow singers and worshippers.

**b.** Not everyone has all of the songs memorized. These people will have great difficulty “looking at” their fellow worshippers while singing, and sing “with the spirit and with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15).

**c.** In order for every singer to “speak to” all other singers, the singers must be arranged in a circle. Furthermore, this circle would have to be large enough for all singers to occupy a single row. The argument disallows a double row, for any worshipper standing behind another worshipper would not be able to “face” him. According to the argument that some are making on Ephesians 5:19, these back row folks would be guilty of violating Ephesians 5:19, and would therefore be in sin!

**d.** There is also a problem with the positioning of the song leader. This physical arrangement requires the song leader to stand in the middle of the singers. It is therefore impossible for all people to see his face all of the time. Not only would this violate “facing” argument, but this also presents a problem for those who have

difficulty hearing, and must rely upon the song leader's hand gestures and the movements of his mouth.

e. Worship is to be conducted in a non-confusing way. It is to be done "decently and in order" (1 Cor. 14:33,40). The use of overhead projectors and marker boards in teaching and preaching generally require people to face in the direction of the screen or board in order for them to comfortably view the material (this can't be done in a circle). In order for brethren to face each other in their singing it will be necessary to reconfigure the seating and/or standing position of the worshippers. This is especially problematic for those who believe this should be done by the formation of circles. By the way, please remember that the command to "speak to yourselves" applies to all worshippers. Simply turning around in your pew will not accommodate the demands of the argument. A circle seems to be the only configuration that will. This position requires a lot of walking, moving and shuffling around in the worship assembly. Does this harmonize with the principles of 1 Corinthians 14:33 and 40? No, it doesn't. For example, many churches have the practice of using a song to help prepare worshippers for a scriptural observance of the Lord's Supper. Usually, the emblems are placed on a table in the front of the building so all can see and focus on the words and actions of the servers. This new interpretation of Ephesians 5:19 would require partakers to physically turn so they can see each others faces, sing the song, then turn back to where they could see the servers. Through all of this commotion, will worshippers keep their thoughts focused on the Lord's death? Is this "decent and in order?"

### **Conclusion**

Ephesians 5:19 emphasizes spiritual direction, not physical direction. Singing "to" yourselves means singing "with"

yourselves. The Holy Spirit is not concerned with where we are looking when we sing. He is concerned with what we are thinking. Let no one trouble you with their innovations. Change, for the sake of change, often leads to trouble. A thing is not necessarily wrong just because it has been done the same way for a while. Of course, in the final analysis all that matters is what the Bible teaches.

Tim Haile

7693 Russellville Rd

Bowling Green, KY 42101

270-842-5354

[www.biblebanner.com](http://www.biblebanner.com)

Primary Email Address: [timhaile@me.com](mailto:timhaile@me.com)