



THE MUSIC OF THE CHURCH

Biblical Research Library

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THE MUSIC OF THE CHURCH

It is the nature of the ekklesia (church) of Christ to be bonded together because of a common salvation (Jd 3). Passages that use the phrase “one another” saturate every New Testament book that was directed to the early ekklesia. The phrase is used so much that we are overwhelmed with the Spirit’s affirmation that we as members of the ekklesia should make every effort to be known by our love for one another because of our common salvation by the grace of God (Jn 13:34,35). Christianity is a “one another” faith that is focused on Jesus.

In the context of such emphasis on the participatory oneness of the body of Christ, **we would expect that the Holy Spirit would mandate discipleship behavior that was focused on doing that which brings us together and keeps us together.** For example, consider these exhortations: “*consider one another to stir up love and good works*” (Hb 10:24), “*bear one another’s burdens*” (Gl 6:2), “*bear the weaknesses of the weak*” (Rm 15:1), “*let every one of us please his neighbor for his good*” (Rm 15:2), and “*for this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that you should love one another*” (1 Jn 3:11). We get the point.

In reference to the unified nature of the body, we would expect that God also mandate what should be manifested when all members of the body come together in assembly. **What His people would**

do in assembly should reflect the participatory oneness of the body. For example, in the Lord’s Supper/love feast we are to consider one another and “*wait for one another*” (1 Co 11:33). In our assembly as disciples we are to exhort and edify one another with our gifts that find their expression in edifying the whole body (Read 1 Co 12). In fact, every meeting of the saints should be an opportunity for mutual edification through the mutual participation of the whole body. Unfortunately, the Corinthians manifested pride and divisiveness in their assemblies. The result was that the Holy Spirit directed the hand of Paul to write a lengthy portion of Scripture specifically directed to correcting their divisive attitudes and behavior (See 1 Co 11-14). **When Christians come together in assembly, it should always be for edification and the promotion of the oneness of the body.** Our assemblies should always reflect our unity and participation in one another’s lives.

In the midst of his exhortations to the Corinthians, Paul made the statement, “*I will sing with the Spirit and I will sing with the mind [understanding] also*” (1 Co 14:15). Certain individuals in the Corinthians’ assemblies were taking pride in speaking in languages (tongues) in prayers or songs that no one understood in the assembly. Paul said that such prayer and singing in a foreign language was unfruitful because no one understood

the language (1 Co 14:14). His mandate was that if a person spoke in a language a prayer or song that could not be understood by the assembly, then that person should remain silent (1 Co 14:28). He should remain silent because his speaking in a language that no one understood did not edify the entire assembly (1 Co 14:26). **He was violating the purpose of the assembly of the disciples by doing something that was for his own pleasure or according to his own abilities or gifts.** He was thus ministering selfishly, and not according to the “one another” purpose of the assembly of the body.

In the “one another” context of the assembly of the body, Christians have the opportunity to sing with their voices in order to encourage one another. Through song, individuals have the opportunity as a collective group to bring participatory exhortation into the assembly of the saints in order to promote unity.

When we discuss the music of the church, therefore, we must determine the type of music that meets the needs of the participatory function of the body. Music is defined as “the art and science of combining vocal or instrumental sounds or tones in varying melody, harmony, rhythm and timbre ...” (*Webster’s Dictionary*). Music is arranging the notes of

different sounds in a manner that produces a melody. There are thus two ways by which music can be produced: **vocally** or **instrumentally**. God recognizes the existence of these two types of music as separate, for He is the Creator of all music (See 2 Ch 29:25-29). Vocal music is referred to as **acappella** music, that is, singing without instruments. When we speak of the music of the church, therefore, we seek to determine which music God wanted His people to use in order to accomplish the participatory function of the disciples to exhort one another.

The word “acappella” is an Italian word that means “according to (the style of the) chapel,” or “in the church style.” The word originally referred to the sacred choral music that was sung in the assembly of the church or in the chapel. In other words, when reference to music in the assembly of the church was made years ago, it was vocal singing. This was the music of the church. Only in modern times have churches adopted both vocal and instrumental music in the assemblies of the church. But this was not the case from the first century until about four hundred years ago in the religious world outside the Roman Catholic Church. All music of the churches was vocal, or acappella, and thus, “the music of the church” was singing without instruments.

Chapter 1

Music In The Old Testament

When considering the acappella music of the New Testament, it is often good to consider the acappella music with

which Israel lived for several years after they came out of Egyptian captivity. The timbrel, or tambourine, was used to ac-

company the singing of Miriam (Ex 15:20), but it is doubtful that the timbrel would be considered a musical instrument. It makes noise, but cannot play a melody of notes, and thus does not fall under the definition of musical instruments as is indicated in 1 Samuel 18:6.

