

The Joy Of Singing

Introduction. One of the blessings as well as an important responsibility for the Christian is the practice of assembling regularly with other Christians. We have an example of Christians assembling in Acts 20:7 and we have an explicit command not to forsake our assembling together in Hebrews 10:25.

The purpose of our assembling is threefold: (1) to express praise and devotion to God and Christ; (2) to exhort and encourage our brethren to greater service; and, (3) to receive such encouragement ourselves.

A very important element of our worship is the act of singing praises. We spend nearly a third of our assemblies engaged in this activity. It also has a place in our private devotions to God, and rightly so, for it has the potential of reaping great benefits. It is clear that those who walked with God in Old Testament times delighted in singing (Psalm 146:1-2). Christians were taught to respond to the goodness of God in a similar way (James 5:13).

But there are indications that some have lost the joy of singing. Many Christians sing with virtually no emotion and some go one step further, and do not sing at all. Some complain because time available for classes is taken up by the singing of a few hymns or refuse to attend a worship service if they know it will be devoted primarily to singing. In contrast, it was common in the past for people to travel distances to attend a service devoted to praising God in song.

Why do such conditions exist? I suspect it may be a failure to appreciate the true purpose of singing and how we can get more out of singing.

I. **The Purpose Of Singing**

- A. Our purpose is to praise the Lord (Acts 16:25).
 1. This is the most popular concept of the purpose of singing.
 - a) Indeed, this is certainly the idea inherent in the word "hymn."
 - b) It comes from the Greek word *humnos*, meaning "a song in praise of."
 2. Praising God should be natural for Christians. For if David in the Old Testament reacted this way to the blessings God gave him, we should too (Psalm 28:6-7).
 3. Singing is one of the "spiritual sacrifices" that we offer to God (Hebrews 13:15).
 - a) As "spiritual priests" we are to offer up "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God" (1 Peter 2:5).

- b) If we are not careful, we might be guilty of offering "defiled" service to God as was the case in Malachi's day (Malachi 1:7-8, 12-13).
- B. Our purpose is to teach and admonish one another (Colossians 3:16; Ephesians 5:19).
 - 1. Our singing is not just directed toward God.
 - a) Certainly, many songs are directed toward God.
 - b) But many of the songs are directed to each other.
 - 2. That is because many songs are designed to teach one another.
 - a) We teach and admonish each other to live right and enjoy God's blessings.
 - b) So "congregational singing" is often "congregational teaching."
 - c) Thus singing is a way that we can encourage our brethren and ourselves as well.

II. **Getting More From Our Singing**

- A. We must engage the "mind" as we sing.
 - 1. Remember, singing is "teaching and admonishing one another."
 - a) This assumes that we understand what we sing.
 - b) We must be careful that our enjoyment of singing is not just liking the music without necessarily understanding the words.
 - 2. Therefore, give careful attention to the words of the song.
- B. We must also engage the "heart" as we sing.
 - 1. When we sing, we must do so:
 - a) "With grace in our hearts" (Colossians 3:16).
 - b) "Making melody in your heart" (Ephesians 5:19).
 - 2. This assumes that we involve our emotions as we sing.
 - 3. To sing without emotion (without grace in our hearts):
 - a) Will be evident in our countenances (Proverbs 15:13).
 - b) Is hypocritical, and condemned by Jesus (Matthew 15:7-8).
 - 4. Which is more important when we sing, how we sound or how we feel? Are we really teaching and admonishing one another if we just whisper or mouth the words?

III. **Questions To Evaluate Your Singing**

- A. Do you limit the sphere of your singing?
 - 1. Is your singing limited just to the public assemblies?
 - 2. Or do you utilize opportunities to sing at other times with others, or even alone?
 - 3. Do you sing praises to God by yourself throughout the week?
 - 4. Does your family ever sing spiritual songs together (e.g., while traveling in the car)?

5. Singing, like prayer, ought to be spontaneous, arising whenever the circumstances call for it (Acts 16:25; Psalm 34:1-3).
- B. Is there lack of emotion in your singing?
1. Remember, singing is to involve the heart. And not with just "some" heart, but as in all that we do for the Lord, with "all" our hearts (Matthew 22:37).
 2. When it comes time to praise the Lord, it should not be done "half-heartedly." Which is more unscriptural, singing with mechanical instruments, or singing without engaging the instrument of the heart? Someone once said, "It is a great sign of mediocrity to praise always moderately."
 3. We may not all be talented in voice, but all can and should bless the Lord with their "whole being" (Psalm 103:1).
- C. Do you understand what you are singing?
1. Again, singing must also involve the mind.
 2. Some songs, though sounding beautiful, can be so complicated as to hinder understanding. Consider some examples:
 - a) The musical arrangement can be such that one spends more time concentrating on the notes rather than the words.
 - b) The pace of the song can be so fast that we cannot consider its meaning.
 - c) The words used may be unusual and not understood by the average singer.
 3. Song leaders can perform a valuable service by being careful in the songs they select.
 - a) Carefully introducing songs that may be new to the congregation.
 - b) Taking a moment to explain the meaning of the song or unusual words in it.
 4. But the ultimate responsibility falls on us who sing, so we should make every effort to understand what we are singing.
- D. Do you stress musical harmony to the detriment of New Testament singing?
1. God stresses making melody in our hearts over making harmony with our voices.
 2. In a natural desire to offer beautiful praise, do you discourage those who might not have trained voices but still love to praise God with their whole being?
 3. I have seen some Christians give a criticizing look at others who sang "off key."
 4. But the emphasis should be on praising God in heart and mind, and not how it may sound to the human ear.

- a) It is not wrong for a song leader to study pitch, tempo, and even practice the songs they will lead at home. Our singing will benefit from prepared leaders.
 - b) When a song leader struggles by being off key or dragging a song, if I have my mind right, at the end of the song I have still worshipped God acceptably.
- E. Do you hinder your own singing by where you sit?
- 1. Sitting alone or spread out naturally discourages many from singing as they otherwise might.
 - 2. People become more involved, are more uplifted, edify others better, when they sit together and close to the song leader.
 - 3. One of the first steps to better singing is to sit with others who love to sing.

Conclusion. Have we lost the joy of singing? If we could see ourselves as song leaders do, we might be constrained to say "yes." I hope that by reminding ourselves of the purpose of singing and how to get more out of it, we might rekindle this act of worship. May David's attitude, a man after God's own heart, describe our own (Psalm 104:33; 147:1).

In order to benefit from our assemblies, one must first keep in mind who is present. First, our brethren in Christ are present. They are people like you, who appreciate the presence and encouragement of other Christians. So take the time to visit with them before and after the assembly. Second, visitors are frequently present. They draw conclusions about the congregation during their visit. So take the time to visit with them. Third, our Lord is present. Do we act as we would if He were bodily present?

You get out of the assembly what you put into it. Praying about what you are going to do and planning what you can do (such as welcoming and visiting) can make a truly edifying assembly. Come to serve, not to be served and you will be blessed in return. The more you attend and the more interest you show, the more you will grow. "How often do I have to come?" is indicative of grave spiritual immaturity. It displays a lack of true love for Christ and it shows that one is selfishly concerned with how little they can do to save themselves.