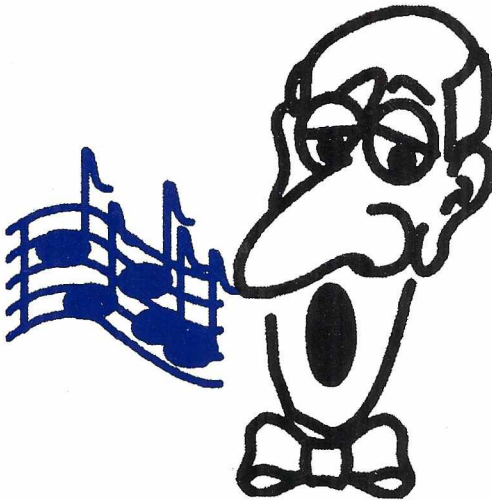


The Music Question

by

Tom House

A Sermon Delivered May 1994
At Gum Church Of Christ
Itawamba County, Mississippi

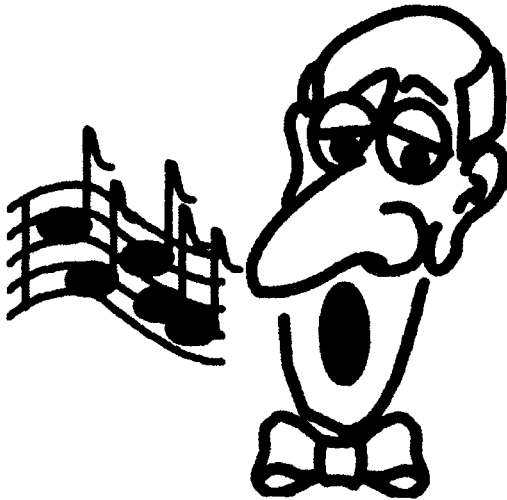


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Preface

This lesson was delivered in hopes that our brethren might recognize the dangers of going the way of the Israelites who wanted a king based on the premise that "everyone else has one." Many today are seemingly enthralled at the enthusiastic productions of those in denominationalism to the extent that the need is felt to build enthusiasm among our ranks by aligning ourselves with denominationalists; (albeit, some do so unknowingly); by accepting and advancing practices and doctrines which are unauthorized by Scripture. If our love is first for the church and the truth which is its foundation, may we only do and say those things which can be sustained by the word of Almighty God.

This lesson has been edited for space and adapted for readability purposes, as it is the case that sermons do not read with same force as when publicly delivered. However, the basic structure or theme has not changed.

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my appreciation to the brethren at the Gum congregation, for which I have served the past nineteen years. Their love and support have meant more to me than words can express. Their love for the truth, their unending thirst for it, have been an inspiration to me in my service for the Lord. My grandest dream, when this life is over, is to walk hand-in-hand with these brethren into the eternal presence of God.

To my loving family, which have been more than strength to me, my love is everlasting.

Special Thanks

To Mary Ann Turner, for the excellent job of transcribing this text from tape.

The Music Question

I am certainly pleased to see this number with **U**s and hope that you have brought your Bible with you for the purpose of studying together what we have announced that we are going to be discussing, and that is regarding the music question.

I feel that this is a matter of vital importance, particularly as it pertains to some events that we are seeing throughout the brotherhood. These trends which continue to take place are something of great concern. We need to address this, and make sure what the Bible says in order to know exactly how we ought to conduct ourselves when it comes to the matter of New Testament teaching in regards to the use of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

I want us to take opportunity to notice the fact that there are ten passages within the New Testament that relate to us matters concerning the music question. I invite all to take notice of these. We will begin first of all in Matthew, the 26th chapter, and in verse 30. Here is the incident, you recall, wherein our Lord established the Lord's Supper. After this sublime scene, you will remember in about verse 30 that they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. Additionally, the account that's found in Mark, the 14th chapter, is essentially the very same thing.

Then to the book of Acts, the 16th chapter, we find the occasion when Paul and Silas are found in the Philipian jail. As found in verse 25, it was at midnight that Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God and the prisoners heard them.