When Israel came out of Egyptian captivity, Moses and the children of Israel sang, “*I will sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously.... The Lord is my strength and song ...*” (Ex 15:1,2). “*Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed gloriously*” (Ex 15:21). The Israelites celebrated the Lord’s victory that was given to them over Pharaoh and his army. Their songs were composed of words that expressed their thanksgiving and joy.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, after receiving the law of God, he heard “*the sound of singing*” in the camp of Israel (Ex 32:18). However, on this occasion, it was not the singing of praise to the Lord, but the singing of rebellion. Nevertheless, it was singing by the people, even though it was in reference to the golden calf they had made for themselves. The focus of their singing changed from praising God to their material idolatry that came with them out of Egypt.

The next time we witness singing in the Old Testament was when Deborah and Barak sang to the Lord for their victory over the enemies of Israel (Jg 5:3). They sang praise to the Lord of Israel for empowering them to conquer their enemies.

When we come to the days of Saul, we have the first mention of “*singing and*

dancing ... with tambourines, with joy and with instruments of music” (1 Sm 18:6). We must keep in mind, however, that this event took place over four hundred years after Israel came out of Egyptian captivity.

In the Old Testament law that God gave to Israel, He did not include any instructions concerning the music of Israel. It was only assumed that when the people sang, they would verbally express their thanksgiving to the Lord and praise of His name. We must also keep in mind that there is silence in reference to instrumental music in the Old Testament until the preceding reference to those who sang with instruments when Saul returned from battle. However, the purpose of the singing of Israel in this situation did not have the same purpose as singing among the people of God today. Singing today is for the purpose of the members’ edification of one another in a spirit of unity as they sing praises to God. **“Assembled singing” for participatory edification was not a part of the Old Testament law.**

David loved his harp while alone as a boy with his sheep in the peaceful meadows of Palestine. It was a part of his life. When he became king of Israel after Saul, the harp was still a part of his life. It had a soothing, tranquil sound that accompanied this sweet singer of Israel. We must not forget that God remembered David as the “sweet psalmist (singer) of Israel,” not the sweet “player” (2 Sm 23:1). David was a composer and singer of songs.

The harp that David used did not pro-

duce a sound that would disturb the sheep in the quietness of the meadows of Palestine. When David introduced the music of the harp into the sacrificial services of the priests at Jerusalem, he wanted to introduce a tranquil sound during the commotion and baying of thousands of animals that were being slaughtered during the sacrificial feasts of Israel.

David's introduction of instrumental music was thus a concession of God, as was the building of the temple. Neither were in the original law that God had given at Mount Sinai, which law was intended for a rural, agricultural culture in which Israel lived for over four hundred years before David. Many years after the introduction of the instruments of music, when Israel was in her final apostasy from God, Amos rebuked the apostates who sang "*idly to the sound of the stringed instruments, and invent for themselves instruments of music like David*" (Am 6:5). David was the "inventer" in that he introduced the instrument into the environment of the sacrifices (1 Ch 23:5). Instrumental music was not in the original law of God, and thus, God gave the concession to David to bring his instruments into the environment of the sacrificial services. In the Psalms that David wrote we would thus expect David to emphasize the praise of God with instruments (See Ps 149:3; 150). However, during special events in Israel where the instruments were used, the Holy Spirit wanted us to remember that the instrument was the invention of David, and not a part of the original law that was given by God on Mount Sinai.

(See 1 Ch 15:16; 25:1; 2 Ch 7:6; Ez 3:10; Ne 12:31-37).

Before we leave the subject of singing and instruments in the Old Testament, we must correct some misinterpretations that have often been made of Amos 5:23. In their state of apostasy, God condemned Israel for their loss of heart in Him. In the Amos 5 passage, God judged, "*Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments.*" This is not a condemnation specifically of "stringed instruments," because the instruments were a concession of God that were introduced by David. In the same context of Amos 5 God told the apostate Israel that He would not accept those things that He had specifically commanded in the law, such as burnt offerings, grain offerings and peace offerings. He also said that they "take away" the noise of their singing. The point is that they had syncretized (mixed together), the laws of God with the practices of their idolatrous religions. Their commanded laws of God were invalidated by their submission to false gods and idols. They were ceremonially making offerings that were commanded, but when they were doing so, they had other gods on their minds.

