

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

WORSHIP “Singing”

Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Ben Bailey.

“Do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:18-19). Welcome to our study on singing as a part of worship. Worship is a very important part of the Christian life, and is something in which each of us must be involved, just as God has commanded us within the Scriptures. One important aspect of our worship is singing “with the spirit and with the understanding” (1 Cor. 14:15). Today we want to examine what the New Testament has to say on the subject of singing.

As we begin, let’s remind ourselves once more of the source of our authority regarding matters of worship, because this is crucial in praising God in song in a way that is acceptable to Him. Our authority today is the Bible—and specifically the New Testament. The Bible teaches that Jesus possesses “all authority in Heaven and on Earth” (Mt. 28:18). The Bible also teaches us that we must not “think beyond what is written” (1 Cor. 4:6). And the Bible clearly says that we are not to add to or take away from the Word of God, lest the condemnations of God fall upon us (Rev. 22:18-19). In the words of Jesus’ mother in John 2:5, we need to understand, “Whatever He [Jesus] says, do it.” Thus, if we are going to worship God in song in an acceptable way, we must do that based on the authority found within His Word. King Solomon said long ago in Proverbs 30:6, “Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you and you be found a liar.”

When it comes to singing, the New Testament is the authority that we must follow today in regard to our worship of God. We are not to worship as people did under the Old Law. We are not to go to Jerusalem. We are not to engage in a feast of booths in the month of October. Nor are we to offer animal sacrifices. We do not worship today like people did under the Old Law because we live in the sunlight age of Christianity. The Scriptures teach that the Old Law has been nailed to the cross. Colossians 2:14 and Ephesians 2:14ff. both teach that the Old Law was nailed to the cross, and therefore is no longer applicable to us. As Paul explained in Romans 7:1-10, Christians are “dead to” the Old Law. In fact, the Old Law itself clearly taught that it was not going to last forever. Jeremiah wrote, “‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah’” (Jer. 31:31). Hebrews 8:13 tells us that the new covenant has made the first covenant “old and obsolete.” Thus, Christians are to follow the New Testament as God’s law today. And it is the New Testament upon which we are to base our worship. The Old Testament does teach us, of course, about people who suffered tragic consequences because they did not respect God’s authority. Consider Moses, for example. He was a great servant of God. But there was an instance in Moses’ life in which He did not follow God’s command, and as a result he suffered for his disobedience. The Israelites needed water. God told Moses to speak to a rock, and it would give forth water. Moses, in his frustration with the unruly Israelites, struck the rock instead of speak-

ing to it. The consequences of that act were that Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. There are always tragic consequences when we do not obey the Law of God. Another example is found in Leviticus 10:1-2, where we are told,

“Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord.”

From this example, it is clear that these two men did something that was not commanded, and that therefore was unauthorized. As a result, they died for their illicit actions. The practical lesson that we need to learn is that we must never put anything into our worship that God has not authorized. If God had wanted it, He would have told us. If He has not said anything about it, then we must not add to His Word. We need to understand today that our authority for how we sing praises to God does not come from the Old Law. Rather, that authority comes from the New Testament. We must worship God correctly in song.

With that in mind, let us inquire as to what the New Testament says about singing. Let's examine all the passages in the New Testament that address the subject of singing, beginning in Matthew 26:30 where we read that Jesus and His disciples “sang a hymn and went out.” They sang a song to glorify God, and then they left the assembly where they had been together. In Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas were in a dungeon in Philippi, where they were singing and praying to God while the other prisoners were listening to them. In Romans 15:9 Paul told first-century Christians to confess God's name among the Gentiles and to sing God's name. In Hebrews 2:12 we are told to sing in the assembly of the saints. Ephesians 5:19 says that we are to “speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord.” Colossians 3:16 admonishes us, “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.” These last two passages teach us that when we sing, it is reciprocal because we sing one to another (as well as to the Lord). Are we to make melody on an organ, piano, or guitar? No, we are to make melody “in our hearts.” How do we do that? Paul answered that in 1 Corinthians 14:15 when he wrote, “I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” We are to pray and sing with enthusiasm—with all of our soul, mind, and being. When we do that “in spirit and understanding,” that is how we make a joyful noise unto the Lord.

