

"Worship in Song"

God desires our worship in song to glorify Him, and be done in spirit and in truth. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders and this is a Bible study, In Search of the Lord's Way. How we worship God in song matters to God, and it should matter to us.

Welcome to In Search of the Lord's Way; we're here to search God's Word for the truth. Because the Bible is inspired of God, we know it will lead us to what is right. God's Word is a light to our paths and a lamp to our feet (Psalm 119:105). And that's why we go to it again and again. Thanks for spending time with us. We love to hear from you and want to be a part of your life each week.

I love to sing hymns. I have my favorites, and I'm sure that you do too. I can't remember a time when songs like "Amazing Grace" or "The Old Rugged Cross" weren't a part of my life. Jackie and I had the song "Be With Me, Lord" sung at our wedding, only we changed the words "Be with Us, Lord." Jackie and I sang spiritual songs with our four children, because we wanted to instill in our daughters the love that we had for God.

Hymns and spiritual songs praise God, teach valuable lessons, and stir the heart. Singing involves the heart, the mind, and the lips to praise God and to build up one another. The Lord blessed us greatly when He instructed us to sing from our hearts. Some of the most memorable moments of my life were spent worshipping God in song.

The music of the church provides a blessing, but it also has challenges. Many focus on what they like in songs and lose sight of what the Lord desires. Others go beyond what the Lord asks. Since the Lord seeks for those who will worship Him, to worship Him in spirit and in truth, it's necessary to ask what the will of God is. What is the Lord's way, for us to worship Him in song?

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Larry Owsley will lead the Edmond church in song, and then we'll read from Ephesians 5:17 to 21.

Our reading today comes from Ephesians 5:17 to 21, and it helps us to understand how we are to approach God in song. "So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but 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; always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father; and be subject to one another in the fear of Christ." That's a reading from God's holy word.

Let's pray together. "Heavenly Father help us to know what the will of God is, and to do that will. Help us to show our love to You as we sing from our hearts. This is our prayer in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen."

To learn the truth about Christian worship in song, we must go to the New Testament. So let's review the relevant passages pertaining to musical worship among Christians. The first mention of singing a hymn in the New Testament is found in Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26. The Lord instituted the Lord's Supper; "And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

In Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison with their feet in stocks for the healing of a servant girl. And the Bible says, "But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and

singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” Now so far, we’ve only seen simple statements of people singing.

In Romans 15 and verse 9, the apostle Paul speaks of the Gentiles glorifying God; as it is written, “Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” Well this quotation emphasizes how a congregation together with one voice glorify God (Romans 15 verse 6).

In 1 Corinthians 14, there are two references to singing. Verse 15 says, “What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also.” Now here the emphasis in singing is on the spirit and the mind. Verse 26 says, “What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.” The early church edified each other by teaching songs.

Ephesians 5:18 to 19 says, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but 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.” Now the emphasis in this passage is on speaking to one another and in making melody with the heart to the Lord. The voice and the heart are involved. The idea of playing instruments in worship is absent. There were no choirs in those days, because everyone was to sing.

Colossians 3 and verse 16 is a similar passage: “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Now the emphasis again is on singing words that teach and admonish. These are activities that require the heart, the mind, and the lips.

The writer of the book of Hebrews twice mentions praising God in song. First, Hebrews 2 and verse 12 quotes from Psalm 22:22, “I will proclaim Thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise.” Again the idea is verbal, proclaiming and singing. Second, Hebrews 13 and verse 15 says, “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.” Now the last mention of Christian worship in song is found in James 5 verse 13, which says, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises.”

In every instance, the music described in Christian worship emphasizes verbal communication: singing, speaking, teaching, admonishing, making melody in your hearts, confessing, giving thanks, proclaiming, and the fruit of lips. The clear instruction of the New Testament is that we should sing from our hearts praise to God. Now instruments of music cannot speak, teach, admonish, give thanks, praise, proclaim, confess, or make melody in your heart. Instruments of music fail to do any of them. And that’s why they become additions; they go beyond the instructions of the New Testament.