In all our discussions concerning David's introduction of instrumental music in the Old Testament era of Israelite history, we must not allow ourselves to be confused in our discussions concerning the acappella music of the early church. Israel was not a nation to be bonded together through assemblies. There was the yearly Passover assembly

of a rural nation. Though this event reminded them of being a nation of many tribal groups, the infrequency of the event did not serve as an occasion for unity that God intended should happen during the weekly assembly of Christians. Throughout the year, Israel functioned as a farming community of people whose focus was on the worship of individual families on the farm. There was no such thing as the assembled worship of several fami-

lies as was characteristic of the weekly assemblies of the early church (At 20:7; 1 Co 16:1,2). Through the assemblies of the early church, God sought to encourage the bonding of individuals. However, in the Old Testament situation, the families were already bonded by blood from the fathers, and in their common covenant relationship as a nation, which covenant God made with them at Mount Sinai.

Chapter 2

Acappella In The New Testament

We must continually remind ourselves of the nature of the ekklesia, and thus remember the mutual “one another” participatory assemblies that bring the members of the body together as one. It is not surprising, therefore, that when we study the nature of the New Testament body of Christ, we find an assembly identity in which members are bound together by a participatory ministry of gifts. One means by which Christians are bound together is in their singing to one another. As will be discussed throughout the remainder of this book, acappella music accomplishes God’s purpose of binding Christians together in their mutual expression of love and praise from their hearts. We must make every effort, therefore, to build ourselves up in the area of singing in order to accomplish the purpose of promoting unity through participatory singing.

There are two primary statements in the New Testament in reference to the music of the church. Both statements are

made by Paul. They are made in the context of the Christian’s life in general, not only in reference to the assembled singing context of the church. They are not passages that refer exclusively to the assembly of the saints, but would include the assembly. **The passages define the nature of the Christian’s life every day of the week.** We must understand this very clearly in order to understand what Paul writes in **Ephesians 5:18-21** and **Colossians 3:16**.

“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is debauchery, 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, always giving thanks for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Ep 5:18-21).

“Let the word of Christ dwell in your

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 (CI 3:16).

A. Definitions:

Consider closely what Paul says in Ephesians 5:18-21. It must be noted that the participles in the passage are imperatives. “Speaking” (*lalountes*), “singing” (*adontes*) “making melody” (*psallontes*), “giving thanks” (*eucharistountes*), and “submitting” (*hupotassomenoi*) are participle imperatives that emphasize the fact that these things must typify the nature of every disciple. “Singing” and “making melody” are essential characteristics of one’s life as a Christian. In order to fulfill the mandates of what Paul is stating as an imperative, therefore, every Christian must “sing” and “make melody” in his heart. He must do so in a manner that typifies the nature of his life of praise. Unfortunately, what some have done is confine what Paul described in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 to the assemblies of the saints. But in the context of the instructions, Paul is discussing our life behavior, not just our assemblies with one another.

1. “Singing” and “making melody”: Some have assumed that since these two actions are separate in Ephesians 5:19, one must refer to vocal music and the other to instrumental music. But if this were true, every member of the body would have to play an instrument since

the mandate of Paul **is to every member of the body**. The fact is that “making melody” (*psallontes*) cannot be separated from “in your heart.” The grammar is the same as Jesus’ statement in Mark 12:30, “*You will love the Lord your God with all your heart ...*” “With all your heart” is the means by which one loves God. The action of love cannot be separated from the heart, as the “making melody” cannot be separated from one’s heart. The heart is the instrument by which one loves God and makes melody. If our singing does not come from our hearts, then we fall under the same condemnation that was revealed in the Amos 5:22,23 passage. Heartless singing is worthless in expressing true worship. Our singing becomes only a “noise” if there is no melody in our hearts.

2. “Making melody” (*psallontes*): The Greek word from which “making melody” is translated is *psallo*. The *Abbott-Smith Greek Lexicon* defines this word, “. . . in the New Testament, to sing a hymn, sing praise.” The *Moulton and Milligan Greek Lexicon* define the word, “to sing a hymn.” The *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* defines the word, “. . . in the New Testament to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song.” And finally, W. E. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* defines *psallo* to mean, “. . . in the New Testament, to sing a hymn, sing praise.”

The above meaning of the word *psallo* was carried out in the behavior of the early church. In explaining the singing of the early church, M. R. Vincent, in his *Word Studies in the New Testament*

(p. 915), wrote the following:

A psalm was originally a song accompanied by a stringed instrument **The idea of accompaniment passed away in usage**, and the psalm in New Testament phraseology, is an Old Testament psalm, or a composition having that character” [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.].

The *Shaff-Hergog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (Vol. III, p. 1961) concurs with this thought in the following statement:

It is questionable whether, as used in the New Testament, “psallo” means more than to sing **The absence of instrumental music from the church for some centuries after the apostles** and the sentiment regarding it which pervades the writings of the fathers are unaccountable, if in the apostle’s church such music was used” [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.].

