

# christian

## WORKER



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

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## THE PRIVILEGE OF WORSHIPPING GOD IN SONG

Andy Baker

As Israelites brought their offering to the temple for worship, Levite musicians sang and played psalms for worship to God in the court of the temple. In part, this was to help remind the people that their worship to God was a privilege based upon God's goodness towards Israel. Worship then not simply the killing of an animal, but both a physical and spiritual act (1 Chron. 16:4; 23:4-5). Today we as priests of the New Testament also offer up worship in song, which also helps remind us what a privilege it is to worship the God of heaven. Singing in worship is both a physical and spiritual act when done with the spirit and with the understanding (John 4:24; 1 Cor. 14:15). Consider some of the privileges, reminders, and blessings of offering our worship to God in song:

### Singing in Worship, We Emphasize Our Unity.

Among the issues in the Corinthian church was unity in worship. It seems they were each skilled in singing their own praises, but unskilled in unifying to sing God's praises (cf. 1 Cor. 14:26). When we join together in a song in worship, we all are singing the same things. Our hearts and voices blend, and carry the congregation's song to our everlasting Father. Thus, with one voice and with one heart (as it should be), we proclaim our love and adoration to God the Father for His goodness towards us. No other singing group on earth has such a privilege, especially knowing that our God hears the physical and spiritual sound we make in our worship in song. *"They hymned their King in strains divine."*

**Singing in Worship, We Emphasize Our Dependence on One Another.** When each voice blends with harmony, it is both wonderful and edifying. Yet, one alone cannot create harmony with a single voice.

Brothers and sisters, we depend upon each other in singing. When we *all* sing with our whole hearts, isn't it a glorious sound? When the *voices of all* are blended, doesn't it cause us all to want to sing? On the reverse, when folks choose not to sing in worship, is it not discouraging? When many are absent, doesn't the song service and worship lack? The privilege of singing in worship reminds us that when we care for and admonish

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Kevin Cauley



"We are workers together with Him..." (2 Cor. 6:1)

## The Design of Worshipping in Song

In Isaiah 55:8-9 God says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Many use this passage to speak of God's ineffable and inscrutable attributes. There are other passages that teach such (e.g., Job 26:14, Rom. 11:33), but this verse is not speaking of those things. Rather, these verses teach that God's purposes are so much higher than man's, and with human wisdom alone it is impossible to know God's purposes.

In contrast, the general trend of religious thought today is that man's purposes are God's purposes. And perhaps this is seen most clearly in contemporary "Christian" music, the primary design of which is to stir human emotion to such a fevered pitch that weeping, wailing, crying, caterwauling, and the so called ecstatic state are produced. These emotional outpourings satisfy human purposes because they are quintessentially human. Worship, however, must move beyond the human and into the divine in order to be true worship. "God is a spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

Turning our attention to God's design for worship in song, we find that emotional fulfillment has little (if any) to do with New Testament teaching on the subject. First, all Christian music is music produced by the human voice alone. This in and of itself should rebuke the contemporary cacophony of choruses accompanied by their mechanistically manufactured modulations. Such artificially produced reverberations doubtlessly bring praise to human prowess, but do not glorify God; indeed such exaltation of human righteousness is without submission to the righteousness of God (Rom. 10:2-3).

The lips, mouth, tongue, and voice, however, are

God's design, and when accompanied by the melodic stirrings of the heart, another of God's creation, they harmonize with resonance divine (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16). We see, then, that one great purpose of worshipping God in song is to bring glory to Him by the instrument of *His* creation; it is God who gives us the songs in the night (Job 35:10). He is not worshipped by manmade things, but is the ever giving God who brings musical harmony to our whole being: heart, soul, and body (Acts 17:25).

Hebrews 13:15 reveals that by cultivating the "fruit of lips" we "offer the sacrifice of praise to God." Such sacrifices cannot come forth from leathern tympanis, wooden organs, or brazen strings – only the "fruit of lips" will suffice. Praises to God must be sung, because praises to God can only be spoken in words, the "fruit of lips." The principles of sacrifice found in the Old Covenant teach us that God deserves the best, that sacrifice must personally cost us something, and that one must be wholly devoted. Singing is the only musical act of worship that satisfies these principles. The "sacrifice of praise" is a purpose that must be honored in our singing.

