

# **Music in Christian Worship and Why Does the church of Christ Sing A Cappella?**

## **How are we to worship God?**

God wants us to worship him acceptably, in spirit and in truth. To worship him we must worship him with our innermost self (spirit) through the truth of the gospel of Christ. No longer will worship require external things like certain men (Levites and priests) worshiping in certain ways (priestly regulations from the Torah) at prescribed locations (the Temple at Jerusalem), with physical instruments (trumpets, harp, lyre) but rather Christians will worship in spirit (each as a priest with the fruit of lips played on the instruments of an engaged mind, heart and spirit) and in the truth revealed through the gospel of Christ!

Heb 12:28-29

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire".

John 4:21,23-24

Jesus declared, "Believe me, woman, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ... 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 spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."

John 17:17

Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

## **What Did the Early Church Practice?**

The church universally sang exclusively a cappella for 800-1000 years, and this is clearly the form of music in worship that was initiated by the apostles. The instrument was initiated into Christian worship first by the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation churches were originally a cappella as well. A cappella literally means "in the manner of the church or chapel", and it distinguished Christian worship from both Judaism and pagan worship. It has always been uniquely Christian. The early church, which we in the churches of

Christ strive to emulate, was strongly committed to a cappella singing in all the churches, because to worship with instruments was viewed as falling back to Judaism or even worse pagan worship!

The apostles encouraged the early church to stick to the teachings as they were passed down from them:

2 Thess 2:15

So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

1 Thess 4:1-2

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

Phil 4:9

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

1 Cor 11:2

I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings (traditions) just as I passed them on to you.

Rev 2:5

Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.

Titus 2:1

You, however, must teach what is appropriate to sound doctrine.

1 Tim 4:16

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

### **What is the Purpose of Singing in Worship?**

Congregational singing serves to express gratitude and emotion to God (praise), as well as teach, admonish, and build up or encourage one another. Christian

worship was distinguished by the fulfillment of Christ's command to worship in spirit and truth. Thus, the church's worship should be performed by the worshipers together, and is not a "performance" to watch or "vicarious worship" to be experienced. Vicarious worship was typical of both Jewish and pagan worship practices, whereas the Christian worship of the priesthood of believers was active, spiritual, and edifying to all involved.

### **What Should be our Mental State During Worship?**

First worship is active, not passive. Second worship is engaged in both mind and spirit. Congregational worship is simultaneously individual and collective. It is critical to realize that worship is NOT entertainment.

- John Chrysostom, elder of Constantinople, late 300's AD  
"Making melody to the Lord means paying attention while you are singing. Those who in singing do not offer this deep attention to God are merely mouthing psalms, uttering words, while their hearts are preoccupied elsewhere"
- Alexander Campbell (restoration movement)  
"So to those who have no real devotion or spirituality in them, and whose animal nature flags under the oppression of church service, I think that instrumental music would be not only a desideratum (necessity), but an essential pre-requisite to fire up their souls to even animal devotion. But I presume to all spiritually minded Christians, such aids would be as a cowbell in a concert."

### **Simply put ... why don't we sing with instrumental accompaniment at Eastridge church of Christ?**

1. The Scriptural goal of singing in worship is to praise, admonish, encourage, and instruct or teach each other by singing together with our minds and hearts fully engaged. The words we sing instruct and encourage us as we join our voices together in our sacrifice of praise to God (the "fruit of lips"). An instrument (other than our heart and voice) is not necessary or helpful to this goal, and can even be a distraction (and at worst, in church meetings becomes a form of passive entertainment, not worship).

2. We have no scriptural command or example for the use of the instrument in Christian congregational praise in the NT, thus we cannot be sure it is what God wants. In fact, it did not even appear in Christian worship for almost a thousand years after the church was formed. We enjoy providing the worship to God just as the New Testament church did, which we know is pleasing to God.
3. If our church maintains the goal of simple New Testament Christianity, then there is no doubt as to how the New Testament church worshiped ... exclusively a cappella. It is the opinion of the churches of Christ that seek to restore New Testament Christianity, that this form of singing is the form of worship instituted by the apostles, and is cooperative, spiritual, actively praise oriented, distinctly Christian, and it cannot be improved upon.
4. There are great advantages to a cappella singing! We can sing anywhere and at any time with no accessories necessary except our hearts, minds and voices. There is a comfort level with singing in the c of C that is needed to really participate in singing actively. Let's don't lose that! We don't need professional performers, expensive instruments, stages, sound systems, lighting, or stage crews. Lastly, vocal singing is 100% active, as Christian singing should be, and not "vicarious" worship.
5. I personally do not stand in condemnation of those who worship as a congregation with instruments or praise bands, but for the reasons stated above, our eldership feels that a cappella singing is the right form of worship for our church!

## **What are the New Testament Scriptures on Singing A Cappella or Singing with Instruments?**

### **Singing a cappella (Greek words = psallo, ado, humneo): Related New Testament Scriptures**

#### Hymn Singing

Matt 26:30 or Mark 14:26

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (humneo)

#### OT/NT fulfillment

Rom 15:9

"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name." (psallo)

Heb 2:12

"I will declare your name to my brothers and sisters; in the assembly I will sing your praises." (humneo)

#### Emotional expression to God

James 5:13

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. (psallo)

Acts 16:25-26

About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. (humneo)

#### When together as a church (congregational praise or worship)

1 Cor 14:15-16

So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my understanding (mind); I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my understanding (mind). (psallo)

1 Cor 14:26

What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up.

Eph 5:18-20

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ado then psallo)

Col 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. (ado)

Apocalyptic (i.e. in Heaven)

Rev 5:8-9

Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of God's people. And they sang a new song, saying: (ado)

Rev 14:2-3

The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. (ado)

Rev 15:2-3

They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb (ado)

Other- professing Christ by singing or speaking as a sacrifice of praise

Heb 13:15-16

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise – the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

**Singing with Instruments in the New Testament church: Scriptural Command or Example:** There are none

## Historical Considerations

- **Eastern Orthodox Reason for a cappella singing:**

“Since our entire service is chanted -- the priest and the faithful in dialogue with one another -- the only possible way to render the words of the hymns is with the human voice. There are no parts of our services that call for musical interludes, "background music," etc. The services are synonymous with the texts, and the texts constitute the service, and all are sung.”

(Personal communication with Father John Matusiak, OCA communications office, March 2007)