Then, if you would, turn to Romans the 15th chapter. Note in verse nine that Paul is speaking

about the prophecies that have been made concerning the Gentiles receiving the Gospel of Christ, and all the benefits that would come as a result of its being received. He states in verse 9,

...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.

Then there is I Corinthians 14:15, a passage with which most are familiar. Here Paul says,

...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.

As well, you will note these other familiar passages: Ephesians 5:19, where Paul states:

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

In Colossians 3:16, Paul adds,

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.

In Hebrews 2:12, where Paul speaks of the superiority of Christ over humankind, relates a prophecy from David:

Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.

Here, the word "church" may be interpreted; "congregation," or "assembly," in which the singing or praise may be done. Then in Hebrews 13:15,

you will notice that there are some different terms that Paul uses here, but it seems obvious that he includes singing as part of the context:

· 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.

Finally, there is James 5:13, where the writer states,

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.
Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

Authority And Rules Of Interpretation

Now as we introduce these passages to you that have to do with the music to be used with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, I want to establish at the very beginning that there is one important passage which is going to be the underlying basis for everything which we are going to be discussing. The passage is found in Colossians, chapter 3, and verse 17. Here Paul emphatically states, *“That all we do in word or deed, we do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.”* That means that everything that we do religiously has to be, must be, in accordance with His authority. That is, it cannot go beyond it and it cannot come short of it. There is no room for negotiation or variation when regarding Biblical authority. Please keep that in mind as we discuss this issue.

In order to establish this particular point, we might note something in reference to the matter of how the Bible teaches. It teaches us, basically, in three ways. First of all, we are instructed by commands. If God issues a command, through

Christ, directly or indirectly, then that is something unto which we are pledged to obey. Please realize there are two basic types of commands: generic and specific. It is vital that we know the differences in them.

For example, we remember that Jesus taught that we should "teach all nations." Although this is a general command, He began to specify that which was to be taught, namely the Gospel of Christ. There were those in Paul's day that varied from the pure gospel, as he made mention in the book of Galatians. He stated,

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-7).

Hence, when we teach the gospel, my friends, that's exactly what it is that we are to teach, no more and no less.

The same application is made regarding the command that was given to Noah concerning the ark. God tells Noah, "*build an ark.*" That is a general command. Yet when you see the specifics begin to be applied, you will find that he was instructed to build it a specific length, a specific width, a specific height, with only one door and one window. Likewise specified, was the type of wood to be used. Therefore, you see the difference in generic, or general commands, and those that are specific.

Secondly, the Bible teaches us by means of implication. That is, if the Scriptures, in some way, form or fashion, implies that something be done

or not to be done, then likewise we are pledged to follow.

Thirdly, we are taught by an approved action, or example. By using particular characters found throughout the Biblical text, we find the Word provides marvelous examples which would be most profitable to imitate. Additionally, when it comes to the matter of New Testament doctrine, we must as well follow the examples that were set by those that lived during that time, who were working directly under the inspired direction of God.

Also, we might consider another method of instruction that would aptly apply to these other categories, and that would be the law of expediency. For example, the Bible teaches us, as noted earlier, that Jesus told us to go *“teach all nations.”* This, in essence, is a general command. However, it involves some expediencies. As He has told us to go teach the lost, He did not tell us exactly how to achieve that task. He told us what to use, but not how to use it. This is where the realm of expediencies comes in to play. To illustrate, we have the capability of using the air waves, by using television and radio. We use the printed page. We use our vehicles to carry us from place to place. Consequently, these are expediencies by which we are able to carry out those particular instructions.

Now, with that in mind, keep before you what we established at the very outset; that when discussing matters concerning things religious, that it must be in accordance with the Lord’s authority. When using these rules of interpretation, it will be much easier to understand the established truth.

That brings us to our subject, which has to do with the proper use of sacred music.

Types Of Music And Types Of Songs

It is important to note that there are two types of music. One type of music is instrumental or mechanical, which is provided on some foreign substance other than the human voice, and is mechanically produced. Then there is vocal music, which obviously is produced by the human voice.

The question before us is; which of these, or are both, to be used, and in which form are they to be used?