Another great purpose of singing is found in Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." When we sing the words of Christ, we teach and admonish. So many contemporary lyrics fail to provide this needed aspect of Christian music. Songs of the New Testament period were originally composed to instruct, and even rebuke. Today we have few songs in our songbooks that employ these didactic tools. The contemporary "Christian" composers have left this purpose behind in their quest

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to glorify man.

What is the place of emotion in singing? Human emotions must flow out of the God-given purposes that are fulfilled in song, and must never be the object of our worship. If the singing rebukes, we should feel ashamed. If the singing exhorts, we should feel edified. If the singing is glorifying God, we should feel humbled, awestruck even. Whatever the particular intent of the individual song, the goal is to empty ourselves unto God in fulfillment of His purposes first, and, like the obedient eunuch, the result will be that we will go on our way rejoicing (Acts 8:39). God's design for worship in song is for His praise glory and honor, and our instruction and rebuke. May we ever seek to fulfill **God's** design.

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## SINGING WITH THE SPIRIT

Mike Bonner

**O**ne of the greatest joys and privileges known to man is singing! So it is when we focus our attention on the LORD; those who are members of the church of our Lord come together to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through the Messiah (1 Pet. 2:5). This opportunity which has been afforded to us should be done with the spirit (1 Cor. 14:15). Singing with the spirit, fortunately, can be done publicly and privately. This is a time for appropriate adoration and authorized devotion unto God. With such great swelling words, expressed with a colossal of feelings and intellect, we can draw near unto our God in righteous praise and thanksgiving which is due to Him!

So what is singing with the spirit? Singing with the spirit can be viewed as singing with intellect, volition, and meaning which should rule our feelings while singing to God! We must keep in mind that God made us emotional beings as well. This will play a part in our worship to God, yet it should not cause us to be irreverent towards Him. If we could sum up First Corinthians fourteen, we would have to conclude Paul is dealing with intellect and understanding as being the foundation. The reason for this is because God's nature is intelligent and full of understanding and holy

emotion. Hence the reason we should sing intelligently and even emotionally unto the LORD. Keep in mind when many fell down before God they showed emotion and control, which means that every now and then a song may cause crying and/or happiness. God is spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). He is a God of *mind, intellect and will!* In the beginning God **spoke** the world into existence; this implies intelligence and language (Gen. 1). It's known according to First Corinthians 2 that the mind of God was revealed through the Spirit of God. It was the Spirit who intelligently expressed thoughts to man, showing and demonstrating to mankind how he should *honor, adore, revere, and esteem God* in all aspects of life including worship (1 Cor. 2:11-13). Now that man has God's word, he is without excuse on how to sing to God according to the dispensation under which he lives (1 Cor. 9:20-21). Hence the reason we are to sing with the spirit (intellect, attitude and will) unto God. So the spirit under consideration is man's spirit and NOT the Holy Spirit Himself. Paul taught the Thessalonians of their tripartite make-up, it showed them how they were made up of body, soul and spirit (1 Thess. 5:23). Our design is consistent with that with which we are to worship the Lord; hence, the reason our whole being is involved in worship to God.

It is evident, according to Psalm 150 and other well known passages, that mechanical instruments were used. However, in the church of the New Testament there is no evidence of them being used in worship to God until the early eighth century. This is one of many reasons the churches of Christ sing without the aid of instruments. Thus singing with the spirit becomes even more beautiful and meaningful. We are to sing with the right attitude (spirit) which comes forth from our hearts (Col. 3:16). Singing from our hearts will cause us to think about the grandeur of God and the blessings He has bestowed upon us spiritually, materially, and otherwise! This will even cause us to be edified when we come together in the assembly on the Lord's Day (Heb. 10:24; Rev. 1:10). Singing great spiritual songs will enhance our devotion to God. Paul was exhorting the brethren to sing spiritual songs and make melody in their hearts to the Lord. So singing songs that are governed by the law of Christ (His word) should encourage us to always sing scriptural songs which represent God accurately.

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## Singing with the Spirit, continued

The church should use every opportunity to demonstrate the correct attitude in worship to God. Whether or not the congregation is assembled or singing individually to Him, the Christian's attitude should be that of high honor and praise to God. This attitude of admiration will be cultivated from allowing God's word to dwell in us richly (Col. 3:16). Our singing will aid in admonishing one another, thus showing us the right way through song service. Let us always use the best individuals when leading singing to God! Let us endeavor to sing out to God in worship, exclaiming the richness of His presence as we esteem to the Highest. Let us never forget that He is the audience of worship and we're the ones seeking His approval while glorifying Him. Let us therefore *sing with the spirit*.

