

"Worship in Song"

God desires our worship in song to glorify Him in spirit and in truth. Hello, I'm Phil Sanders and this is a Bible study, In Search of the Lord's Way. And 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 God's will. Because the Bible is inspired of God, we can trust it to keep us on the right track. God's Word is a light to our paths and a lamp to our feet (Psalm 119 verse 105). We go to God's Word as the authority for all that we do. Thanks for spending this 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 cannot remember a time when singing hymns was not a part of my life. Jackie and I had the song "Be With Me, Lord" sung at our wedding, only we changed the words to "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. Now our girls are old enough to sing hymns and spiritual songs with their children. Some of the happiest moments of our lives have been spent worshiping God in song.

Hymns and spiritual songs praise God, they teach valuable lessons, and they stir the heart. Singing involves the whole person: the heart, the mind, the voice, and the lips. Songs send a message of love, thanksgiving, and adoration. By singing, we praise God and build up one another. The Lord blessed us greatly when He instructed us to sing from our hearts.

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

Now we offer the information on this program free. And if you'd like a printed copy or a CD of this lesson, we offer it to you free. So mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send us an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org. Or, if you like, call our toll-free telephone number. We'll pay for the call. That number is 1-800-321-8633. We also stream this program on our website at www.searchtv.org. The Edmond church will now worship in song, and then we'll read from Ephesians 5 verses 17 to 21.

Our reading today comes from the book of Ephesians chapter 5 verses 17 to 21. 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 good teaching from the word of God. Let's pray together. Father we're grateful that You do reveal to us what Your will is. Help us Father to listen and be careful students. May Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, 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 verse 30 and a like passage in Mark 14 verse 26. The Lord had just instituted the Lord's Supper; "And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

In the book of Acts chapter 16 verse 25, Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown into prison and they had their feet in the stocks for healing 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 these are simple statements about Christians singing.

In Romans 15 verse 9 Paul speaks of the Gentiles glorifying God; as it is written, "Therefore I will give praise to thee among the gentiles, and I will sing to thy name." Now this quotation emphasizes how a congregation in one accord and with one voice should glorify God (Romans 15 and verse 6).

In 1 Corinthians 14, there are two references to singing. Verse 15 says, "I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also." 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." Now the early church edified each other by teaching songs and singing them.

Ephesians 5 verses 18 and 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 idea of having concerts or of playing instruments of music in worship is absent in these passages. There were no choirs, because everyone was to sing.

Colossians 3 verse 16 says, "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." 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, in Hebrews 2 and verse 12 which 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 (that is through Jesus) 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."

Now in each 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 the things that are in God's instructions. They are additions that go beyond the instructions of the New Testament.

The fact there is no reference in the New Testament to the use of instrumental music in Christian worship is startling! Neither Jesus nor the apostles commanded them. The New Testament gives no example of churches using them in worship. God desires singing from the heart, but He is silent about using instruments.

Well, why do you bring up instruments in Christian worship? Most people think churches have always used instruments of music in worship. And they're surprised that some churches don't use instruments, and they think it's peculiar. The early church, however, didn't 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.”

Early Christians actually rejected instrumental music in worship. For several centuries, they strongly opposed using instruments. Not until the thirteenth century did churches widely begin using the instruments. Both Jews and Greeks used instruments in their worship. But converts to Christianity, they knew this, but they still sang unaccompanied. They consciously said no, because they had no God-given reason to use them.

Dr. Everett Ferguson said, “It is quite late before there is evidence of instrumental music, first the organ, played in the public worship of the church. Recent studies put the introduction of instrumental music even later, he says, 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 withal, that she may not seem to Judaize.” He understood that harps were for Jews not for Christians. Instruments of music came along as an innovation brought in because people wanted them, not because the New Testament gave instructions for them.

Now God has revealed His will in His Word. 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. We shouldn’t imagine that God has forgotten something.

When God revealed all the truth, He did not need to say more. To think we need more and to introduce new practices denies that we have all the truth. When we aren’t content with God’s teaching but go beyond that teaching, we’re actually showing dishonor to God. Starting new practices, going beyond God’s teaching, is presumptuous. It fails to listen to God and it builds on sand.

The Lord said in John 8 verses 31 and 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.” Now Christ here reveals the mark of 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. Now the person who stays with the word will know the truth, and the truth will set him free. When you leave the word or you tamper with the truth, you end up with man-made religion.

