

The apostle Paul said, *"I will sing with spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding"* (1 Corinthians 14:15). Singing praises to God! What a privilege! What a joy! God has given each of us a voice with which to praise Him. Singing which comes from our hearts, going to the heart of God, is a wonderful experience.

The N.T. was originally written in Greek. The word "singing" in our English translations is from the Greek N.T. word *psallo*. Literally it meant, *"Plucking the heart strings."* When we use our voices to praise God we are plucking our heart strings. Not only is God pleased but it can bring the Christian great joy too. James says, *"Is any merry? Let him sing Psalms"*(5:14).

Paul's instructions to the church in Colosse was, *"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"* (5:19).

The heart is the only instrument the Lord has authorized to make melody on in Christian worship. The practice of vocal music (singing) in the early church seems to be alluded to by the author of Hebrews who wrote, *"By Him let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name"*(Hebrews 13:15).

When we offer up our heart felt praises to God. Notice the writer says we are offering up a *"sacrifice of praise."* Also at the same time we are teaching and admonishing the hearts (minds) of one another according to **Colossians 3:16**.

There are two kinds of music, vocal and instrumental. Singing was the practice of the early church. Instrumental music in worship was unknown to the apostles. Not that there were no musical instruments available but Christians were directed by the Holy Spirit to use only their voices. They were commanded to pluck their heartstrings rather than plucking the strings of a musical instrument.

This would change some 600 years later. Pope Vitalian introduced an organ in the Latin church around 670 A.D. However, opposition was so great it was removed to preserve unity. It would be another 200 years before it would be adopted into the Latin Mass.

In 1054 A.D. a great division took place between the eastern and the western churches of Europe. While the western churches (Catholic) adopted the use of images, a universal head (Pope), instrumental music, and sprinkling for baptism, the eastern churches (Orthodox) rejected these things. To this day Orthodox churches (Greek, Russian and Eastern) use only vocal music. Secular history is very clear that the use of instrumental music in public worship did not take place until about the 10th century, which was one of the innovations of the Catholic church.

It was never a practice in the early centuries of the church. The eminent musicologist Curt Sachs of Columbia University said, *"All ancient Christian music was vocal."*

When the Protestant Reformation began in the early 1500s many left the Catholic Church and establish other churches. Almost without exception the leaders of these denominations were opposed to the use of instrumental music in worship.

John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church said, "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen."

John Calvin the forerunner of the Presbyterian church wrote, "Musical instruments in celebrating the praise of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papist, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews."

A few years later Charles H. Spurgeon the preacher for the famous Baptist church in London wrote, "Musical instruments would hinder rather than help our praise. Sing unto Him. This is the sweetest and best music. We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it."

During the Reformation period only the Church of England and the Lutherans (over the opposition of Martin Luther) carried over the use of instrumental music from their Roman Catholic past.

In modern day worship not only is it common to hear organs and pianos but full orchestras. Professional musicians are often employed. This may be pleasing to the ears of men but Paul said to "*make melody in your heart to the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:19).

The object of Christian worship is to bring glory to God. Worship is not intended to please men, but to please God. Plucking the heart strings delivers vocal music which is the only kind of music that is authorized in Christian worship.

This is not to deny that singing has a pleasing and entertaining element in it thus is enjoyable. This no doubt is why we work at developing four part harmony. Outside of a worship setting Christians often gather to sing hymns for the pure joy and pleasure they get out of singing. Others may listen and enjoy it, even be edified by it.

The Hebrews writer said our singing in worship is to bring "*praise to God continually*" (Hebrews 13:15). Paul said our singing is to "*be to the Lord*" (Ephesians 5:19). Singing in worship is for the purpose of glorifying God not entertaining those in the pews. However, our singing does serve the purpose of "*teaching and admonishing one another*" (Colossians 3:16).

It is interesting that nothing in the N.T. indicates God is impressed with the beauty or quality of our voices. The average voice does not have to be professional in quality to please God. It is our hearts that God listens to even though our voices may not produce the most beautiful sound. The quality of our voices may be good for entertaining but not essential to praising God.

Richard Wagner, one of the great musicians and composers in America once expressed his opinion about vocal music in these words. "There is no doubt but that those qualities absolutely necessary to church music, namely, modesty, dignity and soulfulness are more inherent in the vocal style than in any other. Vocal music is in general more expressive than the mechanically produced tones of instruments is undeniable. Religious feeling finds its most natural expression in vocal utterance, for the human heart is the source of both devotion and song."

More important than what Wagner voiced, is what God has commanded the Christian to do, and that is, *"Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord"* (Ephesians 5:19). The heart is the only musical instrument authorized in Christian worship.

In the temple worship of the O.T. period David and Solomon introduced musical instruments into the worship but it was without the approval of God. Today, we live under the law of Christ and not under the O.T. law with all its ceremonial trappings and animal sacrifices. Any appeal to worship practices in the O.T. are irrelevant to present day N.T. worship. Just as surely as animal sacrifices have been replaced by the sacrifice of Christ, so other items of O.T. worship changed with the coming of the N.T. period which we are presently living in.

The issue for us today is the question of authority. What constitutes acceptable worship to God?

Jesus in a conversation with a Samaritan woman said, *"Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is a spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth"*(John 4:23, 24).

Does instrumental music fall within the range of true worship?

No where in N.T. Scripture do we find any indication that God ever authorized instrumental music. Every reference to music in the N.T. is to singing.

The bottom line is, do we seek to please God or to please man?

This may be a hard choice for some but it is the right choice. Jesus said, *"If you love me, keep My commandments."*(John 14:15).

John wrote, *"This is love that we walk according to His commandments."*(2 John 6).

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could all together say with Paul, *"I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also"*(2 Corinthians 14:15).