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## SINGING WITH THE UNDERSTANDING

John Haffner

Quarter notes, key signatures, crescendos, fermatas, and mezzo-forte symbols are just a few of the mysterious markings we encounter upon the pages of our songbooks. Through man's years of melodic discovery and advancement, a working notation system has been devised. I am very grateful for my brothers and sisters in the faith who command a working knowledge of this complex musical language. The remainder of us will have to remain content, at least for the time being, with attempting to stay on the proper verse.

Although there is much to gain from the ability to read music, Christians can rejoice that an understanding of musical symbols is not required to be pleasing to the Lord. However, there is a type of understanding that Christians must have when we worship the Lord in song. Paul addressed this sort of understanding in 1 Corinthians 14. Paul established and strengthened many congregations during his missionary journeys. The people who made up these congregations communicated in many diverse languages and dialects as Paul and his various companions carried the good news into the world. It is uncertain how many languages Paul knew from study and how many he was allowed to know

through the power of the Holy Spirit. In either case, however, he knew a lack of understanding would make all of his efforts wasted.

The chapter begins with Paul's exhortation that the Corinthian brethren desire the gift of prophecy rather than the gift of tongues. The ability to preach the Word and to explain clearly the prophecies of the Old Testament by inspiration would certainly be more beneficial to the brethren than speaking an unknown language. Paul's concern is the edification of the church body, and in that regard those with the gift of prophecy were greater (1 Cor. 14:5). Unless you are speaking in a language and in a way that can be understood, how could anyone make use of your words? You may as well talk to yourself (1 Corinthians 14:9). The ideas carried by words are quickly discarded when the translation is absent. The meanings are obscured and chaos results like mixed signals on a battlefield (1 Cor. 14:8). Paul resolves to steer clear of this confusion by praying and singing with understanding (1 Cor. 14:15).

It's clear that praising the Lord is something to be celebrated among Christians, and that singing is a vital part of worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). As such our song service should be conducted in a way that is intelligible and edifying to others. The words should be distinct and their meanings contemplated upon. We should never replace clear enunciation in our song service with the slurred and sloppy vocals popular in today's music world. The spiritually uplifting, faith-charging power of a song service in the Lord's church can quickly fade when the focus shifts to pretty sounds, meaningless phrases, or empty claps and hums.

Singing in our worship assemblies is to be instructional and edifying. When the songs are in another language, no listener is able to say whether or not they agree with the message of the song (1 Cor. 14:16). It would be more beneficial to have one or two words with understanding rather than millions of beautiful unknown words (1 Cor. 14:17-19). Perhaps there is no part of public worship in which there is greater imperfection than in singing. At the same time, there is scarcely any part of the service of worshippers that may better impress ideas upon the heart of those in attendance. Singing has an advantage that no other act of worship can compare to. Lyrics and melodies can get "stuck in your head" in a way that lines from a sermon or a prayer never could.

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## Singing with the Understanding, continued

How better to assist our minds in setting our affections on heavenly things (Col. 3:2)! If we all endeavor to sing wholeheartedly in our worship and to do so with understanding, then we can be a more beneficial and more edifying force for ourselves, our fellow Christians, and for our Lord.

CW

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## SINGING WHEN MERRY

Rob L. Whitacre

**F**arouk Radwan wrote, “One of the facts about the operation of the mind is that everything that you hear or see programs your mind.” The strength of song should not be overlooked. One study found, “Those who listen to romantic songs after breakups recover 10 times slower than those who don’t.” Indeed, what we sing has a deep and profound impact upon our minds. No one understands this better than God. “*Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms*” (James 5:13).

**It is partial:** Could it be that God is giving us an inspired prescription for man’s mental merriness when James penned those inspired words? As long as we live in this world, we cannot and never will be in a state of continued euphoria. “*Is any...*” helps man realize the fragile nature of his condition. Sometime we will be *afflicted* while at other times we will be *merry*. I have often found that worship in song had a powerful effect upon my mood. There have been times I have entered into the worship of God with a heavy heart, a fatigued body, and a sorrowful spirit that has been turned around quickly by the power of song. Adam Clark wrote,

It is natural for a man to *sing* when he is *cheerful* and *happy*. Now no subject can be more noble than that which is Divine: and as God alone is the author of all that good which makes a man *happy*, then his praise should be the subject of the *song* of him who is merry.

