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WHY WE SING

1. In Worship, how much time do you spend considering whether God is going to hear you or not?
2. How much time do you spend trying to teach or admonish others?
3. How much time do you spend listening to what others are saying to you?
4. Is there any way you would like to improve in these areas? How?

Throughout the ages music has been a part of mankind. Who among us does not sing when working around the house, or in the car. Who does not enjoy music (although we all have different tastes). Try, if you can, to say, not sing the lyrics to the song; “Happy Birthday”. Two things happen; you first notice that you don’t feel as happy when you say the words as opposed to singing them. And secondly, it is difficult to just “say” them isn’t it. You catch yourself trying to sing them or at least saying the words to a beat or rhythm.

To understand fully the New Testament meaning of worshipping God in songs one must focus on what the Scriptures say about its purposes. Three purposes become clear in studying the passages related to singing.

FIRST, there is the purpose of expressing DEEP FEELINGS. Singing has been called the language of the soul. It expresses, better and more fully than words alone, the deep feelings that are within the heart. It is no accident that singing is to be found in such ceremonies as weddings and funerals. When feelings of joy and sorrow are too deep for mere prose, singing is then used to express the inner feelings of the soul.

After instituting the Lord’s Supper in the upper room, Jesus sang a hymn with His disciples (Matt 26:30). One can hardly imagine greater emotional feelings than were being experienced at that time by both Jesus and His disciples. At such a time, they sang.

When Paul and Silas found themselves in prison, they sang hymns of praise to God (Acts 16:25). They had been falsely accused, beaten and put in the inner prison with their feet in stocks. Such treatment must have stirred deep feelings. They sang hymns to express these feelings of their heart.

Just as there is singing in sorrow and depression, there is also singing times of joy. Most individuals know of times in their lives that they would feel like bursting if they could not sing their joy. Such must have been the case of the multitude when Jesus entered Jerusalem on the colt. They “*began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice*”. Luke even preserves what they were singing. It is poetic

“Blessed is the King who comes in the Name of the Lord

Peace in heaven and glory in the highest” (Luke 19:38)

The basic purpose of singing is the expression of inner feelings which come from stress or joy. It fulfills the natural yearning of the soul to find expression. Such is recommended in Psalms 100:

*Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth
Serve the Lord with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful singing*

A SECOND purpose of singing is EDIFICATION. This purpose was quite distinctive from the worship found in the pagan religions of the first century. Worship of the Greek and Roman idols was performed as civic duty to pacify the anger or to gain the favors of the gods. Worship in the mystery cults was engaged in to gain an experience. Christian worship involved the “one another-ness” of community. What was done in worship to God was also to be done in edification of the church.

- *Teaching and admonishing one another (Col 3:16)*
- *Pray for one another (James 5:16)*
- *When you come together to eat, wait for one another (1 Cor 11:33)*
- *When you assemble...Let all things be done for edification (1 Cor 14:26)*
- *Speaking to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19)*

The importance of understandable and heart felt worship is shown by Paul’s admonition to the church at Ephesus:

- *So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spirituals songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord (Eph 5:17-19)*

The Dionysus mystery cult was perhaps in the background of this exhortation. Dionysus was the god of wine. Devotees of this cult became drunk in the belief that this allowed the gods to enter them. Their drugged mind would cause them to surrender their will to an experience and act like a drunken fool. In this context, Paul said, “do not be foolish, but understand” and “do not get drunk, but be filled with the Spirit”.

Christian worship was to be understandable and rational. The person singing was to do it with the heart, as an expression of inner devotion. The speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs was to be done so it could be understood. Singing in Latin would not benefit many of us today.

Worship involves the expression of inward feelings and is directed upward toward God. Worship also involves those who hear the songs and understand the teaching and are edified by our singing.

A THIRD purpose of worship in song is that of PRAISING GOD. It has already been shown that worship in song is directed “to the Lord”. God is the audience. The worshipper is the performer.

Much of what goes on in the name of worship is no more than traditional rituals performed as a duty and is empty of real devotion to God. Many worship services today are no more than artistic performances directed to men to stimulate their emotions. The criteria by which it is judged is how the viewer feels rather than if the worship is real. Perhaps no part of worship is more prone to this failing than worshipping in song.

God has always rejected empty “form worship”. David recognized that external rituals of sacrifices and burnt offerings were not what God desired. Rather, it was the inward submission of the spirit that God wanted (Psa 51:16-17; 1 Sam 15:22; Micah 6:6-8; Amos 5:22).

God desires worship directed to Him from the heart of man. All of the pomp of men, all of the orderliness of form, all of the beauty of the art and all of the emotional stimulation evoked through drama and music cannot substitute for the simple devotion of a humble heart.

In genuine worship, a man pours out his heart, his mind and spirit as a sacrifice upon the altar of praise. One of the sacrifices which a Christian offers to God is the “sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips” (Heb 13:15).

The three purposes of worship in song are shown in Colossians 3:16 –

“Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you; with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thanksgiving in your hearts to the God.”

Thanksgiving was to come from the heart. Worship was to be directed to God. Teaching and admonishing with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs was to be done to “one another” as well as being addressed to God.

1. Why do we sing to the Lord:
 - a. Isaiah 12:5
 - b. Psalm 13:6
 - c. Psalm 95:3
 - d. Psalm 47:6-7
 - e. Psalm 135:3
 - f. Eph 5:18-19; Col 3:16

2. We Sing to the Lord because of who He is and what he has done:
 - a. Psalm 71:23; Zech 2:10
 - b. Psalm 96:2
 - c. Psalm 147:7
 - d. Psalm 27:6; Isa 65:14
 - e. Psalm 66:2
 - f. Jer 31:7

Note: Material for this class was gathered from a variety of study sources. “Singing as Worship” by Kevin Cauley, “The Hymn and the Heart” by M.W. Bassford

Father and Friend Thy Light Thy Love (#140)

Father and Friend! Thy light, Thy love,
Beaming through all Thy works we see;
Thy glory gilds the heavens above,
And all the earth is full of Thee.

Thy voice we hear, Thy presence feel,
While Thou, too pure for mortal sight,
Involved in clouds, invisible,
Reignest the Lord of life and light.

We know not in what hallowed part
Of the wide heavens Thy throne may be,
But this we know, that where Thou art,
Strength, wisdom, goodness dwell with Thee.

Thy children shall not faint nor fear,
Sustained by this exalted thought;
Since Thou, their God, art everywhere,
They cannot be where Thou art not!

1. What do you think this song addresses?
2. How do the “works” of God praise Him?
3. How do they reflect His Light and Love?
4. How do we hear His voice?
5. What emotions or reaction do you feel when you read the third verse? Does this song help you acknowledge that “Strength, wisdom, goodness dwell” wherever He is?
6. Read the fourth verse, and then read the following passages, how can this song help us worship and teach each other?
 - Psa 124:7-8
 - Psa 139:7-12
 - Acts 17:27