I want to, first of all, establish one other thing that's going to determine our conclusions. And that is this: that there are basically two different classes of songs. This is very important that we understand this difference. One class of songs are secular songs, which are songs that have nothing to do with things spiritual, and speak of things relative to this world and human ventures. Secondly, there is what the New Testament has outlined for us in several of these passages which we have discussed already, a class of songs which are classified in a group known as: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Now this is the question that becomes very important to this whole issue: What is the criteria by which is determined the difference between secular songs and psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs? What makes a song a secular song? What makes a song a psalm, hymn, or spiritual song? I suggest that most folks do not consider such to be important. Yet, it is crucial to the entire issue. As we have established, there are obviously two different classes of songs. When looking to the New Testament, we find there are three in a group specified for our use religiously; psalms, hymns,

and spiritual songs. Again, what makes a song a psalm, hymn, or spiritual song? What determines it? Will it not be songs which speak the name of God, the name Christ, of heavenly scenes, and in general all things spiritual? If this criteria does not determine it, what would? I think all will have to agree that there is a clear difference between secular songs and psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.

Now then, the vital question here will be: How are psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to be used? Remember the answer will be determined by the authority. What does the authority say? All that we “do in word or deed” must be done in accordance with the authority of Christ (Col. 3:17). Therefore, of the matter of sacred music, what was commanded? In Ephesians 5:19, Paul says,

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

He has made it emphatically clear that is how psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are to be used. Hence, we have a command.

Secondly, the authority has left an implication. We notice the passage again in I Corinthians 14:15, where Paul says this:

...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.

Paul, speaking of himself, implies the way that psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are to be used, they are to be sung!

The New Testament also exemplifies the same obvious conclusions. We recall Jesus with His

disciples at the establishment of the Supper, in Matthew 26. During the course of this scene, what were His disciples doing? After the Supper they sang a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. When Paul and Silas were in the Philipian jail, in Acts 16, what example do we see here with reference to the use of sacred songs? They sang them. My friends, that sets the precedent on how they are to be used.

When Does The Authority Apply?

Now the third most important question regarding this issue is this: When does the authority apply? Understand friends, that the problem with many is, that they feel like that outside the worship service, that they are at liberty to do as they will, when it comes to the matter of sacred music. By so doing, possibly without realizing it, these brethren are sanctifying the church building as the place by which only these authorities are to be imposed. However, the results of such logic not only create a problem in the practice of singing, but in the matter of prayer as well. Bear in mind, that singing is no more exclusive to the worship service, than is prayer or preaching. Obviously, one is authorized to pray outside the worship service, as well as preach. However, one must pray or preach in accordance with the authority wherever he may be (Col. 3:17). The same laws are going to apply.

There is the argument that some offer from time to time in support of the use of the instrument or some facsimile thereof: "God did not say not to use the instrument. God did not say that we should not 'ooo,' or 'aah,' or hum. God did not say that

we could not imitate the sounds of instruments with our mouths as we use psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs."

Well, my friends, if in fact, God omitted saying that we should not practice such things, where **is** the authority to allow us to modify the instructions He **has** given regarding the use of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs? The fact remains, that there is no such authority. To go beyond the authority is clear violation of Revelation 22:17, which teaches that we are not to add to the Lord's words.

This brings us to the law of exclusion, which is so often used in reference to the discussion of this subject. God does not have to specify certain things that He would ordinarily condemn, in order to clarify what it is that He is trying to establish as a matter of law or doctrine. For example, when He told Noah to build the ark, He specified exactly what it was that He wanted him to use as with reference to the material out of which the ark was to be constructed. Noah was told to build the ark out of gopher wood. While this argument is familiar to most, it remains to be formidable, logical, and reasonable. God did not have to say, "Thou shalt not use pine. Thou shalt not use cedar. Thou shalt not use oak, etc." When He specified the use of gopher wood, that excluded every other kind of wood.

When applying this to the issue of the music question, the same laws apply. We have seen the authority in the form of command. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, are to be sung. We have seen the authority in the form of implication from I Corinthians 14. We have seen the authority exemplified from the passages we have shown

from Matthew 26 and Acts 16. There is, then, the authority.