**It is possible:** No, as James indicated, we won’t always be merry, but we can achieve it from time to time. According to Thayer, “merry” means to “to be of good spirits, gladden, to be joyful.” Even when conditions are not so cheerful, the child of God can find an inner joy

that can be manifested in song. “*And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them*” (Acts 16:25). Instead of having a pity party, these prisoners of Rome lifted their voices in praise to God. We must remember true joy is a fruit of the Spirit that is produced when we follow His word (Gal. 5:22-23; John 6:63).

**It is pointed:** We must *sing psalms*. The singing of scripture and the psalms of praise should be the source of our songs. Humanistic hymns are both dangerous and demoralizing to the spiritual man. Singing has the power to infiltrate the depths of man’s mind and spirit with its words. This is why Paul wrote, “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord*” (Col. 3:16). God knew song was one way to place His word in the human heart. How long can we sing about adultery, drinking, gambling, sex, and cheating before they dwell in our hearts? How long can we sing of sin before it sits in our spirit? Therefore, we must be careful about what we sing. Have you ever examined the words you sing while listening to your iPod? Would Jesus sing that song? Perhaps one reason you are not merry is because your song selection is not merry!

**It is polemic:** Singing psalms is God’s defense against the devil. The Psalmist wrote, “*Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee*” (Psa. 119:11). It has long been my contention that the book of Psalms is more than the Jewish hymnal but also is a handbook for good spiritual and mental health. One preacher wrote, “For every human ‘sigh’ there is a divine ‘Psalm!’” (For every feeling you can have...there’s a passage in the Psalms to teach you how to properly respond to that feeling!). There is something about our praise in song to God that is able to affect every aspect of man (mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual).

There is no doubt God’s plan for praise in song was a form of medicine for the mind and a shield for the soul. God knew what He was doing, when He directed us to sing with the “*fruit of our lips*” (Heb. 13:15). The Psalmist penned, “*Praise ye the LORD: for it is good to sing praises unto our God; for it is pleasant; and praise is comely*” (Psa. 147:1).

CW

## “MAKING MELODY IN YOUR HEART”

Don Prather

Some call them the “sing-sing passages,” the utterly consistent thread of New Testament verses<sup>1</sup> that specify *a capella* singing as the only acceptable form of “church music.”<sup>2</sup> Among them, Ephesians 5:18-20 contrasts the uncontrolled outbursts of alcohol-fueled drinking festivals with the reverent, respectful singing of Christian worship. “*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,*” writes Paul, “*singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*”

Sometimes overlooked, the significance of “*making melody in your heart*” (NIV, etc.; “*make music in your heart*”) is great. Combined with “*grace in your hearts*” (Col. 3:16)<sup>3</sup> these words stress the importance of the full involvement of our inner man in our singing. Deeper study also answers an argument used to support instrumental music in worship.

### “Making Melody in Your Heart” – What this Means

Mixed among the superficially killing letters of the Law of Moses were shadows of life-giving spiritual involvement to come (2 Cor. 3:6, Heb. 10:1). The Lord promised to come near “*unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit*” (Psa. 34:18). David prayed that God would “*Create in me a clean heart...and renew a right spirit within me*” (Psa. 51:10). The penitent were to “*rend their hearts and not their garments*” (Joel 2:13).

The New Testament deepens this teaching. “*God is a Spirit,*” Jesus said, “*and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*” (John 4:24). We must approach God on the “*spirit*” level of His existence. This requires us to honor the “*truth*” of His word and also love Him “*with all (the) heart, and with all (the) soul, and with all (the) mind*” (Matt. 22:37). This is the same as singing “*with the spirit and with the understanding also*” (1 Cor. 14:15).

Extending this theme into worship, Paul commands us to make “*melody in your heart.*” All of the tender graces stirred by lyrics about God and his Son, about Christ’s cross and its reconciliation, and about thankfulness in life and challenges of life should be present in our hearts and minds as we sing. As fellow worshippers raise their

tune, our emotions and thoughts should also rise with them toward God.

