

Sing With The Understanding

Adapted from an Article by Jake Van Dyke

HISTORY OF CHURCH SINGING

Little is written about the history of Christian Music. The church fathers down thru history that referred to music usually did so briefly while directing their attention to some other subject.

Most of their writing that does mention music in the church refers to psalms which had been adopted from the synagogue and applied to Christian worship. Those psalms were often chanted to a simple tune, not merely recited. It is easier to remember the thoughts and rhymes of a song than of poem without a tune.

Early writers were clear in drawing a line between the delights of the world and the holiness required by God. They denounced musical pagan practices and the use of instruments that went with it. They deal with the use of music in what they called the liturgy.

Liturgy is the organized form of worship which developed over time into a ritual. It would be in various forms at different places and cultures, beginning with just keeping everything happening "decently and in order" until it became a standard practice, and then a ritual.

OLD TESTAMENT VS NEW TESTAMENT MUSIC

The Old Testament Law was silent about the use of the musical instrument in worship. The Mosaic Law was a system tied to material things. They offered bulls and goats as sacrifice for sin. They built a Tabernacle and later a Temple for the dwelling place of God.

Their covenant represented by the Ark of the Covenant wherein God presence resided and where Moses was to meet God. They burned incense made of spices and gums. Their praise to God in song beginning with David was accompanied with a material instrument such as the harp or other stringed inventions. Amos 6:5 tells us they "invented the use of these instruments for themselves like David."

NEW TESTAMENT SINGING

When moving from the Old Testament worship to the New Testament) worship one of the most conspicuous changes is there is no longer worship with material things The blood of bulls and goat is no longer needed as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus paid it all with the blood sacrifice of the Son of God, once for all! God no longer dwells in temples made with hands (Acts 17:24) but in the hearts of His obedient and faithful people.

“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.” (Col. 3:16-17) Worship to God with our heart and make melody in our heart as we sing to God and one another.”

Jesus said to the woman at the well in Samaria, "God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and in truth." (John 4:21)

The sweet smell that goes up to God is no longer the smoke of spices or gums, but the sweet odor of songs and prayers of God's saints.

Under a system of material worship those material instruments, though not commanded. were acceptable and useful. No longer are dead animals offered to God as they were in the Old Covenant. The sacrifice to God in the New Covenant is a living sacrifice of continual worship by His people in spirit and in truth. (Romans 12:1-2)

Likewise, the praising to God through singing was no longer done with the material instrument, but on the divinely created instrument of the heart and the human voice.

The most basic purpose of singing in worship is praising God. But, singing can be done anytime, not just during the assembly for worship. In Acts 16:25 Paul and Silas were in prison. Singing even outside the church assembly has positive effects.

The reasons for the songs in the assembly of those in His Body, (His Church) are to praise God and acknowledge the glory of His name, and to edify, teaching and admonishing, the brethren, it says "one another " or "Speaking to yourselves in Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs. This teaching and admonishing even happens in a prison as we saw in that prison event with Paul and Silas.

Another reason is to give thanks to God for who He is and all the blessings of life we receive, both temporal and spiritual. Thanks can be given to God in prayers or

in songs anytime. Singing is an expression of the heart. "Is any among you afflicted? Let him pray. Is any merry? Let him sing Psalms." (James 5:13) This demonstrates the reaction to emotions which happen anytime. Singing gives spiritual refreshment anytime, anywhere, whether in individual situations or in a congregational setting. It can be a time to renew mind and spirit.

Singing as the scripture designates is making melody in our hearts, singing with grace, and with understanding. Singing should teach and admonish one another and praise God with the fruit of our lips. We should sing songs of comfort, hope, and joy. We should sing of the goodness of God and the future home of the saints. By singing we can pour out our feelings to God and each other and be mutually blessed by it.

These questions each Christian and congregations must answer are:

1. Do those singing understand what they are saying to God?
2. Are the words of the song truly what the singer desires? Such "anywhere with Jesus I will go" or Lord come quickly."
3. Were the words of the song true to the scriptures or error?
4. Did the singing leave those not musically inclined confused?
5. Is the focus on the sound or on message to God and the brethren? "The singing really sounded good today.
6. Are feelings and emotions put into the thought?

May our hearts be blended together as well as our voices that we might all worship and serve God according to the pattern found in the New Testament.