

SINGING (Part 1)

For the past few weeks we have been considering "worship." Jesus told the Samaritan woman in John 4:24 that "God is spirit; and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth." That is, God must be worshipped according to the right attitude and in accordance with his instructions in the Bible. If we are to worship God, we must do so as he has directed in the New Testament. This has been our concern for the past few weeks: what does God direct concerning the worship of the church? What did the New Testament Church do as worship in their assemblies?

Last week we concluded our brief study of the Lord's Supper as one of the acts of worship in the New Testament. This week we wish to begin a study of another act which was performed by the church--singing.

Surely no one who professes to believe the Bible at all will doubt for a moment that singing constitutes a very important part of our worship to God. Immediately after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26, it is recorded in verse 30 that they sang a hymn. Further, when Paul and Silas were imprisoned in Phillipi, it is said in Acts 16:25 that "about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God." And in Romans 15:9 the apostle declares: "Therefore will I give praise unto thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name." It cannot be denied, then, that singing in the New Testament was a very important part of the worship of the church.

But why did it exhibit such importance? The Scripture notes three reasons.

First, and foremost, singing is one medium by which we praise God. In Hebrews 2:12, the writer there proclaims: "In the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise." We ought always to live in thanksgiving and praise of God, and singing is one means which God has ordained by which we should praise Him. The Psalms are full of references to this aspect of singing. In Revelation 5 when Jesus entered the throne room of God, and took the book which contained the destiny of the redeemed, the angels about the throne broke out in songs of praise to glorify God. On our lips also ought to be continual praise for the work of Christ on our behalf, giving glory to his Name. In this respect, notice what the Hebrew writer says in Hebrews 13:15, he writes: "Through him, then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips that give thanks to His name.

A second reason why singing was so important to the church of the New Testament is because that it was used as a teaching medium. Songs in the New Testament were not only geared toward the praise of God, but also toward the teaching of those who sang them. This is exactly what Paul commanded on two different occasions. In Colossians 3:16 the apostle writes: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God." It is clear from this passage that we do not only sing for the praise of God, but also for the instruction of our fellow-members. To refuse to sing, therefore, is to refuse to teach and admonish your own brother, much less your God. Note further Ephesians

5:19 where Paul says, "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Here again the apostle is concerned that the singing not only be directed to God, but to each other as a means of instruction. But notice in this passage just quoted that we are to make melody in our heart to the Lord. If our worship is to be acceptable to the Lord, we must not only worship in accordance with the Scripture, but it must be from the heart. The essence of singing is not who can do it the best, or who can stay in tune; but who is truly worshipping God in their heart. Teaching or instruction, therefore, is an integral part of the function of singing.

A third reason why singing was so important in the New Testament church is because singing was an expression of joy. The Christian life should be one of joy, knowing what God has done for you. In Philippians 4:4 Paul declares: "Rejoice in the Lord always, and again, I say rejoice." Singing is but one expression of that joy. In James 5:13 the Holy Spirit says, "Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises." We sing in Christianity because we are happy and thankful. When the angels appeared to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth, what did they do? They sang! When the ascended Lord entered the throne room of God to take his rightful place and receive the Kingdom from the Father, what did the angels do? They sang. James says, if anyone is happy, he should sing praises. When I worship God why do I sing? Because I am happy, knowing what my Lord has done for me.

For these reasons, then, praising God, teaching each other, as an expression of joy, singing constitutes an important aspect of the worship of the New Testament Church; and we should also practice as they did. If worship in song does not exist in your congregation, then you ought to direct your leaders to the Scriptures we have considered this morning. Singing must be practiced if we are to worship God in spirit and in truth.

However, most denominational groups do practice singing in their worship services; and for this we are thankful that the Scriptures are obeyed. But in most of them, only a few of the members do the singing. So many traditions have arisen that now only a small segment of the congregation does any singing. This usually takes the form of a choir or some such group which supposedly does the singing for the whole congregation. What they are, in effect, doing is, they are worshipping for the whole congregation. But this is impossible. I can not worship for you anymore than I can pray for you. I cannot sing for you anymore than I can take the Lord's Supper for you. If 30 members of a large congregation can sing for the whole, why cannot another 30 members partake of the communion for the whole? We maintain that the existence of choirs is destructive to the very nature of worship itself. Worship is an individual experience as well as a corporate one. We worship together, but everyone worships and everyone participates. If you do not participate, you do not worship; and the existences of choirs prevent other members from participating, and therefore prevent them from worshipping in song.