### “Making Melody in Your Heart” – What this Does not Mean

Emotions that are righteously stirred and minds that are rightly stimulated by the word of Christ dwelling in us should play only one kind of instrument. Supporters of the use of instrumental music in worship argue that “*making melody*” (Greek: *psallo*; verb, “to pluck”) opens the door for plucking the strings of a harp or plunking the keys of a piano. They argue that *psallo* means “playing and singing with an instrument.”<sup>4</sup>

This thinking takes supporters of instrumental music too far down a road they do not want to travel. The language of the passages is directive. If instrumental accompaniment is built into the meaning of *psallo*, then instruments must be played. Their argument condemns the centuries of *a capella* singing prior to the first uses of organs as well as our singing today.

Finding some sympathy for the “*psallo = instrumental accompaniment*” position in a few Greek language helps, they fail to understand that the *psallo* of Classical Greek had lost its pluck by New Testament times. The *psallo* of New Testament *Koine* (common) usage had come to “refer simply to vocal music,”<sup>5</sup> and “no (Bible) translator has ever rendered this verb any other way.”<sup>6</sup> The only kind of instrument that can properly accompany our singing is the instrument specified in the passage—our heartstrings plucked with spiritual sentiment and edifying understanding. Not only for ourselves, but also for others do our lively lips “*teach and admonish*” while harmonizing with convicted hearts.

1. See Matt. 26:30, Acts 16:25, Rom. 15:9, 1 Cor. 14:15, Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, Heb. 2:12, Heb. 13:15, James 5:13.
2. We are indebted to brother. Everret Ferguson for much scholarly work on the instrumental music issue, especially for emphasizing that the Latin words *a capella* came to be synonymous in the early church with “church music.”
3. Note the many enlightening parallels between Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.
  - a. They share the same author, time-frame, similar audiences, and similar purposes for writing.
  - b. Eph. 5:19: “*be filled with the spirit*”; Col. 3:16: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.*”
  - c. Eph. 5:19: “*teach and admonish one another*”; Col. 3:16, “*speaking to yourselves.*”

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## Melody in Your Heart, continued

- d. Eph. 5:19: “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs”; Col. 3:16: “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.”
- e. Eph. 5:19: “making melody in your heart”; Col. 3:16: “making melody in your heart.”
4. Jamieson – Fausset – Brown Bible Commentary (on Ephesians 5:19).
5. Brother Wayne Jackson does an outstanding job explaining this in “Psallo and the Instrumental Music Controversy” in his *Christian Courier*.
6. James Burton Coffman Commentaries on the New Testament (on Ephesians 5:19).

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## THE FRUIT OF THE LIPS AND GOD’S RESPECT

James Gravelle

*And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering. But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect (Gen. 4:4-5).*

The story is well known. After sin entered the world through Eve and Adam, and after their expulsion from the Garden, two children were born. One grew to be a shepherd, the other a farmer. In due time they each brought fruit of their own labors to offer to God in worship. God met one with respect and acceptance. The other received no respect.

The reason God accepted one and rejected the other not only forms the foundation of this article, but is, in truth, the bedrock foundation upon which all acceptable worship to God must be laid. In this article, we will see that our worship must be “a matter of faith.”

Nowhere in the Bible can we find the record of words spoken by Abel; yet the Hebrews writer says that even being dead, Abel continues to speak—and his message is loud and clear. Why was Abel’s worship accepted and Cain’s rejected? Hebrews 11:4 answers the question: “*By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.*” Abel offered worship “by faith.” Two verses later, the Hebrews writer tells us that without faith, it is impossible to please God. And Paul makes it crystal clear in Romans 10:17 that true Bible faith comes by hearing God’s Word. God revealed to

Cain and Abel the type of sacrifice that was acceptable. Abel, by faith, offered accordingly. Cain, determined to choose his own sacrifice, rejected God’s Word and offered as worship that which God had not authorized.

Many years later, the prophet Jeremiah would re-teach this lesson by saying, “*O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*” (Jer. 10:23). Thus, God has not left His creation without guidance. Peter declared, “*According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue*” (2 Pet. 1:3). Everything we need to know about how to worship God acceptably has been provided. Jude, in verse 3 of his epistle, said that we are to contend for “*the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.*”