The word *psallo* can be found in the Greek language with meanings as “to pluck the hair,” “to twang the bowstring” or “to touch the cords of a musical instrument.” However, according to historians and Greek lexicons, this meaning did not find its way into the New Testament in reference to the singing of Christians. That which was “plucked” or “touched” was the vocal cords of the heart. It is for this reason that translators correctly translated the word *psallo* to simply mean “sing.”

The above meaning is what the translators of hundreds of translations wanted us to understand in their use of the English word “sing” to translate the Greek word *psallo* in the following verses: “*For this cause I will confess to You among the Gentiles and sing [psallo] to Your name*” (Rm 15:9), “*I will sing with the Spirit and I will sing [psallo] with the mind also*” (1 Co 14:15), “*Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing [psallo] psalms*” (Js 5:13). Every credible translation uses the word “sing” to translate *psallo*. Since the Holy Spirit used the word *psallo* in reference to what Christians should do with hymns, psalms and spiritual songs, then we would conclude that the Spirit wants every Christian to approach God with his heart through vocal music. God desires that our praise of Him through song originate, not externally, but internally from our hearts. The music must come from the melody of our hearts.

B. A note from church historians:

We would not do justice to this subject by using our present day environment of the typical assembly of the typical church as the guide by which we would either determine or judge the music of the body of Christ. In fact, if Jesus would step into the assembly of some churches today, He would probably think that what was going on would be quite strange.

Since we are driven by the authority of the word of God, then it is always our purpose to first investigate the Holy Scriptures in any matter that pertains to our behavior and worship. Any mandate

of God must take priority over our present day practices. Once we understand the instructions of God in His word, then we can proceed to study through church history. It is thus interesting to survey through the statements of church historians in order to capture their understanding of the behavior of the early church. This is particularly interesting in reference to the historians' research in reference to the singing of the early church. Without exception, every commentator and church historian agrees that the early church fulfilled her obligation to sing praises to God with acappella music.

As a matter of historical perspective, the use of instruments in conjunction with vocal music in Christendom came many centuries after the establishment of the early church. Around A.D. 139, Justin Martyr, wrote, "**The use of singing with instrumental music was not received in the Christian churches**, as it was among the Jews in their infant state, but only the use of plain song [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.]." McClintock and Strong made the following statement in reference to the development and use of instrumental music in Christendom:

The Greek word *psallo* is applied among the Greeks of modern times exclusively to sacred music, which in the Eastern Church has never been any other than vocal, instrumental music being unknown in that church, **as it was in the primitive church**. Sir John Hawkins, following the Romish writers in his erudite [scholarly] work on the *History of Music*, makes Pope

Vitalian, **in A.D. 660, the first who introduced organs into churches. But students of ecclesiastical archaeology are generally agreed that instrumental music was not used in churches till a much later date**; for Thomas Aquinas, A.D. 1250, has these remarkable words: "Our Church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize." From this passage we are surely warranted in concluding that there was no ecclesiastical use of organs in the time of Aquinas. It is alleged that Marinus Sanutus, who lived about A.D. 1290, was the first that brought the use of wind organs into churches, and hence he received the name of Torcellus. In the East, the organ was in use in the emperor's courts, probably from the time of Julian, but never has either the organ or any other instrument been employed in public worship in Eastern churches; nor is mention of instrumental music found in all their liturgies, ancient or modern (Vol. VIII, p. 739) [Emphasis mine, R.E.D.].

In contrast to the assemblies in pagan temples wherein instruments were used in worship, the early church refrained from such. Early Christians understood that they should refrain from the use of instrumental music in their assemblies, understanding that vocal music was instructed to be used by the early New Testament prophets of God, and later recorded in writing as in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. In the Roman

Catholic Church, the custom of vocal music evidently changed when Pope Vitalian introduced in Catholic Church assemblies instrumental music in the seventh century. However, during the period of the Reformation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the leading reformers sought to restore vocal music to the assemblies of the reformed churches.

Most churches of Christendom today use instrumental music in their assemblies. Though most have little knowledge of the historical controversy that has surrounded this subject, they have often been unaware of the benefits of acappella music and why the great leaders of the Reformation Movement stood against the introduction of instrumental music into the assemblies of the Reformation churches. Instrumental music has become so common in the assemblies of

churches today that adherents to these churches often do not realize the marvelous bonding effect that acappella music has in bringing the hearts of the people together in an assembly context.

It is not our purpose in this book to investigate the use of instrumental music in the assembly of the church, but to exalt what God intended should be accomplished with acappella music. For some reason God instructed the early church to sing only with their voices in order to exhort one another and praise Him. This tradition continued for several centuries after the establishment of the ekklesia. For this reason, it is necessary that we rehearse again what God intended should be accomplished by the medium of participatory singing among the disciples of Jesus.