The New Testament, on the contrary, knows nothing of choirs. The apostle Paul commands every Christian to sing. There is no dividing of the group into those who do sing and those who do not. Why that is unheard of in the New Testament. When the congregation worshipped in song, everybody sang. Should not everyone have the opportunity to praise God, and should not every member participate in the instruction which occurs through song, and should not everyone express their joy over God's might works through singing? If so, why are there choirs? Why have a choir in the first place?

I fear that choirs are there to give someone something to do, or to make the singing sound better. But do we not have enough to do in spreading the truth of the gospel. Further as we pointed out a moment ago, the essence of singing is not in what it sounds like, but in what manner of heart is the song sung.

Singing is the privilege and duty of every Christian in the worship of God, and anything, such as choirs, which hinders the fulfillment of such a privilege and duty by every member of the congregation is sinful. Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 do not command that God should be worshipped through song only to a segment of the congregation, but to the whole of it. Everyone is to sing and not just the choir.

If we are to restore the New Testament Church, we must follow its example. Since it had no choirs, but every member regularly participated in the song service, so we should obey the teachings of the Lord. Please do not permit the privilege and joy of singing to be restricted to only one group in the congregation.

SINGING (Part 2)

Last week we began a discussion of the subject of singing as an act of worship to God. We observed that in the New Testament there are primarily three reasons why we should worship God in song. The first was that singing is one medium by which we praise the Lord. Secondly, singing is also to be used as a teaching medium for the instruction of the congregation, and thirdly, it is also a wonderful expression of Christian joy. These points serve to signify the important place singing should have in our Christian worship.

However, in most denominations today, singing is not the only musical means for worshipping God. Most churches also use some instrument of music as the organ, piano or guitar to accompany their singing. But I want to raise the question this morning: does the New Testament authorize the use of instruments of music in the worship of the Church?

The fundamental principle of true worship is that no religious service is acceptable to God unless it is authorized by His word. This principle or law of worship is clearly set forth in John 4:24. There Jesus says: "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." No worship, according to this pronouncement, can be right unless it is done in spirit and in truth. What is the truth? John 17:17 answers: "Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth." Since men must worship in truth, and the word of God is the truth, then they must worship according to the word. Where does God's word expressed in the New Testament give command or example for the use of instrumental music in

the worship of the Church? Not anywhere; therefore, this practice cannot be of truth, for the word is truth. We conclude then that instrumental music in worship is a violation of the law of worship as expressed in John 4:24. For only singing in and of itself is explicitly authorized in the New Testament, singing without the aid or accompaniment of instrumental music.

The antithesis of true worship is vain worship. All forms of worship unauthorized by the New Testament are vain--void and useless. Jesus said in Matthew 15:9, "But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men." In the context of this reference, the Pharisees had remonstrated with the Lord because His disciples did not wash their hands before eating. The Pharisees taught that this act was a doctrinal necessity, a direct service rendered to God, and that those who failed to do this were spiritually defiled and displeasing to God. But, in fact, God had never commanded men to wash their hands before the eating of a common meal. This act was merely a precept of men, and the failure to practice it did no spiritual harm to the individual. Jesus Christ condemned this doctrine, along with all other man-made religious precepts when he described them as vain worship. Instrumental music in worship is a practice originating with man and not with God; thus it falls into the same category as the washing of hands, characterized by the description of vain worship. Instrumental worship is an addition to the New Testament's description of worship.

In Colossians 3:17, listen to what Paul the apostle says there. He writes, "and whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through

Another way of expressing this same argument is to note carefully what the apostle Paul writes in Colossians 3:17. There the apostle says, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the father." Now to do something in the name of someone is to do it by his authority. Thus, what the apostle is saying is that whatever we do (that is practice) and whatever we say (that is teach) it must be done upon the authority of Jesus Christ. In other words, we cannot practice or teach anything in the Christian religion unless it has been authorized by Jesus Christ. It is extremely important to grasp that principle. We must have the authority of Jesus Christ behind everything that we do as religious service. As Peter wrote in I Peter 4:11, "if any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God" We must have, if we are to be pleasing to God and our worship acceptable to him, we must have New Testament authority for what we do in our worship services.