Singing is a very important part of the Christian life. James 5:13 tells us, “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.” John 4:24 (“God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth”) explains that God is glorified when we worship Him acceptably. When we talk about singing, we must understand that, in the New Testament, God never authorized us to use mechanical instruments of music. It is impossible to find mechanical instruments of music being used in the New Testament in the worship of God by first-century Christians. They simply did not use such instruments. There is no authority in the New Testament for the use of such instruments. Remember that in Revelation 22:18-19 we are told that we must not add to or take from the Word of God. If we are not to add to God's Word, and if the use of instruments is not in the New Testament, then how can we use instruments of music in our worship to God? If we add instruments of music to our worship, then we are spoiling the purity of New Testament Christianity. By adding instruments of music to our worship, we are violating Revelation 22:18-19. In Colossians 3:17 we are told, “Whatever you do in word or deed, do **all** in the name of [Acts 4:7—“by the authority of”] the Lord Jesus.” Where is Jesus' authority in the New Testament for us to include instruments of music in our worship of God? Can you name one passage where Jesus authorized

the use of instrumental music? No, you cannot—because there is no such passage. Note, too, that an instrument can never admonish or teach anyone. We are to “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.” How many instruments do you know that can teach or admonish someone regarding the principles of Christianity? They cannot—because they simply do not possess the mind and intellect with which to do such a thing. Only a child of God can do that. What we recognize as “the law of exclusion” teaches us that when God commands something, that is **all** He wants. And what He has commanded is exactly what He wants us to obey. Let me illustrate. Look at Hebrews 8:5, where we read of those “who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” There is a pattern for Christians today as well. God has given us a pattern for our worship and for the organization of the church. Just as He told Moses, we are to make everything “according to the pattern.” Our pattern today is that we follow God’s will as set forth in the New Testament.

When God tells us what He wants, we need to understand that is **all** He wants. Suppose you telephoned the local pizza place to order a pizza with pepperoni and black olives. When your doorbell rings about thirty minutes later, you take the pizza from the delivery person. But when you open the box, the pizza does indeed have pepperoni and black olives on it, but it also has anchovies and bell peppers. So, you call the pizza place and say, “Something is wrong with my pizza. I said I wanted pepperoni and black olives. I didn’t say anything about anchovies and bell peppers.” How would you feel if the pizza parlor said, “Well, you didn’t say **not** to put anchovies and bell peppers on your pizza”? Would you accept such reasoning? Just because you did not **specifically exclude** every pizza topping did not mean that you **wanted** every single topping on your pizza! When we say what we want, that is **all** we want. We understand that in our daily lives, so why can’t we understand it when it comes to Scripture? When God tells us to sing and make melody **in our hearts**, and there is no mention of any kind of instrumental music in the New Testament in Christian worship, how could we ever justify adding instrumental music to our worship? It is amazing that even denominational leaders in the past have recognized this principle. I recognize, of course, that such people are not the authorities in this matter, and that I am not the authority. **God** is the Authority. But I would like you to see that many of the people who started the denominations that use instrumental music in their worship knew that the use of such instruments was wrong. Let me illustrate.

Catholicism taught from its earliest days that the use of instrumental music in worship of God was wrong. The *Catholic Encyclopedia* says, “The first Christians were of too spiritual a fiber to substitute lifeless instruments for, or to use them to accompany, the human voice.” If the first Christians were “too spiritual” to use instruments of music in their worship, then the use of such instruments obviously would be “**unspiritual**.” The Catholic Church recognizes that first-century Christians did not use instruments of music in their worship.

In the Greek Orthodox Church, as Constantine Cavarnos has pointed out in *Byzantine Sacred Music*, “The execution of Byzantine church music by instruments, or even the accompaniment of sacred chanting by instruments, was ruled out by the Eastern Fathers as being incompatible with the pure, solemn, spiritual character of the religion of Christ.” Cavarnos is not our authority for what we should do in religion. Yet he admitted that the use of instrumental music in Christian worship is “incompatible with the pure, solemn, spiritual character of the religion of Christ.”

Another important religious figure is John Calvin, the originator of the Presbyterian movement. In his commentary on Psalms Calvin said,

“Musical instruments, in celebrating the praises of God, would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, or the restoration of the other shadows of the Law. The papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise, but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostles is far more pleasing.”

Calvin admitted that men often bring into their worship of God things that are unauthorized because of their own desire for “outward pomp.” Yet such things are not included in what God has taught us through His Word.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, stated very simply, “I have no objections to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither seen nor heard.” That is a telling statement from Wesley, whose position was that instruments of music were fine as long as no one could see or hear them. How true that is!

Adam Clarke, a popular Methodist commentator, wrote,

“Music, as a science, I esteem and admire. But instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music. And here I register my protest of all such corruptions of the worship of the Author of Christianity.”

Clarke referred to the use of instrumental music in worship to God as “a corruption” or defilement of that which was right and pure in God’s sight.

Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran movement, is quoted in the McClintock and Strong *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* as saying that instrumental music was “an ensign of Baal.” What?! Instrumental music is a tool to be used in worshipping a false God? That is how Luther viewed instruments of music when used in worship of God.