In Hebrews 13:15, the term “*sacrifice of praise*” is used in a form of command that requires Christians to continually offer to God a type of worship that is described as “*the fruit of our lips.*” Let’s look at one aspect of this specific sacrifice: the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs in praise to God by those living in the Christian era. How can a Christian sing such songs in praise to God by “*the faith delivered to the saints*”? The answer is by hearing the Word of God. In each instance in the New Testament where Christians are commanded to sing, such as in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, the authorization is “singing.” Unlike the Old Testament, where God commanded the use of instrumental music in worship, the New Testament is completely silent regarding any such addition to the “*sacrifice of praise*” that is “*the fruit of our lips.*”

“But,” you may ask, “what about the gifted person who plays the piano in such a way as to move the spirit of man to deeper, richer, more heart-felt praise to God? Why would God have no respect for worship offered by such a person who wants to praise Him by using such a talent?” Even though Abel is dead, we can let him answer all such questions. That worship is not “by faith.” Such praise is nowhere authorized in the New Testament. Such sacrifice has no respect from God. Jeremiah answers all such questions too. Those who choose to worship God in such manner have “directed their own steps”; they have found their own way, and because they have not allowed God to direct their steps, they are lost.

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## Fruit of the Lips and God's Respect, continued

Cain was a gifted farmer who chose to offer to God the labor of his hands rather than that which God had commanded. He did not offer by faith, but instead directed his own steps. Thus, God had no respect for his sacrifice.

It is a matter of faith that we offer praise to God in the form of singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Instrumental music in worship cannot be "by faith," and those who choose to make such addition direct their own paths. One receives God's respect. The other does not.

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## SINGING AS TEACHING AND ADMONISHING

Jim Word

While singing is a part of every worship service we have, it is one of the most often neglected parts of our worship. This statement seems contradictory. However, if we consider that all parts of our worship are to be done in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), then it is easy to see how we can do lip service in our song service without truly honoring God. Colossians 3:16 says, *"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."* The passage doesn't say "teaching and entertaining one another." Too many times we have the attitude that if the songs do not stir up some emotion in us, then we do not need to participate. Feelings, however, have never been a measure of truth. But to say the feelings of the worshipper are not to be considered in the song service would be a disservice, for how could we be admonished if the songs did not affect us in some way. First Corinthians 14:26 says; *"...Let all things be done unto edifying."* It is not hard to see that some are truly edified by our song service while others seem to look at it as a ritual that we do just to be doing something. A non-Christian once told me, *"I'd love to go to church with you and I'm interested in knowing about God, but I just can't take all that singing!"* I found this saddening but when I look over the faces of the congregation during the invitation song, I often wonder how many of our own members have the same attitude.

The teaching and admonishing aspect of our song service comes from the words that we sing; "ooing" and "aahing" are not words and cannot teach or admonish. This being said, the words we sing must play a very important role. Let the elders deem a song unscriptural that the congregation has been singing for years and see what happens. People will say things like, "I don't see what's wrong with it; we've been singing it for as long as I remember! It's a good song!" Why? Because they have never really considered the meaning of the words that they're singing. First Corinthians 14:15 says, *"What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also."* Notice how I said "they." What I should have said is "we" for preachers often preach on faith and love, and the steps of salvation. When you hear a sermon on music, it is usually to denounce mechanical instruments; but what about the condition of the heart? This is where God says the melody comes from (Eph. 5:19); so then we must get our heart right. Many times you will hear the song leader say something like, "To prepare our minds for the Lord's supper turn to song number..." or even "The song before our lesson..." and they choose a song that coincides with the sermon. But what about preparing your heart for the songs you sing?

Unfortunately, there are many songs even in our own song books that promote Calvinism, premillennialism, or any of a number of other "isms"; yet, if we continue to sing them, then we're teaching and admonishing one another with a song that is unscriptural. Matthew 15:8-9 is not a verse that is often used when talking about our song service however it fits in this instance. *"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."* No one would ever consider passing the communion tray by without partaking on Sunday morning; however, many will sit idly by never parting a lip during the song service. This is not admonishing. In fact, for those of the congregation who are trying to sing with the spirit and with the understanding, it is discouraging.

Let us from this point forward determine to make our singing as important as all the other facets of our worship. Honor God with our lips in song, and then let us encourage others to do the same.

CW



## PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS

Joshua Rodriguez

Through song, as well as the other acts of worship, we express our souls unto God. True worshipers demonstrate their reverence with sincerity from the inward man, and their service is in compliance with the commands of God (cf. John 4:23-24; Joshua 24:14). Although the method of our worship is significant, the manner of our expressions is that which truly pleases the Lord. In the book of Psalms, it is written, *“For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise”* (Psa. 51:16-17). The Lord requires proper action in worship, and especially attitude.