Chapter 3

The Beauty Of Acappella Music

Singing among Christians is mentioned several times throughout the New Testament. Singing manifested both the spirit of joy and praise in the heart of Christians, as well as their desire to exhort and encourage one another. The focus of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 is that our singing be both vertical in praise of God and horizontal in exhortation of one another. When both purposes for singing are accomplished, then the members of the church are greatly encouraged to be united as one.

There were no special places where

the early Christians sang to one another. Singing was simply a part of their lives. They sang anywhere and at anytime. The following are some of the purposes, or advantages, of acappella singing, as well as the nature of the spirit of singing that Christians must manifest in praising God and edifying one another:

A. Singing is the outpouring of a joyful heart.

James wrote, "*Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms*" (Js 5:13). Sing-

ing is an emotional outlet. It is an outlet of one who feels joy in his or her heart. Those who are experiencing the true joy of their salvation naturally express their joy through song. James does not state that one's singing should be limited to the presence of others. Joyful hearts sing anytime and anywhere. This fact was manifested in the lives of Paul and Silas when they were in prison in Philippi. The magistrates of the city commanded that both evangelists be beaten with rods (At 16:22). *"Now when they had laid many stripes on them, they cast them into prison"* (At 16:23). The jailor *"put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks"* (At 16:24). You get the picture. Paul and Silas were sore from beating and sitting in stocks in the darkest part of the prison. And yet, *"about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God"* (At 16:25). It is the nature of joyful Christians to sing, even under the most dire of circumstances.

Because of the singing of Paul and Silas, the other prisoners were listening to them. We must conclude from this occasion of acappella music that the singing of Paul and Silas opened the door to the hearts of their fellow prisoners. At least this was the case with the jailor. An earthquake opened the prison doors, but the songs had already opened his heart (See At 16:26-34).

We encourage our preachers to stand in markets and on street corners in order to preach the gospel to the public through spoken lessons. Likewise, we need to encourage our gifted singers to stand in

markets and on street corners in order to preach the gospel through song. We have experienced that more people will often listen to the singers than to the preachers.

B. Singing is a means of communicating to one another.

In the context of their daily relationships with one another, Paul stated that Christians must be zealous in *"speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs"* (Ep 5:19). Singing encourages Christians to communicate with one another in a way that brings joy to their hearts. "One another" means that there are at least two who must speak through songs that are spiritual in nature. Christians have an obligation to communicate with one another in song because they are obligated to encourage and exhort one another.

What is important to remember concerning the context of Ephesians 5:19 is that "speaking to one another" in song is not limited to a specific place or time. The entire context of Ephesians 5 focuses on the daily behavior of the Christian. On every occasion, and at every opportunity, Christians should fulfill their obligation to their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ by communicating with one another through song. Unfortunately, many have limited their singing communication to a specific time and place. Outside this special time and place they often fail to keep the channels of communication open through song.

C. **Singing is a means of teaching the word of Christ.**

Paul exhorted that we should “*let the word of Christ dwell*” in us richly (Cl 3:16). When the word of Christ dwells in us richly, it is only natural that the word of Christ be expressed through our singing. Paul thus commanded, “... *teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs ...*” (Cl 3:16). Singing is a means of teaching one another the word of Christ. In order for one to be taught, he must clearly hear and understand that which is being taught through song. This assumes that the teaching through song must not be cluttered with noise that drowns out one’s speaking through song. The teaching in song must be clearly heard. The ministry of teaching through song thus assumes that Christians are to be in a quiet place where the words of the songs can be clearly understood. **If the noise of the environment is so loud that the words of the teaching cannot be heard, then the mandate of teaching one another through song is useless.**

Teaching through song also demands that the word of Christ is being taught in the songs. One is not teaching the word of Christ through songs that have no reference to the word of Christ. One is not teaching the word of Christ when singing those words that are contrary to the truth of the Bible. In other words, in order for individuals to be teaching the word of Christ through song, **they must know the word of Christ.** When Christians are filled with the knowledge of

Christ, they are able to admonish one another with the word (Rm 15:14). If they do not know the word of Christ, then they could be singing error, and thus, not accomplishing the purpose for singing which God instructed.

Teaching through song assumes that not everyone must sing at the same time. The act of teaching assumes that someone is speaking and others are listening. If an individual has a truth of the word of Christ that he or she would like to teach others, then there must be those who are willing to listen, as well as the opportunity for the teaching to take place. If a group of Christians have truth they want to express through the means of song, then there must be an audience that respectfully listens to their teaching through song. (It is interesting to note that the first translations of the Bible into English were portions of the Bible that were translated into English by preachers who composed their translations into songs that they sang before the people.)

“Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” **does not assume that everyone is teaching at the same time.** It assumes that some are teaching and others are listening. This seems to be the context of 1 Corinthians 14:26,27. When the Corinthians came together in assembly, there were those who had a psalm. Some had a teaching, others a language, some a revelation, and then there were those who had an interpretation. All the singing of psalms, teaching, speaking in a language, etc. were to be done for the edification of the whole assembly. In other words,

not everyone came with a psalm. However, the whole came with all the ministries that Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:26,27. They were ministries that were, in an orderly manner, to be used for the edification of the whole body. Not everyone had a revelation or a language. Some came with a psalm. They would in the assembly, therefore, be given the opportunity to teach with their psalm while others listened. Not everyone had to sing when one was teaching through song. Someone may have written a song and the whole assembly needed to listen to the teaching of the song. When the newly revealed teaching in song was learned by the whole assembly, then the whole assembly could join together in the song.

The nature of the assembly was defined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 14:31. *“For you can all prophesy **one by one** so that all may learn and all may be exhorted.”* Paul instructed that those who had written or received a psalm by inspiration should take the opportunity of the assembly to teach the word of Christ through song. If different people came with different songs, then “one by one” they could teach their songs to the assembly. This is possibly the commentary on what the Hebrew writer wrote in Hebrews 2:12. *“I will declare Your name to My brothers, **in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.**”* Notice the first person pronoun “I.” This was an individual singing praise to God in the assembly while others were listening.

D. Singing encourages the ministry of singing.

Everyone can sing. However, there are those who are gifted with voices that excel. The preceding point C should be understood in the sense that the body as a whole has gifted singers and gifted speakers. We should give an opportunity to our gifted speakers and singers to use their gift to edify the body as a whole. If one feels that the gifted are entertaining the body through their gift of singing, he have missed the point. When our gifted speakers deliver a good lesson to the assembly that is eloquently spoken, we often compliment them. We should also compliment our gifted singers among us who can stir our spirits through spiritual songs. Gifted speakers and singers have special abilities to lift up our hearts in praise to God. Acappella music is an opportunity for the body to clearly hear Bible lessons of spiritual songs by our gifted singers.

The advantage of acappella singing is that the gifted singers can minister to the body. The teaching of their songs communicates exhortation because our minds are focused on the words of their singing. It is for this reason that our gifted singers must not be interrupted by any surrounding noise of the environment. If we cannot hear the words of the singers, then they cannot minister to us teaching with their gift. The louder the surrounding noise, the less the singers are able to teach by means of their gift. In many cases we have witnessed that those

who have trained themselves to play instruments, for which they have no mandate to exercise in the assembly of the saints, actually drown out those who have a divine mandate to teach through singing.

E. Singing stimulates the organic life of the body.

The ekklesia is an organic body in motion for the purpose of serving others. Along the path of service, the members of the body have obligations to one another. They are to “*consider one another to stir up love and good works*” (Hb 10:24). One of the means by which the body organically functions is that the members stir up one another through the ministry of singing. The members of the body speak to one another in song (Ep 5:19). They teach and admonish one another through spiritual singing in order to encourage love and good works.

God knew what singing would do as a dynamic bonding experience for the ekklesia. He knew that when the members of the body speak to one another for the purpose of edification, they would grow together as the ekklesia of Christ. Their responsibility to sing to one another would bond them together as a functioning body that would reach out in service to others.

Two people will have a hard time holding a grudge against one another if they are singing to one another in song. If they do have a matter of contention between themselves, it will soon pass as they exhort one another through song.

When brothers and sisters are bonded together in song, the dynamics of participatory singing stimulates the organic function of the body to work as one.

F. Singing focuses on ministering to others.

Though individuals sing to themselves in praise of God, the Scriptures add the responsibility that in song Christians must teach and admonish **one another**. Singing, therefore, is an outward, not inward ministry. It is an expression of joy from the heart of one disciple to the heart of another disciple. In our singing to one another, we are encouraged by hearing others sing to us. Acappella music, in teaching and admonition, focuses on reaching out to others. In assembled singing, each Christian should focus on his or her output in song from the heart in order to teach and admonish the others. Acappella music is a mutual ministry of the church as a whole. The serendipity (“unexpected surprise”) of our individual participation in singing is that we are personally exhorted when we join in song with the whole assembly.

G. Singing includes everyone.

The “one another” statement of Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 is an **inclusive** statement. Everyone must sing. And when everyone sings, **everyone is included in the body life**. This is the advantage of singing over playing mechanical instruments. Not everyone can play an instrument. But everyone can

sing. God knew that when everyone joined in with his or her offering in song, then the natural feeling would be that everyone would feel that he or she is a part of the organic life of the body. Everyone would have a sense of belonging.