Someone says “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, my friend, was not a Christian, and we’re exploring how Christians worshiped not how the Israelites of old worshiped. We don’t offer animal sacrifices as David did. 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 that the word “psalm” and the Greek word psallo, used in Ephesians 5:19 for “making music in the heart,” permits us to play instruments. While it is true that many years before the New Testament the Greek word psallo meant to pluck on a string or play a harp, however the word changed in meaning over time. Someone says well how did this happen?

The Jews sang psalms with instruments in the Temple but sang without them outside the temple. Musical worship in the temple was limited to the Levites who had choirs with many instruments, but the worship outside had no musical instruments. Jews regularly sang psalms for hundreds of years

without any use of the harp. They chanted psalms and many of their daily prayers without any instrument at all.

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

Others ask, "Phil, aren't people playing harps in heaven?" Yes, John's visions found in the highly figurative book of Revelations speaks of harps in heaven. 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 Christians are not allowed to say on earth (2 Corinthians 12 and verse 4). You see heaven and earth are very different. Let's ask "What does God want us, on earth, to do?"

Our task is not to imitate what's done 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 that. That they were supposed to play them? Why did they refuse to play them for centuries?

Someone says, "Well Phil, that's just your tradition." Well the word tradition speaks of what has been passed down from an authority. We have an authority in Scripture for singing. It's the use of instruments that is of human origin.

Someone says, "Well the Bible doesn't condemn playing an organ!" Well that's true; it doesn't say that particular phrase. But neither does the Bible specifically condemn burning incense in the church, or praying to saints, or using roast lamb in the Lord's Supper, or offering animal sacrifices, or substituting sprinkling for immersion in baptism, or baptizing infants. Just because the Bible doesn't specifically condemn something doesn't mean that God approves of it.

Now these things, like using an instrument of music in worship, come not from God but from men. The right question is not "Where does the Bible condemn an instrument in worship?" but rather the question should be, "Where does the New Testament instruct us to use instruments of music in Christian worship?" To act without God's instruction, without His teaching, is presumptuous; it's building on sand.

If the Bible were to include everything that God condemned, why it would surely be too large to carry. The Lord has chosen to instruct us in positive terms what His will is for our lives and our worship. He has shown us the way, which rules out all other ways. There is only "one baptism" (Ephesians 4 and verse 5); and that means that there cannot be other approved baptisms. The Bible says there is only "one gospel" in Galatians 1:6 to 9 and so that condemns any other gospel. The Bible says there is "one body" (or church, Ephesians 4 and verse 4; and in chapter 1:22 to 23). And that means there cannot be other approved churches.

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

Now if I went to a restaurant and I order fried chicken and mashed potatoes, I'd expect the waitress to bring just what I ordered. If she brought me liver and onions, I'd say to her, "Well this is not what I ordered; I ordered fried chicken and mashed potatoes." You see telling her what I want specifically excludes everything else. Wouldn't it be ridiculous if I had to go down the whole menu and

tell her everything I don't want? Folks we need hear and do what God says. Let's pray together. Oh Father we're thankful that You have taught us how to worship You in spirit and in truth and to do Your will. Father, help us every day to do Your will on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus name, Amen.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24 to 27, the Lord told this story: "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 it. Foolishness is hearing God's word but doing something else that you want to do. Now I can read clearly in the New Testament the Lord's instructions about singing in worship. Not one word of the New Testament is said about using instruments of music in Christian worship. They weren't used in any 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? Well let me ask you this question. Which one is wise and follows the Lord's teaching and which one is foolish by failing to do what God teaches? Which does the Lord's will and which is an innovation of man?

In the same way, we should come to God in faith and obedience. If there is sin in your life and you are not yet a child of God, a Christian, why not become one today. You can do so by believing Jesus is the Christ, by repenting of your sins, by confessing Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized in water for the forgiveness of your sins (Acts 2 verse 38). That's how people became Christians according to the Scriptures, and how you can become one too. Be wise and follow what the Lord teaches. You'll never regret doing the right thing.

We hope you've been blessed by today's study of God's Word. If you'd like this little free book on worship that we have, a copy of it or a CD of our message today. Then we're offering them free. Mail your request to In Search of the Lord's Way, P.O. Box 371, Edmond, OK 73083 or send an e-mail to searchtv@searchtv.org.

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Please attend worship at one of the churches of Christ in your area. Oh, they love guests, and you'll be glad that you visited. Well we'll be back next week, Lord willing. So we ask that you keep searching God's Word. God bless you and we love you from all of us at In Search of the Lord's Way.