The instructions for singing in worship are simple, yet profound, in meaning and application. In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 the command is to “speak” or “teach and admonish” *“one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”* Obviously “speaking” was with the intent to instruct and encourage the congregation as they sang corporately. Due to the poetry usually associated with singing, the melody of a song, and the force of an entire church, this style of teaching would address the emotional aspect of man. According to the Scriptures, the purpose of singing is two-fold: to render service to the Lord and to teach one another. The passages of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 not only tells us what must be done, but also what must be taught. The phrase *“psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”* gives us an understanding of the topics and attitude that should be addressed in our song service.

The term “psalms” is defined by *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* as “a striking or twanging.” The passage explains that our heart is the instrument (figuratively speaking) that is being struck (cf. Eph. 5:19c). In addition, the term strongly alludes to the Old Testament book of Psalms. The *Sepher Tehillim* or “Book of Praises” was the temple hymnbook and devotional guide for the ancient Israelites. It is possible that the apostle Paul was indicating a use of the book of Psalms for the church to learn reverence in their song service (cf. Rom. 15:4-6). There are many topics addressed in the Psalms, but the overwhelming theme is the worship of God for His attributes. Today, the New Testament church would do well to devote their attention to this

theme in their song selection. As an added gesture, the song leader should explain his choice of songs, and prepare the minds of the members with a passage on reverence (cf. Heb. 12:28-29).

Interestingly, the term “hymn” was used by the ancient Greeks as “a song in the praise of gods, heroes, and conquerors.” Certainly the apostle was not suggesting polytheism or hero worship, but was articulating the praise that should be given to the true Conqueror. In prophecy, Jesus is said to “sing praise” unto the Father in the midst of the church (cf. Psa. 22:22; Heb. 2:12). In connection with this thought, the book of Hebrews ends with an exhortation to sing praises to God by Jesus Christ: *“By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name”* (Heb. 13:15). During our song service, the church should keep in mind that we are expressing our admiration of God. In song, we describe the goodness of His character and strengthen our love as a church towards Him. Hence, the song leader should choose hymns that magnify our God and create enthusiasm in the worshipper.

The term “spiritual” makes reference to “one who is filled with and governed by the Spirit of God.” In both passages (Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16), it is evident that the Scriptures are contemplating one who is “filled with the Spirit” by letting the word of Christ dwell in them richly (cf. 1 Cor. 2:13-15; Rom. 8:5). As a result, “spiritual songs” are hymns that communicate the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (cf. Gal. 5:22-23). These are songs, not necessarily for the reverence and praise of God, but to benefit the church by teaching lessons of morality. Songs of this nature that we frequently sing are “Trust and Obey,” “Angry Words,” and “Is Thy Heart Right with God?” The elders and ministers should coordinate with the song leader to prepare a unifying and edifying service.

Let the church sing in reverence and praise to God, songs of spiritual influence (in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs)!

CW

## WHY NO INSTRUMENTS?

Clay Bond

The Psalmist declared, *“O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker”* (Psa. 95:6). One of the greatest privileges we have as God’s creatures is that of kissing toward our Creator in the reverential adoration called “worship.” When we engage in this great blessing, it should be our utmost desire to approach God in sincerity (Josh. 24:14; John 4:24) and to worship Him with our “whole heart” (Psa. 9:1; 111:1; 138:1). The failure to properly prepare ourselves to approach God causes our worship to become vain and nothing more than noise (Matt. 15:7-9; Amos 5:23).

According to John 4:23-24, our Heavenly Father is seeking “true worshipers.” True worship requires respect: *“God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him”* (Psa. 89:7). True and genuine worship gets Heaven’s attention (Rev. 8:1-4). In fact, when we worship, our Lord Jesus Christ is with us: *“In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee”* (Heb. 2:12).

If our worship is to be pleasing and acceptable to God, rather than vain and meaningless, we must worship according to the truth of God’s word (John 17:17), using it to establish authority for what we practice (Col. 3:17). This may be done by direct, explicit command, by example or by necessary inference (implication). As Christians, we are to worship God according to the New Covenant He has made with us (Heb. 1:1-2; 9:16-17). This New Covenant includes new instructions for worship.