No mention of instrumental music in the New Testament worship is remarkable! Neither Jesus nor the apostles commanded them. The New Testament gives no example of churches using them in worship. And God desires music of the mind and of the spirit. God purposely did not include instruments.

Now you might question why we’re discussing instruments in Christian worship. Well most people think churches have always used instruments of music in worship. They’re surprised that some churches don’t use instruments, and they think it’s peculiar. Churches, however, didn’t always use instruments; and some churches, like the Orthodox churches, have never used instruments. The word a cappella is a reference to singing unaccompanied and means “in the manner of the church.”

You see, early Christians rejected the use of instruments in worship. In fact, for several centuries they were firmly opposed to using instruments. Not until several centuries later did churches begin using the instrument. While Jews and Greek pagan religions used instruments in worship, Christians did not. Converts from the Jews and pagans knew this, but early churches didn't start using instruments to placate their converts. They consciously said no, because they had no God-given reason to use them.

Dr. Everett Ferguson, a noted church historian, said, "It's quite late before there is evidence of instrumental music, first the organ, employed in the public worship of the church. And recent studies put the introduction of instrumental music even later than the dates found in reference books. It was perhaps as late as the tenth century when the organ was played as part of the service. This makes instrumental music one of the late innovations of the medieval Catholic church."

As late as 1250 AD, Thomas Aquinas said, "Our church does not use instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God with all, that she may not seem to Judaize." He understood harps were for Jews not Christians. Instruments of music came along as an innovation brought in because people wanted them, not because the New Testament instructed them.

God has spoken to us in His Word. And the Lord promised the Holy Spirit would guide the apostles into all the truth in John 16:13. Now "All the truth" means the New Testament teaches us everything God wanted us to know to have eternal life and to live the Christian life. Nothing is missing. God hasn't forgotten something.

And since God has revealed all the truth, He didn't need to say more. He's taught us everything that we need to know. To add more or to pursue additional practices says to God that His teaching was not sufficient. And how is God honored when men are not content and decide to add practices to their worship? To start new practices, going beyond God's teaching, is presumptuous. It fails to listen to God and does what it wishes.

The Lord said in John 8:31 to 32 that "If you abide in my word, then you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Christ here defines a true disciple. A true disciple abides in His word. He doesn't add to it, take away from it, reinvent it, or change it. He stays in the boundaries of the teaching and instructions of the word. The person who stays with the word will know the truth, and the truth will set him free. When you leave with the word, that word, and you tamper with the truth, then you begin to buy into half-truths and man-made religion.

Someone says, "Well Phil, don't you know that David played the harp?" Well yes, I'm aware of passages like Psalm 150 and 2 Chronicles 29:25. I also know that David lived a thousand years before Jesus Christ. David was not a Christian, and we are exploring how Christians worshiped not how the Israelites in David's time worshiped. We don't offer animal sacrifices as David did. You see, David lived under the old covenant, while we live under the new covenant. According to 2 Chronicles 29:25, God approved of harps in the worship of the temple under the old covenant; but the New Testament never speaks of the use of instruments of music in Christian worship.

Some say the word "psalm" and the Greek word psallo, used in Ephesians 5:19 for "making music in the heart," permits us to play instruments. Well while it is true that many years before the time of the New Testament the Greek word psallo meant to pluck on a string or to play a harp, the word changed in its meaning over time. Well how did this happen?

Well the Jews sang psalms with instruments in the Temple, but sang without instruments elsewhere. Musical worship in the temple was limited to the Levites who had choirs with many instruments, but the worship of the synagogue, that had been going for centuries had no musical

instruments. From day to day, and Sabbath to Sabbath, in their homes and in the synagogues Jews regularly sang psalms for hundreds of years without any use of the harp.

So when the word psallo or the word psalm was used, they normally thought of singing the words of the song unaccompanied. It never occurred to early Christians, who knew Greek better than we do, that the words psallo or psalms meant that we should or we could use instruments in our worship. Now if those words had pointed to instruments, why didn't the early church use them? Why did they refuse to use them? Why did it take many centuries before someone started using them?