Well-known Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon said, “I would as soon attempt to pray to God with machinery as to sing to him with machinery.” How many of us would consider using a “prayer wheel” in our prayers to God? None of us would do that! Why, then, would we think it would be acceptable to sing to God with a mechanical instrument if it we would not pray to Him with one? Neither is authorized or commanded. Thus, we must not include them in Christian worship today.

J.H. Garrison of the Christian Church said, “There is no command in the New Testament, Greek or English, commanding the use of the instrument. Such a command would be entirely out of harmony with the New Testament.” The Christian Church generally uses instruments of music in its worship, yet even one of their own scholars recognizes that the use of such is out of harmony with the teaching of Christ.

John Girardo, a Presbyterian professor at Columbia Theological Seminary and author of *Music and the Church*, wrote, “The church, although lapsing more and more into defection from the truth and into corruption of apostolic practice, had no instrumental music for twelve hundred years. That is, it was not in general use until that time.”

While none of these men is the final authority in matters of religion, we need to recognize that the founders of numerous prominent denominations (which do use instrumental music in their worship) recognized that instruments of music were never commanded by God, and that they represent a corruption of what is right and true. For twelve hundred years people recognized that, and did not use instruments of music in Christian worship. What has happened, then? The religious fiber of our society has been corroding for a long time. People no longer want to take the Bible and the Bible alone as their sole authority in religious matters. Our plea in the churches of Christ is that we go “back to the Bible.” In Jeremiah 6:16 we read, “Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, where the good way

is, and walk in it; then you will find rest for your souls.” Yet in the latter part of that verse we find the sad statement from the people: “We will not!” So many today are saying the same thing. We are pleading, “Let’s go back to the Bible!” Yet so many people today are saying, “We will not!” because that is not what they want to do. Much of the problem associated with the use of instrumental music today centers on the fact that people want to please themselves by worshiping God the way **they** want to worship Him instead of the way **He** has commanded. Worship has become so entertainment driven that some people feel like they need a rock band on stage in order to attract a big crowd (and to produce a big financial contribution!). Much of religion today is about “being popular.” Yet the Scriptures teach us that we must not “follow a multitude to do evil” (Ex. 23:2). The Bible teaches us that most people are going down a road that leads to eternal destruction (Mt. 7:13-14). So when we sing, we need to do so in the way God has instructed us.

Now let us look at some ways in which we can improve our singing. One way we can do that is to ensure that everyone is actually singing! We **all** need to sing if our singing is going to be what God wants it to be. We must realize that singing is not an option that we can “do” or “not do.” Regardless of the quality of a person’s voice (in his own mind) or how a person might “feel,” the fact remains that **singing is a command of God**. We are to “speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). We are commanded, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another.” Those are not optional matters, but are commands that we must obey if we intend to please God. If we sit in the pew like a bump on a log and with a grouchy look on our faces, never moving our lips during worship, then we have failed to obey the command of God regarding singing in worship. And by doing that, we will have given Christ our Savior the least that we could possibly give Him. Very little could be worse than simply sitting in worship like a bump on a log and not doing anything! If we want to improve our singing, then we need to sing out and do the very best we can.

Another way to improve our singing is by thinking about and meditating on the words of the songs we sing. Notice again what the Bible says in 1 Corinthians 14:15—“I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” “Singing with the understanding” means that we must think about and meditate on the songs. We probably all have sung, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound!” But have we really thought about and meditated on God’s amazing grace—a grace which demanded that Christ leave Heaven and come to Earth, a grace that is found only in Jesus Christ (Jn. 1:17), and a grace that is founded upon faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9)? Grace is “God’s riches at Christ’s expense.” When we sing songs like “Amazing Grace,” do we really think about all that Jesus did for us? When we sing songs like “The Old Rugged Cross,” do we mouth the words without really thinking about what they mean? Do we really see Christ suffering on the cross? Do we really understand what the cross symbolizes, and how it was (from man’s point of view) a curse—while being a blessing to the child of God? Do we really understand and think about what we are singing? If we were to do that, there might be some songs that we would have difficulty singing. For example, could we really sing “Jesus Is Coming Soon” if we really thought about the words of the song? The Bible teaches that no one knows the hour or time when Jesus will come again (Mt. 24:34-36). It might be soon, or it might not. The time is simply not known to us, or knowable by us. How, then, can we sing, “Jesus Is Coming Soon” if we don’t know when He is coming? We are to sing with the understanding in order to sing scripturally. This may require us to recognize that some of the songs in the books we use are incorrect. We need to check our songs against Scripture in order to ensure that they are right. Thus, we must think about and meditate on the words of the songs we sing.