There is a time for individual singing to one's self, or when two or three are gathered together. But when individual singers come together in the assembly of the people of God, something dynamic happens. To be a part of assembled acappella singing is an experience that few people today in Christendom understand simply because they have not allowed themselves the opportunity. Some assemblies have become so dominated by and dependent on instrumental music that they have forgotten to sing as an assembled body. The instrumentalists have hijacked the assembly at the expense of those who want to sing with their voices alone. Our encouragement to these churches is that they must learn to sing acappella again. Once they do, they will understand the beauty and dynamic that God intended should be experienced in assembled acappella singing.

H. Singing is a mutual offering of praise to God.

The members of the body speak to one another in song, but also as the body they make melody in their hearts in unison to the Lord (Ep 5:19). They sing with grace in their hearts to the Lord (Cl 3:16). Christians can individually sing at all times in their daily walk of life. How-

ever, when the individual members of the body bring their melodious hearts together in song as an assembled body, they are bonded together through the harmony of their vocal singing. The beauty of acappella music is in the harmony that is produced when singers come together as a group. There is a natural spirit of unity among those who seek to harmonize their voices with one another. God knew this, and thus, He instructed Paul to write that Christians speak to one another in song. This seems to be the meaning of the Hebrew writer's statement in Hebrews 13:15. *"Therefore, by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, **the fruit of our lips**, giving thanks to His name."*

The "fruit of our lips" can mean nothing other than vocal singing in praise of God. This is not something that can be produced mechanically. "Making melody in our hearts" in praise to God is the "fruit of our lips." When Christians assemble together to join in songs of praise to God, something magical happens. The beauty of acappella music is truly discovered when devoted disciples of Jesus unite together in offering praise to God with the fruit of their lips.

I. Singing is spiritually without limits.

There is an interesting phenomenon that takes place when individuals pour out their hearts in song. We often sing until we become hoarse, where we can sing no more. But after so much singing, we feel exhilarated. We have a sense

of peace, knowing that we have poured out our hearts in praise to God and edification of one another. It is a feeling of tremendous elation. We feel so elated with the experience that we cannot wait until we have the same experience again. There seems to be no end to the emotional joy that one experiences when he or she vocally sings with others as united hearts pour out their feelings to the Lord.

But with mechanical noise it is different. After about thirty minutes of amplified mechanical music from giant speakers, the listeners are physically tired and exhausted. One of the first lessons that is taught to airplane pilots in their training is that noise emotionally and physically wears the individual down. In flying airplanes over great distances for great periods of time, the individual becomes physically and emotionally tired because of the noise of the airplane. The same is true when assembled people are bombarded with the high decibel noise that is mechanically produced and projected through amplifiers and speakers.

Those who have experienced the loud noise of amplified mechanical music have often never experienced the difference between an hour of mechanical music and an hour of vocal music. And since mechanical music has captivated and dominated the majority of religious groups today, it is doubtful whether they will take the opportunity to experience the difference. But everyone who has poured out his or her heart in vocal music with fellow worshipers knows the difference. After an hour of amplified instrument music, one is exhausted. After

an hour of vocal music, one is spiritually exhilarated and emotionally uplifted, not worn down. Please keep in mind that there is a difference between being emotionally exhausted and emotionally exhorted. Emotional exhaustion is **not** spiritual exhortation.

But what about the harps? There is a difference between a full instrumental band that takes a dominant role before an audience as a concert and the background sound of a harp. David knew this, though he never experienced the reverberating noise of amplified mechanical music that is so typical of religious groups today. If he had the opportunity to amplify the noise of a full band across the peaceful meadows of Palestine, surely his sheep would have been scattered from Dan to Beersheba.

In the book of Revelation, John used symbols to signify the nature of eternal dwelling (Rv 1:1). He used harps as a symbol, or metaphor to portray the appeal of the heavenly dwelling. The harps were not literal, as the incense and other figures of speech were not literal (See Rv 5:8). These figures only referred to concepts and teachings that were above their literal use in this world. However, we would wonder why the Holy Spirit used harps to refer to the appeal of heaven? This is easy. The sound of the harp is appealing, as heaven should be. David knew this when he introduced the sound of harps as the background music during the offering of the animals as sacrifices in the tabernacle service. But every instrumentalist knows that there is a vast difference between the amplified instru-

ment music of today through monstrous speakers and the quiet background music of a harp.

Acappella music was the music of the early church. For the preceding reasons God wanted to accomplish through vocal music that which would bring the members of the church together to both exhort one another and offer up praise to Him. In the midst of a religious world that seems to be obsessing over the performance of high profile bands and orchestras, we would plead for a restoration of the simplicity of acappella music. Our plea is based on the aforemen-

tioned reasons. God simply knew what He was doing when He instructed the holy writers to teach the church to offer up the fruit of their lips in vocal music. We would thus plead with our instrumental friends that they give acappella music a chance. Silence the instruments for a month. Allow the assembly to learn how to sing again and you will be surprised. Learn “four-part harmony,” and the church will come alive. (If you do not know what four-part harmony is, then you have a long way to go in understanding the beauty of what our Creator made possible with the human voice.)