Generally when someone visits a worship assembly or even hears that we belong to the church of Christ, the first question they ask is, “Why don’t you use instruments?” As noted above, worship practices of the church must be authorized by the New Covenant; by simply reading the entire New Testament, one may easily ascertain absence of authority for the use of mechanical instruments. In the New Testament of Jesus Christ we find no explicit command to use mechanical instruments; we have no example of Christians using mechanical instruments; and no passage in the New Testament implies that instruments were used or may have been used by our first century brethren.

The argument that the New Testament “doesn’t say not to” is one of the first lines of defense for those who desire instrumental music in worship. One of the things we learn from the Old Testament is that our God has ever been a God of details. For example, in Genesis 6 when God gives Noah instructions for building the ark, He does not forbid Noah to use oak, maple, or cedar. He simply told Noah what *to* use, gopher wood. Also noteworthy is that the Israelites were never *forbidden* to move the Ark of the Covenant using carts and oxen as David attempted to do (1 Chron. 13 and 15). They were simply told how *to* move it (Num. 4:15). What we see in these cases is the “law of exclusion” in action. When our Lord tells us what *to* do and how *to* do it all else is excluded.

Another common argument used goes something like this “David used instruments, therefore so can we.” Evidence can easily be found in the Psalms (Psa. 33, 150) to support the claim that David used instrument in the worship he offered. The first part of this assertion is clearly correct. However, in order to return to the Old Testament for authority to use mechanical instruments, one must reject the authority of Christ, Who sealed His New Covenant with His own blood and Who by changing the priesthood necessarily changed the law (Heb. 9:16-17)!

We must remember that our Lord has infinite capability in His use of language and the written word. His vocabulary is not limited, nor is it incomplete, He forgets nothing. Several times in the New Testament Christians are commanded to sing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15). In these passages we find a beautiful synopsis of the power of Christians blending their voices together in worship to God. If His desire is to be worshipped and praised by the use of our voices accompanied by the beauty of stringed instruments, drums, and trumpets, I cannot help but think He would have instructed us to do so.

Long ago Jehovah God said, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Isa. 55:8-9). God’s instruction for us to sing, making melody in our hearts is a wonderful commentary on what really matters to our Creator and God. To my human ears, singing accompanied by the music of a well-played instrument is beautiful; but then

*(Continued on page 11)*

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## Why No Instruments? continued

I am not able, as God is, to hear the music and melody of the heart of man as he humbly worships His Savior. "Why no instruments?" Because our God desires "the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name" (Heb. 13:15).

CW

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## Privilege of Worshipping in Song, continued

Christians as we should, our worship is that much sweeter (cf. Gal. 6:1-3; James 5:16-20). "I heard the song and strove to join."

**Singing in Worship, We Emphasize Our Common Hope.** What would we Christians have in common if we had never found Christ? Many of us would have never crossed paths in this life. Yet, now, in the kingdom, God's family, we offer up our songs together; we teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; and we do so because of our common hope in Christ. We sing together in worship knowing that one day, we will sing before the throne of Jesus in heaven, and ever praise Him there (Rev. 5:9-14). "Shout victory now and hail the Lamb, and bow before the great I AM."

**Singing in Worship, We Focus on God's Holiness.** We bring and offer to our holy God, the sacrifice of praise, that is the fruit of our lips, and we give thanks to Him, because that is what He has commanded (Heb. 13:15). So many people are trying to fashion the worship of the church to look more like the world. In doing so, they do not show respect for the holiness of God, nor are they trying to be holy *as He is holy* (1 Pet. 1:13-19). We would do well to concentrate upon the holiness, the separateness, the hallowedness of God. It would make a difference in how we sing. "Holy, holy, holy, Lord! God of hosts on high adored! Who like me Thy praise should sing, O almighty King?"

**Singing in Worship, We Anticipate the Day of Our Redemption.** Revelation 14 opens with a picture of a Lamb and one hundred forty-four thousand who were sealed from the earth. They sing a song that no one else can learn except for those who were redeemed from the earth (Rev. 14:3). The songs of our lips and hearts that we offer in worship to God now prepares us for that day when we, the redeemed, will stand with Christ and sing this song that no one else knows. Yet, today, our lives must reflect His glory as the One Who redeemed us, as the Author and Finisher of our faith if we hope to stand with the Lamb (Rev. 14:4-5; Heb. 12:1-3). "On Zion's glorious summit stood, a numerous host redeemed by blood."

CW

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