

SINGING HAS BEEN AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE WORSHIP OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD. Ex 15:1, 21; Num 21:16-17A; Dt 31:19; Jdg 5:1; 1 Sam 18:6A; 2 Sam 1:17-18; 22:1; 2 Chr 23:18; 1 Chr 9:33; 13:7-8A; 2 Chr 5:13A; Ps 95:1-2; 1 Kg 4:32; 2 Chr 20:21-22; 23:13A; 29:27A, 28A, 30; 35:15A; 35:25; Ezra 3:11; Neh 12:27A

SINGING IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE WORSHIP OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD. Jesus and the eleven sang a hymn after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. Matthew 26:30. Paul and Silas sang to God when they were in jail. Acts 16:25. God commands all Christians to sing. Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16

1. **To whom?** God, the saved, and the lost.

2. **When?** Always. Psalm 104:33. As we should pray without ceasing, so we should sing without ceasing. Psalm 96:1-2; 59:16; 42:8; James 5:13B; Acts 16:25

3. **Where?** Psalm 149:5, 1; Romans 15:9B

4. **Why?**

A. Singing is good, pleasant, and becoming. Psalm 147:1

B. For joy! Psalm 67:4A. Singing should naturally spring from hearts overflowing with joy because:

- 1) We are in fellowship with God. Zechariah 2:10
- 2) God is so good. Psalm 13:6; 98:1A
- 3) God forgives. Psalm 51:14
- 4) God answers prayer, etc. Psalm 28:6-7

C. Singing can impart spiritual strength to those who sing and to those who hear. Psalm 61:8; 40:3

5. **What?**

A. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Ephesians 5:19. It is difficult if not impossible to clearly differentiate between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. It may be that the Holy Spirit used three synonyms not because they were in any way truly distinct, but rather as a rhetorical tool to emphasize the type of songs we should sing.

B. Scriptural songs. We must test what we sing against what the word of God, especially songs written by people who are not New Testament (NT) Christians, but even the songs in songbooks put out by NT Christians. Just because a song is in a songbook put out by members of the church does not mean that its lyrics are necessarily scriptural.

C. Scriptures put to music. Psalm 119:54A

D. Songs of the ways and deeds of the Lord and their fruit. Psalm 138:5; 105:1-2

E. Songs of thanksgiving and praise. Ps 7:17. For God's ... power (Ps 21:13); righteousness (Ps 51:14); lovingkindness (Ps 59:16); goodness (Ps 135:3A); justice (Ps 101:1); authority (Ps 47:6-7A, 8); truth (Ps 57:9-10; 138:1-2A); works (Ps 66:1-3A, 4-5); judgment (Ps 67:4); faithfulness (Ps 89:1); deliverance (Ps 32:7); salvation (Ps 96:2); etc.

6. **How?**

A. In a way that pleases God. Psalm 104:33-34A.

B. In a way that glorifies God. Psalm 66:2.

C. In a way that teaches, admonishes and convicts men. Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:15, 26, 24-25

D. From the heart. Psalm 71:23; Ephesians 5:19B. With understanding and sincerity. Our songs can be witnesses against us. Deuteronomy 31:19-22

E. Joyfully. Psalm 71:23. Not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful singer.

F. Thankfully. Colossians 3:16.

G. With righteousness. Amos 5:21-23A, 24; Colossians 3:16

H. Enthusiastically. 1 Chronicles 13:8A

I. Steadfastly. Psalm 57:7

J. Following the leader. 1 Chronicles 15:27.

1) Song leading is a very important responsibility that must not be taken lightly.

2) The song leader can't necessarily make a song service, but he can certainly break the song service.

3) Keys to good song leading: the proper life, ability, training, preparation, pitch, attitude, command, tempo, timing, etc.

4) On occasion it might be appropriate for song followers to help a struggling song leader, but they should never battle with him for control.

K. Without instrumental music (IM), i.e. a cappella.

1) To my knowledge there is not a single NT passage that authorizes Christians to play IM when they come together as a church to worship God.

2) History confirms this view.

a. The Catholic church first introduced IM into worship around A.D. 660 and did not widely use it for several hundred years thereafter. As late as A.D. 1250 Thomas Aquinas wrote, "Instruments of music such as harps and psalteries, the church does not adopt for divine praises, lest it should seem to Judaize."

b. Protestant churches did not introduce IM in their worship until much later than that. John Calvin wrote: "To sing praises of God upon the harp and psaltery unquestionably formed a part of the training of the law and of the shadows and figures; but they are not now to be used in public thanksgiving." He also said: "It appears that the Papists ... in employing IM cannot be said so much to imitate the practice of God's ancient people as to ape it in a senseless and absurd manner, exhibiting a silly delight in the worship of the Old Testament which was figurative, and terminated with the gospel." As late as 1881 the general assembly of the United Presbyterian Church of America voted by a slim margin of 8 votes to remove from their "Directory of Worship" the following words: "As the use of musical instruments in the New Testament Church has no sanction in the Bible, they shall not be introduced, in any form, in any of our congregations."

c. A Cappella singing is rare today but it has not always been so. Others have changed, not the word of God or us.

