

Singing

I. What is the difference between a hymn and a prayer?

“Perhaps the most consistent distinguishing characteristic between prayers and hymns is that almost all hymns are sung by an entire assembly.” - *Willis, Wendell. Worship: A definitive study of the history, methods and intent of Christian Worship.* p. 54

- A. Without a doubt, singing is worship and falls under the study of the theology of worship as has already been studied in this series.
- B. Christianity is clearly not only a movement of intellect, but of heart as well.
- C. Singing is a natural expression of Human emotion.

II. Purposes of Singing

A. To Commemorate God and his works

- 1. Exod 15:1-19 - The Song of the Sea
- 2. Jud 5:1-31 - Song of Deborah and Barak
- 3. 1 Sam 2:1-10 - Song of Hannah
 - This song also serves as an introduction to themes in Samuel and Kings
- 4. 2 Sam 22:1-15 (Psalm 18) - Song of David
- 5. Psalm 136 - God's acts through history
- 6. Psalm 104; 139 - Creation
- 7. Psalm 103 - God's character
- 8. 1 Tim 3:16 - The work of Christ (It is debated whether this was a hymn)
- 9. Rev 5:9-10 - Jesus work of atonement
- 10. Rev 15:3-4 - For the Lord's character and holiness

B. To instruct, teach and rebuke

1. Deut 31:19, 30; 32:1-46 - Song of Moses
2. Isa 5:1-7 - Song of the Vineyard
- Imagery used in Mark 12:1ff
3. Col 3:16 - Singing as a result of the word in you
4. Jews referred to the Psalter as the Second Torah
 - a. Five fold division of the Psalter probably reflects this view
 - b. Many, many New Testament quotations of the Old from Psalms
 - Many familiar with it
 - Music aids memory
 - c. As they commemorate God's acts, they are teaching and reminding

C. To encourage and build up one another

1. Ps 145 - The Lord will save
2. Psa 30 - The Lord's anger is for a moment,
3. 1 Cor 14:26 - All things are to be done for edification

D. To express joy, praise and thanksgiving

1. Psalm 47; 100 - Express Joy to the Lord
2. Heb 13:15 - Offer up a sacrifice of praise
3. James 5:13 - If cheerful, sing praises

E. To express sorrow, remorse, or even anger

1. James 5:13 - Hebrew Parallelism
 - Prayer is parallel to singing, implying in this case that singing and prayer are to be the same response to either joy or sorrow
2. Psalm 137 - Missing Zion
3. Psalm 51 - Sorrow and repentance for sinning
4. Lam 2 - Expression of extreme despair and sorrow

F. As a prayer of request

1. Psalm 44; 64 - A prayer for deliverance
2. Psalm 25 - Numerous requests

G. Thought Question: Why singing? Why not just pray and use words without melody?

III. Results of Singing

A. God is glorified

1. Psalm 34:1-3
2. Rom 15:9-11

B. God acts

1. 2 Chr 20:20-24 - Jehoshaphat and worship leaders
2. Acts 16:25-26 - Paul and Silas in prison

C. We are edified

IV. Important considerations in singing

A. Content

1. I Corinthians 14:15 - “with the Spirit & Mind” Content is important
 - a. We should always seek to understand what we are singing
 - b. Singing without understanding does not edify or praise God
2. Eph 5:19 - Types of Songs
 - a. Psalms (Grk: psalmos) - Old Testament word used to refer to sacred music. Most often used to refer to the collection of

Psalms in the book of psalms

- b. Hymns (Grk: Hymnos) - A song of praise addressed to God.
- c. Spiritual Songs (Grk: Pneumatikos) - Songs about spiritual things

B. Properly and Decently

- 1. 1 Chr 15:22 - Singing classes
- 2. 1 Chr 25:7 - Skilled
- 3. 1 Cor 14:40 - Worship is to be orderly to honor God

C. Methods

- 1. Is the method, style, music, etc. important?
- 2. Examples of God's instructions concerning how to worship and serve him:
 - a. How seriously were God's instructions concerning worship?
 - b. Leviticus 10:1-3 - Nabad & Abihu
 - c. I Chronicles 13; 15:1-2; 16:1-3... - Transporting the Ark
 - d. Conclusion: God is to be treated as holy in worship, which involves taking his instructions seriously.
- 3. Has God specified how to sing in the New Testament?
 - a. I Corinthians 14:15, 26
 - 1) "I will sing psallo with the spirit and mind"
 - 2) See John 4:24 - God seeks spiritual worshippers
 - b. Ephesians 5:19
 - 1) Leading thought - Being filled with the spirit
 - 2) Followed by five masculine imperative participles
 - a) Speaking
 - b) singing
 - c) making melody
 - d) giving thanks

- e) being subject (submitting yourselves)
- c. Colossians 3:16 - Similar construction to Ephesians passage
- d. Singing needs to be from the heart, not a mere ritual

V. Principle of Edification and Congregational A Cappella Singing

A. Mentions of Musical instruments in the New Testament:

1. Matthew 9:23 - According to custom, even the most poor should hire no less than 2 flute players and a wailer for a funeral for a wife
2. Other N.T. Passages with instrumental music mentioned: Luke 15:25 - Prodigal son; Matt 11:17; I Cor 14:7; I Cor 13:1; I Cor 15:52; Luke 2:14; this is not a complete list)
3. Musical instruments were widely known and used both among Jews and Greeks. HOWEVER, there is no mention of them being used in connection with "Christian" worship.
4. A closer look will reveal why:

