

# ***Teaching Sound Doctrine***

## **The Worship of the Lord's Church as God Would Have It Part 2**

### **SINGING**

In the New Testament there are some references to actions either prior to or after the worship of the church of our Lord in the Christian age regarding music (i.e., Mat. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Rev. 5:8; 14:2; 15:2). While these might be interesting to study, they have nothing to do with the worship of the Lord's church today. We must discover what God has authorized for our worship today, not in the past or in the future. Let us first list all the passages dealing with the music of the New Testament church or Christians in the order they are found. "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them" (Acts 16:25). "And that the Gentiles might glorify God for *his* mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name" (Rom. 15:9). "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Cor. 14:15). "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). "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). "Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12). "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (Jam. 5:13). We might also add: "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of *our* lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:15-16). While this is not a specific reference to the music in our worship to God, singing would be included.

We must also consider the nature of music and its subcategories. Music is a category which includes many subcategories. All music is either vocal or it is not vocal; there can be no other kinds of music. In the area of vocal music, we can divide all vocal music into communicable or non-communicable. That is that it either communicates a message or it does not. Then that which communicates a message can be divided into communicating in a foreign language or ones mother-tongue. The non-communicable area of vocal music is the making of

sounds with our voice but those sounds do not communicate any message. Examples of this kind of music is humming, whistling, making our voice simulate instruments of music, long sustained “Ah’s,” or “Oh’s,” etc. When we move to the subcategory of non-vocal music, it likewise can be divided into two categories. There is mechanical non-vocal (instrumental) music or non-mechanical non-vocal (instrumental) music. The mechanical non-vocal music is divided into several groups: brass (trumpets, trombones, tubas, etc.), woodwinds (clarinets, oboes, flutes, etc.), percussion (bass drum, snare drums, castanets, etc), strings (violin, viola, bass, etc.), and electronic synthesizers. The last subgroup is the non-mechanical non-vocal (instrumental) music. This music is humanly produced instrumental music such as snapping fingers, stomping feet, hand boning, clapping hands, and etc.

In the passages considered above, God never instructed man to simply make music. If he had everything would be authorized for man to do in worship to God. Additionally, God did not simply state to make vocal music. If he had authorized vocal music, then every subcategory under vocal music would be authorized. However, God always (per the passages listed previously) specified singing. Singing is a specific kind of vocal music. Singing is communicable vocal music. Everything under this category (foreign language or mother tongue) is also authorized in worship to God. However, no other category has been authorized. Therefore, we must conclude that instrumental music whether mechanical or human (non-mechanical) is without authorization and thus sinful. We must also conclude that non-communicable vocal music is also not authorized and therefore sinful. This corresponds to the instructions that we are to teach and admonish one another in our singing (Col. 3:16). Only communicable vocal music is able to teach and admonish.

Since we are to teach and admonish, our singing must be according to truth. We must make sure that the songs we sing are teaching God’s doctrine and not false doctrine. There are many songs in our books that simply are not scriptural, and, thus, we should not sing them. There are other songs in which we should eliminate certain stanzas because that specific stanza teaches error. There are other songs in which all we need to do is to change certain words to bring them in harmony with God’s Word.

Let us also notice a few principles from the previously mentioned passages. The types of songs we are to sing in worship to God are psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Other types of songs are not authorized by God in worship to Him. We are not to sing patriotic songs or country and western songs or other like songs in our worship. We learn that singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs is worship and may be done either in the public assemblies (as in 1 Cor.

14:15) or in private (as in Acts 16:25; Jam. 5:13). In either one we must still act by the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17).

Another lesson we learn is that we are all to engage in the singing. Both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 use a specific term (*heautou*) which is a reflexive pronoun. What this means is that we are doing this to each other and doing it simultaneously; I am teaching and admonishing you in song as/while you are teaching and admonishing me in song. Having choruses and choirs sing while others are listening in our worship has no scriptural authority.

Next week we will look at prayer as part of our worship.