3) So how do people attempt to defend the use of IM in Christian worship?

a. **The Old Testament (OT) argument.** Admittedly, the OT authorizes the use of IM in worship to God. However, we are no longer under the OT. Gal 3:24-25; etc. Also, if this was a valid argument we could not stop with IM. We would also have to offer animal sacrifices, make three annual trips to Jerusalem for three annual feasts, keep the Sabbath, observe dietary restrictions, apply the death penalty to stubborn and rebellious children, etc. Mt 5:17-19.

b. **The harps in heaven argument.** Admittedly, the use of IM in worship to God is mentioned in Rev 5:8; 15:2. However, in these passages the IM is being played in heaven, not on earth. The will of God for those in heaven is not necessarily the same as for those on earth. Compare Mt 22:30 and 1 Cor 7:8-9; Lk 16:23-26 and Rom 12:20. If these passages authorize the use of IM in worship on earth, then the harp is the only authorized musical instrument, each worshipper must play a harp (Reve 5:8; 15:2) and we could not stop with the use of harps. Among other things, we would also have to incorporate into earthly worship the use of a throne, white robes, crowns of gold, lamps of fire (Rev 4:4-5), palm branches (Rev 7:9), a golden censer, incense, and a golden altar (Rev 8:3).

c. **The talent argument.** Gen 4:2B-5. Cain had a talent for farming. He offered to the Lord what he had grown, but God had no regard for Cain or his offering. Why? Cain offered what he did well, not what God had commanded.

d. **The psalmo argument.** In Eph 5:19 the phrase "making melody" is the Greek word *psallo*. Per Thayer, *psallo* originally meant "to pluck off, pull out" and then "to cause to vibrate by touching ... to twang the strings of a musical instrument so that they gently vibrate ... to play on a stringed instrument ... to sing to the music of the harp." However, by NT times it simply meant "to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song." *Psallo* is also used in Rom 15:9; 1 Cor 14:15 (twice); and Jam 5:13. Each time it is translated "sing." James 5:13 makes it clear that this is the appropriate translation. In Eph 5:19, Paul may have been alluding to the earlier meaning of *psallo*. If so, the instrument to be twanged is specified and it is not a mechanical instrument of music. Rather, it is the heart. The point is that when singing we must do more than move our lips, we must also be "pulling on our heart strings." The companion passage Col 3:16 confirms this meaning. If *psallo* means sing and play in Eph 5:19, then all would have to sing and play IM in worship.

e. **The psalms argument.** Some argue that what differentiates a psalm from a hymn and a spiritual song is that a psalm is a song sung with IM. Having reviewed the literature, I am convinced that no one can say with any degree of certainty what the actual differences are between psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. However, I can say with certainty that a psalm is still a psalm even when it is spoken without instrumental accompaniment. Luke 20:42-43; Acts 13:33, 35. Therefore, the premise of this argument, that instrumental accompaniment is absolutely necessary for a psalm to be a psalm, is false and the argument proves nothing. Also, the voice of history, as previously discussed, is in total opposition to the idea that early Christians understood Paul's use of "making melody" (*psallo*) and "psalms" to demand the use of IM.

f. **The silence of scriptures argument.** To my knowledge no scripture says that things not expressly condemned are permitted. There are, however, scriptures that say things not expressly permitted are condemned. Deut 29:29; 1 Cor 4:6. Unless we are prepared to arrogantly presume to know the mind of God, the question is never, "Where does the NT say I can't do it?" Rather, the question is always, "Where does the NT say I can do it?" 1 Th 5:21 and 2 Tim 3:16-17.

g. **The aid argument.** The command to sing authorizes whatever is necessary to sing, i.e. a tune, lyrics, a pitch, a rhythm, and a tempo. Mere aids to these ends are scriptural as long as they don't violate some other principle of scripture. IM is not a mere aid. It is an unscriptural addition because instrumental accompaniment is not essential to singing. Compare using an electronic keyboard only for a pitch vs. playing it while we sing.

h. **The tradition argument.** Yes, a cappella singing is a tradition. But, there are two types of traditions—those handed down by God and those handed down by men. A cappella singing was handed down to men from God and like all such traditions is mandatory, not optional.

i. **The old hermeneutic is defective argument.** The old hermeneutic—command, example, and necessary inference—is scriptural, common sense, and without scriptural replacement. The new hermeneutic appears to be "the ends justifies the means." Moses used an unauthorized means for a good end and he lost the promise land. Num 20:8, 11-12.

L. Notice that in all this discussion of "how" sound quality and technical precision have not been specifically mentioned. We must do all the above even if we can't carry a tune in a bucket. The latter does not matter to God and should not matter to us. No, we should not needlessly distract and yes we should blend in not stand out. But we should say something only in rare circumstances. Generally we should assume the best and get over it.

SINGING WILL BE AN IMPORTANT PART OF THE WORSHIP OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD. Rev 5:9-10; 14:1, 3A; Rev 15:3A-4