The question to raise, then, does the New Testament authorize the use of instruments of music in the worship of the church? The answer is no. There is not one word about the use of instruments of music in the worship of the church in the New Testament. You can search the New Testament in to find a command to use or an example of one's use in the worship, but you will look in vain. It is simply not there. Therefore, according to Colossians 3:17, we must not use instruments of music in our worship because they are not authorized by the New Testament, the last will of Jesus Christ. If we are to, as Peter says, speak as the oracles of God, how may we justify the use of instruments in our worship when

the New Testament nowhere authorizes its use. In fact, history records that beyond any doubt the early Christians did not use any instruments of music in their worship. It was not until 606 A.D. that instrumental music was first introduced into supposedly Christian worship. Even then it was bitterly opposed by most of the church. If the New Testament Christians did not use instrumental music, and where is no doubt that they did not, and if we are to restore New Testament Christianity, we must not use instruments of music in our worship to God because there no authority can be found for their introduction into the worship in the New Testament.

Now all this may seem very strange to you. You are probably thinking that I am the only one who feels this way, and that the churches of Christ are all alone in their rejection of instrumental music in Christian worship. However, you are wrong. That I might demonstrate to you that my position is neither unique or new for it is actually as old as the apostles, note carefully what some of the great religious leaders have said on this very question. Be careful to note, however, that these men are quoted not for the purpose of proving my position (for one can only prove such by the Bible), but to show that even the founders of certain denominations were opposed to instrumental music. John Calvin, for instance, one of the forerunners of the Presbyterian Church had this to say: "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, the restorations of the other shadows of the law. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews." Martin Luther, the founder to the

modern Lutheran churches and distinguished reformer called the organ an ensign of Baal." And John Wesley, the reputed founder of the Methodist Church wrote: "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided that they are neither heard nor seen." Charles Spurgeon, one of the greatest Baptist preachers who ever lived, preached for twenty years to thousands of people each week in London, England did not have musical instruments in his worship service. You see, then, that the churches of Christ do not stand alone in their opposition to the use of instrumental music in the worship of the church. However, whether they stand alone or not is no real consequence. For if the Scripture does not authorize the use of instruments of music in Christian worship, I would be opposed to it whether I stood alone or not.

The plain fact is that there is no authorization for such a use of instrumental music in the New Testament. This no one can deny. Since, therefore, we must worship God in Spirit and in truth, we cannot worship God with instruments of music because it is not found in God's word which is truth. The New Testament church did not use instruments of music, this no historian doubts. Therefore, if we are to restore New Testament Christianity, we must also forbid the use of instruments of music. The only music the New Testament knows of is singing, and therefore that is all we should practice. However, several arguments have been made from Scripture to justify the use of instrumental music in Christian worship, and next week we shall examine them next week.

SINGING (III)

For the past several weeks we have been discussing the practice of singing in the New Testament as an act of worship in which the church of the New Testament participated. We' have discovered from our brief study that singing constituted an integral part of the worship of the first century church. Last week, however, we asked the question whether or not singing was the only musical means by which the early church worshipped God in their assemblies. The answer we received from the New Testament was no. There is no record in all the New Testament that the church of the first century ever used instruments of music in their worship. They only had singing.

Because we can find no authority for the use of instrumental music in the worship of the Church, we must, therefore, abstain from using it in worship to God. Colossians 3:17 reads: "whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." Thus, the apostle Paul demands that whatever we teach or practice in the Christian religion must have the authority of Jesus Christ behind it. Further, Jesus himself in John 4:24 states that "God is spirit, and those who worship him, must worship him in Spirit and in truth." Anyone who seeks to worship God, must worship in spirit, that is in the right frame of mind; and in truth, that is according to the word of God. The principle is clear from Scripture. We must not teach or practice anything in Christianity which does not have the explicit authority of Christ behind it, unless it is authorized by the New Testament. Since the use of instruments of music is nowhere authorized in the New Testament for the use of the church in worship, we must therefore forbid its use in the worship of the church.

However, such a position is not generally accepted by most denominations because most of these groups do use instruments of music in their worship. For this reason, we wish to take the rest of our remaining time to examine some objections which might be offered by denominational groups who do use the instruments of music in their worship.