B. (1 Cor 14:26) An emphasis in New Testament Worship is mutual edification

1. (1 Cor 14:6-9) Worship needs to be intelligible
2. (1 Cor 14:23-25) Worship needs to be understandable
3. (1 Cor 14:40) Worship needs to be orderly, not chaotic

C. Note on Congregational A Cappella Singing: Worship focus in the Old Testament - Magnifying the name of God (not necessarily edification)

1. (1 Chr 29:25) Singing at the temple was for the purpose of magnifying God
 - a. Involved "professional" worshippers, the Levites. Only they could perform the services
 - b. They did the job, and they did it well

- c. Involved professional musicians with their instrument
 - d. This was commanded by God through the prophets
- 2. Destruction of the Temple and exile to Babylon in 586 A.D.
 - a. The temple, levitical system of worship, etc. were all destroyed
 - b. Israel determined to maintain her identity among foreign peoples, a way of doing this was the formation of the Synagogue, a place for teaching, meeting, and worship.
 - c. The synagogue became the focal point of Jewish identity
 - 1) Gathered on the Sabbath
 - 2) Purpose was for mutual encouragement and edification
 - 3) Unlike the temple, the singing was strictly A Cappella
 - a) The synagogue did not employ "professional" musicians that magnified God with their talent
 - b) Music in the synagogue was congregational, a cappella singing.
 - c) This was appropriate, because the focus at the synagogue was not merely worship, but mutual edification.
 - d) Congregational A Cappella Singing is the music of mutual encouragement
- 3. Return from captivity
 - a. Two systems of music developed
 - 1) Temple worship, involving the Levites. This was music of the temple with instrumentation
 - 2) Synagogue worship, involving everyone without instrumentation. This was the music of mutual edification.
 - b. Jesus could not have participated in worship at the temple because he was not a Levite.
 - c. Jesus could sing in the synagogue worship, which involved A Cappella singing.
- 4. Specific forms of music serve specific purposes -
 - A Cappella congregational singing is the music of mutual encouragement
- 5. New Testament worship is patterned after the synagogue

- a. The synagogue was a place for mutual encouragement, thus there was congregational A Cappella singing rather than professional musicians.
 - b. 1 Cor 14 - New Testament worship is a place for mutual encouragement, thus A Cappella congregational singing
 - c. Not a place where professionals perform for God
 - d. Everyone participates in a mutual way
 - 1) Edification is to be given, not taken
 - 2) Purpose is to give, not try to get something out of it
 - 3) Typically, what one gets out of worship is proportional to what they put into it (First act of worship in the Bible in Gen 4:1-5 is an act of giving, not trying to get)
6. This is why singing in Christian assemblies for many centuries was congregational, A Cappella singing
7. From the beginning of the church and for centuries, church leaders did not see instrumentation as appropriate for Christian worship
- D. Interesting note: "A Cappella" originally meant, "In the manner of the church," which was singing without instruments
- 1. Introduction of instruments in Christian worship was a recent innovation
 - 2. From this study, it can be seen that instruments of music are not appropriate for Christian worship assemblies.
- E. Arguments people make to justify instruments in worship assemblies
- 1. The Bible doesn't say NOT TO use instruments
 - a. Did God say NOT TO use the strange fire in Lev. 10?
 - b. Did God say NOT TO offer animal sacrifices in the New Testament?
 - c. He did say both that the Old Law was done away with, and has specified how he wants to be worshipped in the New Testament
 - 2. Musical instruments are authorized by the Greek Word "Psallo"

- a. Word meant to play or to sing to musical accompaniment in Classical Greek
 - b. This was what was written in Thayers lexicon. However, more recent linguistic studies have shown that from 200-300 years before Christ, the word came to mean singing and singing only. This is acknowledged in the best and most recent Baur's lexicon.
 - c. If it did mean play, or to play and sing, then we would all have to do it.
3. It is only an aid to singing. Not an unauthorized addition
- a. 2 Chronicles 29:25-28 - Old Testament Worship was with instruments
 - b. Psalm 150 - Were the instruments worship, or just an aid? They were most definitely worship, not an aid.
 - c. Songbooks, pews, etc. are aids, but instruments are worship
4. Instruments are mentioned in Revelation in worship
- a. Like the Old Testament, the focus is not on mutual edification, but on magnifying God in Revelation.
 - 1) Remember that A Cappella, congregational singing is the music of mutual encouragement.
 - 2) Playing an instrument to God is not the music of mutual encouragement
 - b. So are altars, lamps, incense, are also mentioned, but this does not mean they are literally appropriate for Christian worship in the present time.
 - c. Caution should be used. The book of Revelation contains many apocalyptic visions which are not always literal representations
5. There are no commands for congregational singing in the New Testament, nor are the instructions for worship in the assembly, therefore we are free to do as we please.
- a. This ignores a Christian tradition that appears to date all the way back to the Apostles, namely, congregational A Cappella singing.

- b. This ignores the considerations for the appropriateness of instruments, bands, choirs, etc. for Christian worship which are to be for mutual edification.
 - 1) Anecdotal evidence suggests that significantly less people sing in assemblies with professional musicians than in assemblies where there is congregational a cappella singing.
 - 2) The use of a choir or band often feels like a concert, and people typically listen rather than participate at a concert
 - 3) If the desire is to honor God in producing a period of the worship of mutual edification, then a cappella congregational singing is what is appropriate.
- c. The passages in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 should be understood to refer to the assembly, though not limited to it. There is no reason to limit it to outside the assembly.
- d. You cannot deny that there was at least individual singing in the Assemblies (I Cor 14:15, 26)
- e. This still does not justify the addition of instrumentation with Christian worship