Another way to improve our singing is to sing as if when we sing, it is our opportunity to teach someone the truth. Do you think about singing in that way? Are we to teach and admonish one another through out singing? Colossians 3:16 says that we are. Singing is a way of teaching and of spreading God's Word. So then, let us sing as if we were actually teaching someone. There are people who might never have the courage or ability to stand before a crowd to preach publicly. Yet they can teach during singing. The words of the songs that we sing ought to encourage, admonish, and lift up every person. We need to sing with feeling and emotion—yet all the while be guided by the truth of God's Word. It is difficult, at times, not to get emotional when we sing certain songs like "How Beautiful Heaven Must Be!" It is hard not to get emotional when we think of the beauty and joy of the place called "Heaven." In Romans 8:18 Paul said, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Our emotions and feelings (guided by truth) ought to be involved in our singing. We **must** have feeling in our singing. It cannot be dead and lifeless. In Revelation 2:4 Jesus condemned certain Christians because they had "lost their first love." They were no longer doing things for the right reasons. They had lost their zeal and desire to be right with God. Today, then, our spirit must be involved in our singing—all the while being guided by the truth. John 4:24 admonishes to worship God "in spirit and in truth."

Is your worship in song what God wants it to be? Remember that worship is for the child of God. It is specifically for Christians. Maybe you have not been worshiping God acceptably because you have never obeyed the Gospel. What does a person have to do to become a child of God? Let's take just a moment to see what a person must do to become a Christian in order to worship God acceptably. The Bible teaches that we must hear the Word of God. Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." We must go to the Bible to see what God says on the subject, and allow Him to provide the answer. Hebrews 11:6 says that "without faith, it is impossible to please God." We must have faith, and the only way to do that is by hearing the Word of God. Then we must believe that Jesus is God's Son. In John 8:24 Jesus said, "Unless you believe that I am He, you will surely die in your sins." Then we must repent, which means that we have a changed will that leads to a changed way of life. In Luke 13:1-5 certain people came to Jesus to ask questions about other people whom they felt were worse sinners than everyone else. Jesus said, however, "I tell you, no

We also have to confess the name of Jesus as the Lord. Romans 10:10 says, "With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation." Then we must be willing to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of sins. In Mark 16:16 Jesus said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." There are two conditions stated here for a person who wants to be saved. First, a person must believe, and second, a person must be baptized. Baptism is essential to salvation. In Acts 2:38 Peter told the Jews who had murdered Christ, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." In Acts 22:16 Saul was told, "Why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Someone might say, "The Bible does not say that baptism saves." But that simply is not true. In 1 Peter 3:21 we read, "Baptism does now also save us." Baptism is not something that causes us to "earn" our salvation. It is not something that allows us to look up to God and say, "You owe me salvation!" Rather, just like belief, repentance, and confession, it is a command of God that we must meet if we want to be acceptable to Him. Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." Today, let me en-

courage you to worship God acceptably in song in your worship of Him. If you are not a Christian, let me encourage you to obey the Gospel of Jesus Christ so that you can worship God acceptably.

Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:

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STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “SINGING”

1. According to Matthew 28:18, where does “all authority” lie in religion?
2. How, according to Colossians 3:17, are we to carry out our worship to God?
3. How should the principle of how God dealt with Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10 impact our worship today?
4. In Ephesians 5:19, what did God tell us to do?
5. In Colossians 3:16, what did God tell us to do?
6. According to Ephesians 5:19, what “instrument” are we to use in making melody to the Lord?
7. Hebrews 13:15 speaks of “the fruit of our lips” being offered to God. Do instruments of music fall into that category?
8. According to John 12:48, what will judge us in the last day?
9. Baptist minister Charles Spurgeon said, “I would as soon attempt to pray to God with machinery as to sing to him with machinery.” Can either one of those things be accomplished in keeping with God’s commands?
10. J.H. Garrison of the Christian Church said, “There is no command in the New Testament, Greek or English, commanding the use of the instrument.” Is this true? If so, what is the implication of such a statement?
11. Why did John Calvin, in his commentary on Psalms, say, “Musical instruments, in celebrating the praises of God, would be no more suitable than the burning of incense or the lighting up of lamps?”
12. What did the authors of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* mean when they wrote, “The first Christians were **of too spiritual a fiber** to substitute lifeless instruments for, or to use them to accompany, the human voice”?
13. According to 1 Corinthians 14:15, how are we to sing to God?
14. What do Revelation 22:18-19 and Proverbs 30:6 prohibit us from doing?
15. What important point should we learn from Hebrews 8:5 (“See that you make all things according to the pattern”)?
16. This lesson mentions “the law of exclusion.” What principle (regarding God) is included in that law?
17. What does Exodus 23:2 admonish us **not** to do?