Some object that since the Old Testament authorizes the use of instruments of music in worship, we should not object to its use in the worship of the New Testament Church. After all, it is said, did not David encourage the use of instrumental music in such Psalms as the 150th. However, the objector fails to realize that David also encouraged, even commanded, the offering of animal sacrifices and the burning of incense in such Psalms as the 66th. If the Old Testament is sufficient authority to introduce practices into the worship of the church, then why do we not also burn incense, offer animal sacrifices, keep the ceremonial feasts, and so on. If men bring instrumental music into the worship today on the ground that it is mentioned in the Old Testament, consistency demands that they bring animal sacrifices and the burning of incense also. Yet, if a man leaves the offering of animal sacrifices and the burning of incense out of the worship today on the ground that Jesus did not include them in the New Testament, he must also leave out the playing of instruments for the same reason. As Paul expressed in Colossians 3:17, we must have the authority of Jesus, not Moses, for what we teach and practice in the church today; and it is his authority which we lack in respect to both animal sacrifices and instrumental music.

Others, however, object that the Bible does not say that we cannot use the instruments. Nowhere, it is argued, does Scripture prohibit the use of instrumental music. But neither does Scripture prohibit the addition of bacon and eggs to the Lord's Supper; nor does it prohibit animal sacrifices or the burning of incense. The question is not what the New Testament does not authorize, but what it does. We are obligated to have authority for whatever we do. Peter in I Peter 4:11 wrote: "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God." And Paul in Colossians 3:17 demands that whatever we do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. We have authority to teach and practice in Christianity only those things which are authorized by Jesus. Anything, therefore, which is not authorized is forbidden. Let me illustrate this point. In Genesis 6, righteous Noah was commanded to build an ark, and God specifically commanded that he build it out of gopher wood. Now if Noah had used oak with the gopher, would the ark have floated? Of course not. But why? Oak was not forbidden. The ark would not have floated because oak wood was not authorized by God. In the same way, God has directed in the New Testament that the worship of the church be directed in its musical expression by singing. If we add to singing the instruments of music, then we would be like Noah if he had added oak to gopher. Our worship to God is vain if we offer to him any worship which is unauthorized (Matt. 15:1-9).

Another person, however, argues that since instrumental music is enjoyed in the home, why not also in the church? Yet it must be remembered that there are many activities in

which we engage in the home that are not done in worhsip, such as washing the hands, eating food to nourish the body, and engaging in various forms of recreatâon. None of these actions, which are not morrally wrong, would be right in the worship of the church. Many receive aesthetic delight and mental relaxation by the use of instrumental music in the home, which is entirely all right; in the worship of God, however, it would be wrong because just as washing hands the New Testament does not authorize its use in the worship of the church.

Another indifidual argues that sine in most congregations there are members who have the ability to play on instruments of music, why not use this talent in worship to the glory of God? But there are many women who are capable of baking delicious pies and cakes, does that mean that we should usilize their ability in the worship of God? Many have the ability to tell comical stories. Does that mean we should utilizee their abilities in the worship? It is wonderful to have the ability to play an insturment, but the simple fact still remains, there is no authority in the New Testament for the introduction of insturments in the worship of the Church. We must learn as Paul wrote in I Corinthians 4:6 not to go beyond that which is written.

Finally, someone urges that we should use musical instruments because they aid our singing. But our firend here misses the whole point. The insroduction of musical instruments into the worship would not be just an expedient aid, but an addition. Let us go back to our illustration in the example of Noah. It might have greatly aided Noah's task, if he had been able to use oak in the building the ark. But if he had used that

oak in the building of the ark, it would not have been simply an aid, but an addition to what God had commanded. God did not command simply wood in a generic sense, but he was specific, he wanted gopher wood. In the same way, God in the New Testament did not simply authorize the use of music in a generic sense but he was rather specific--he commanded only singing. Thus, if we add instrumental music to his specification, then we do not simply have an aid to our singing, but an addition which is unauthorized just as the oak would have been in Noah's task. When we use instrumental music in our worship to God in the church, then we add to the divine commandment, and thereby sin.

The issue we are discussing is not a superficial one. It is fundamental to Christianity itself. The principle is what is at stake here. We must abide by the principle of authority which is stated in Colossians 3:17--that is, we must not teach or practice anything in Christianity which is not authorized by Jesus Christ. If we give up that principle, we may not only introduce musical instruments into the worship, but a host of other things such as counting beads, burning incense, steak and eggs on the Lord's table, and the list could go on. The use of instruments of music is but one point in the whole issue, that issue being--will we abide by the New Testament alone, and teach and practice only the things which it authorized. Paul the apostle is clear--to teach or practice anything not authorized by the New Testament is sinful, and, therefore, the use of instruments of music in the worship of the church which is not authorized in the New Testament must be considered sinful.