You see others ask, "Well Phil, aren't people playing harps in heaven?" Yes, John's visions found in the highly figurative book of Revelation speaks of harps in heaven. But saints in heaven also wear crowns and cast them before the throne of God. Angels and people in heaven say many things in heaven that we're not allowed to say on earth (2 Corinthians 12 and verse 4). You see, heaven and earth are very different.

Now our task is not to imitate the worship in heaven, but to obey Jesus and His teachings in the New Testament. If harps in heaven means the church ought to play harps, why didn't the apostles and the early church understand they were supposed to play them? Why did they refuse to play them for centuries?

Someone says, "Well the Bible doesn't condemn playing a piano!" Well that's true; it doesn't say that. But neither does the Bible specifically condemn burning incense, praying to Mary, using roast lamb in the Lord's Supper, offering animal sacrifices today, substituting sprinkling for immersion in baptism, or baptizing infants. Just because the Bible doesn't specifically condemn something doesn't mean that God approves it. The word of God is all-sufficient, containing all that God wants us to believe and to practice. If God wanted us to use instruments in the church, He would have told us to do so.

Using instruments of music in worship comes not from God but from men. The right question is not "Where does the Bible condemn an instrument in worship?" but rather, "Where does the all-sufficient Word of God authorize using instruments of music in Christian worship?" You see to act without God's permission or instruction is presumptuous.

Now if the Bible included everything that God condemned, it surely would be too large to carry. The Lord chose to instruct us in positive terms what His will is for worship. He has shown us the way, which rules out other ways. There is "one baptism" (Ephesians 4 and verse 5); and that means there are no other approved baptisms. The Bible says there is "one gospel" in Galatians 1:6 to 9 and condemns any other gospel. The Bible says there is "one body" (or church, in Ephesians 4 and verse 4; and chapter 1, verses 22 and 23). That means there cannot be other approved churches.

The specific instruction to sing means one should sing. There is no authority for us to add other forms of music. When God instructs us through His Word, He tells us what He wants. We shouldn't expect God to exclude all other possibilities with a series of "don'ts."

If I order fried chicken and mashed potatoes at my favorite restaurant, I expect the waitress to bring just what I ordered. If she brought me liver and onions, I'd say to her, "This is not what I ordered; I ordered fried chicken and mashed potatoes." You see, telling her what I specifically want excludes everything else. Wouldn't it be ridiculous if I read the menu and told her everything I don't want? We should hear God and do what God wants.

Let's pray together. "Heavenly father we're thankful that You have given us Your word, and it has taught us what You wish for us to do, and for us to believe, and for us to be. Help us always to put ourselves aside and to do Your will, and Your will alone. In Jesus name, Amen."

The Lord Jesus said in Matthew 7:24 to 27, “Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

Wisdom is hearing God’s word and doing what God said. Foolishness is hearing God’s word but doing what you want. The New Testament reveals the Lord’s instructions about singing in Christian worship. Not one word is said about using instruments of music. There weren’t any used in church for hundreds of years. Now, let’s put singing in worship on one side and singing with instruments on the other. They’re different, aren’t they? Which one is wise and follows the Lord’s teaching and which one is foolish? Which does the Lord’s will and which is an innovation of man?

Likewise, we should come to God in faith and obedience. And if you’re not yet a Christian, a child of God, why not become one today. You can do so by believing Jesus is the Christ, by repenting of your sins, by confessing Jesus as the Son of God, and by being baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 and verse 38). That’s how people in the book of Acts became Christians, and how you too can become one.

We hope you’ve been blessed by today’s study about worship in song. If you want a free printed copy of this message and live in the United States, mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or by e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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We do ask that you focus your heart on God by worshiping at church. Today is a good day to start back to church if you haven’t been attending. Everybody needs a church family. And there’s probably a church of Christ that’s near you. And if you’re looking for a healthy, Biblical church home, we’ll gladly help you find one. We hope that you’ll watch our program regularly. We will be back next week, Lord willing. So keep searching God’s Word with us, tell a friend about this program, let them know that you’re watching and that you want them to watch. Be sure to tell the folks around you about what we do here. As always, God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord’s Way.