Chapter 4

Worship In Song

In worship we pour out our hearts to the Lord. Worship is an inward response to our awareness of the presence of God in our lives. For the Christian, it is the result of his continual realization of what God has done for him through Jesus Christ. Worship, therefore, originates from within the heart of man. It is not something that can be imposed on man with either a pleasing environment or sound from outside man. True worship needs no crutches, either to be initiated or continued. If environmental circumstances are needed for the individual to bow down before God in worship, then the worship is artificial, if not simply ceremonial.

Singing is naturally worshipful. Singing is the expression of a joyful

heart. It is the evidence of cheer within an individual. We can understand why Paul would instruct Christians to make melody in their hearts to the Lord (Ep 5:19), and to sing with grace in their hearts to the Lord (Cl 3:16). Through the singing of secular songs, the individual is expressing inner feelings. How much more natural would it be for one who realizes the presence of God in his or her life to pour out one’s heart in spiritual songs?

There is a difference between being **mesmerized** and true worship. According to dictionaries, the word “mesmerize” means “the state of being under mesmeric influence ... to hypnotize.” One is mesmerized by something outside himself. When we fall under the influence

of a mesmeric influence, we are emotionally controlled by that influence. It is important to understand that being mesmerized and worshipping God **are not the same**.

We have found that people have great difficulty in determining the difference between mesmerization and worship. Mesmerization is an influence from **outside**, whereas worship originates from **within**. David mesmerized himself with his playing on the harp, but his worship originated from **within his heart**. An individual can mesmerize himself by playing on an instrument, but at the same time never worship God. A multitude can be mesmerized at a rock concert, but never experience worship. Consider also that one can be so mesmerized with his gift of playing an instrument, and the sound thereof, that he can forget God. Simply because an individual is swooned by the art of his fingers does not mean that he is making melody in his heart to the Lord.

In this context it might be good for some to remember the dictionary definition of an idol. Webster's Dictionary gives one definition of an idol as the following: ". . . **any object of ardent or excessive devotion or admiration**." Idolatry is also defined as "excessive attachment or veneration for some person **or thing**; admiration which borders on adoration." Christians should be very careful about giving themselves over to anything that is of this world. In our worship, Christians must give themselves over to the One who is above this world by offering the melody that is in their hearts. They do not give themselves over

to an object that is in their hands to which they give "ardent or excessive devotion."

We must keep in mind that God is the creator of all music, both vocal and mechanical. He knew that the mechanical would originate from outside the individual, but **the vocal would originate from within the heart**. Vocal music would thus accomplish the purpose for which He commanded it among the saints. This helps us understand why God instructed vocal music among Christians. They must focus on their hearts, not their abilities, lest they become so enthralled with their abilities to play an instrument that they forget the One they are to worship. In their worship, therefore, the Christians' vocal music keeps them away from focusing on their abilities to play. It keeps them from idolizing something that is of this world. Acappella music keeps them focused on generating melody in their hearts.

If Christians focused on their abilities to play mechanical instruments, then they would be tempted to suppress vocal music in order to give way to the dominance of either the instrument or the individual or individuals who were mesmerized by what they can generate with machinery. The audience would be tempted to become spectators to the skills of those who would perform before them with an instrumental band or orchestra. God never intended that the music of the assembly should be a "save our children" effort to encourage instrumental concerts. The music of the church belongs to the church, not a select few. Some people need to remember that the assembly of

the saints is not about them and their performances, but about Jesus.

We would suggest that those who play instruments should take another look at the dominant role their playing of instruments has taken in the assemblies of churches. We have been in some assemblies where the instrumentalists have actually hijacked the assembly as an opportunity to perform before an audience. We cannot see this taking place in the assemblies of the New Testament church in the first century. As some Corinthians took advantage of the assembly to boast in exercising their gift of tongues, no one person or group of people should be given the opportunity to do the same in the assemblies of the body of Christ. If they do, then they are as Paul stated when he

rebuked the Corinthians with the words, “You are puffed up” (See 1 Co 1:29; 3:21; 4:7; 5:6; 8:1; 13:4; 2 Co 5:12; 10:17; compare Cl 2:18).

The origin of the music that God wants has always been the result of what James stated. “*Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms*” (Js 5:13). Nothing has changed since these words were written. Today, we ask for a restoration of acapella singing because of the joy that comes forth from the hearts of the worshipers. Is there anyone cheerful today? If there is, then we ask that they do simply as James instructed. When an assembly of cheerful people happens, the result is that everyone sings with their voices.