

Music in Worship

Having devoted two articles to a discussion of the unscriptural nature of instrumental music in the church's worship to God, we now turn to that music which is authorized by the Lord in the New Testament. Over the years I've had people ask me why the church of Christ does not have music in worship. The implication is that music can only be rendered by a man-made instrument. The fact is that, not only does the church of Christ have music in worship, we have the very best kind for it is that which comes from the instrument that God Himself created, namely, the human voice.

That music was a part of the worship of the church in the first century is evident from I Corinthians 14. The entire chapter is set in the context of an assembling of the saints to worship God. In that particular time there were those who had the miraculous gift of speaking in human languages they had not learned as well as those who had the miraculous gift of interpreting these messages into the language of the people in the audience. During this assembling there was also praying and singing (I Corinthians 14:15). The miraculous gifts have passed away (I Corinthians 13:8ff), but there is nothing inherently miraculous about praying or singing so it's proper to conclude that just as the first century church engaged in these acts of worship, we should as well.

According to I Corinthians 14:15, singing is to be done with spirit and with understanding. This agrees with Jesus' statement in John 4:24. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Going back to the Old Testament, we recall the words of the Psalmist in Psalm 51:16-17. "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 contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise." Even then God wanted the heart of the worshipper. Mindless, ritualistic actions were not sufficient to please the Lord (see also Isaiah 1:10-20).

Ephesians 5:19 instructs, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." A parallel passage in Colossians 3:16 reads, "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." Each of these verses shows the heart to be the origin of our singing. As we sing, we teach and admonish. In participating in singing as a congregation, we ourselves are taught and admonished by those around us.

From the passages noted above we conclude that our singing should consist of at least three elements. First, it must be scriptural. Our singing is directed to the Lord. Being the object of our worship, He can only be pleased with that which honors Him. We can no more acceptably sing false doctrine than we can acceptably teach false doctrine. Secondly, our singing must be thoughtful. It is to be done with spirit and understanding. We should be weighing each word that we sing, carefully noting its significance and meaning. Thirdly, our singing must come from the heart. We cannot be double-minded when we sing. We must give God our very best and from the very depths of our being. In our singing we are expressing love, praise and thanksgiving to the One who saves from sin. To allow our minds to wander, to become easily distracted or to not even participate at all in the singing is to give God less than our hearts.

On occasion someone will object to participating in singing in worship due to the fact that they do not have a good singing voice. To my knowledge there is not a verse in the Bible that sets a standard for the quality of one's voice. Granted, some sing well, others sing not so well, and still others really struggle to hit any of the notes correctly. Apparently, to God, the timbre of the voice cannot compare to the tone of scriptural music coming from humble hearts unheard by human ears. In short, though two people sitting next to each other in worship may be on opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to vocal quality, when both hearts are singing to God in spirit and in truth, their music is unmatched in the ears of the Father.

What a privilege it is to be able to sing. What an honor it is to be allowed by the Lord to worship Him in this manner.