However, we must return to a previous point. Some will say, "Well, I know that instruments, or humming, or other non-verbal sounds shouldn't be used in worship, but outside of worship shouldn't I have the liberty to do as I please?" Again, where is the authority?

You will notice these passages again that we have cited which show there are only a couple that even closely allude to the worship service, and they are Matthew 26 and Hebrews 2:12. The record of Matthew 26 is chronicled before the church was established, yet if we wish to include this passage, please note; after Jesus established the supper, they SANG a hymn and went out to the Mount of Olives. There remains to be no other music mentioned! Additionally, we noted in Acts 16, that Paul and Silas were singing outside the worship assembly. This clearly shows we have an example set for how the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs are to be used outside the service or on any occasion, regardless of the circumstances.

Singing Is A Form Of Communication

Let's return to Ephesians 5:19. I want you to notice particularly the first word. Paul says, "*Speaking.*" Then add the next two words: "*Speaking to yourselves.*" Please notice, that this establishes that there is communication; legible, understandable communication between parties involved. "*Speaking to yourselves*" how, and with what, Paul? With psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Doing what with them? Communicating

between you. How? By singing them. But where is the melody made, Paul? *"In your hearts,"* unto the Lord.

Now one of the common problems that some in denominationalism have always had; and we have some in the church that are proposing this same idea, involves the word *"singing"* in Ephesians 5:19. The term comes from the Greek word *"psallo."* Just about every lexicon and scholar on this is going to interpret it correctly. It literally means, "to sing and/or pluck or play an instrument."

Some will say, "Well, that causes a problem, does it not?" No, not at all. Why? Because here Paul established the identity of the instrument. Observe closely; *"singing AND making melody,"* where? *"In your heart."* There is where the instrument is played. There, upon the chords of the heart, is that which is plucked.

Now then, if in fact, one is going to allege that this involves an instrument, saying; "See, right there, there is the instrument. There is where it says the instrument can be used." The obvious response would be: Are we not taught that all must sing? If we are taught that all must sing, and sing means to pluck or play an instrument, then does that not mean that every one of us must play an instrument? If not, why not? Not all have the talent, which would mean that those not playing instruments while singing would violate God's law.

Our study carries us back to Colossians 3:16. Note again, Paul says;

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs...

What is the action taking place in the verse? Teaching and admonishing; from which the context indicates that there is positive instruction being given. Hence, we are by our singing to instruct one another. This means that each one of us is involved in that process. Likewise, we are edifying one another. The messages that are found within these songs instruct and teach us. Such defines one of the purposes of singing.

Additionally, we admonish one another. Many of the songs we sing in our own books, are those which warn us of the consequences when we violate God's law.

So the question now is, when using psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, for the purpose of instruction and admonition, how are they used? They are sung. What is the source of instruction and admonition? Paul said, "the word" which dwells richly within us.

The next passage in our study is I Corinthians 14:15,

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.

One should take notice, that this passage, in concert with the others we have used, does not in any way indicate any authority for the use of mechanical instruments. As well, it does not authorize the use of incommunicable sounds made by the human voice. The passage clearly establishes that what is sung must be understandable. Obviously, in order to instruct and to admonish, one must use communicable language, otherwise his effort is vain. Since logic

will affirm that one cannot understand that which is non-understandable, it follows that humming, or "oooing," or "aaahing," or mimicking the sounds of musical instruments, is not authorized.

While it is the case that there are those which argue that we are at liberty to do as we please outside the worship, we have some among our own ranks which are practicing such things in the worship. I have a record of a congregation of the Lord's body humming during the Lord's Supper. How could these brethren teach or admonish when there was nothing understandable being uttered? Of course, some will argue that "we did not intend to teach or admonish, we just wanted to enhance the emotion to be felt during the supper." My friends, this is the same argument that instrumentalists have been offering for years. If you have authority for the humming, you have the authority for the instrument. If not, why not? The argument can as well be reversed. If there is authority for one or more to sit in a corner and play instruments, while all others are supposedly fulfilling the Lord's design with sacred songs, then you have the same authority to have several sitting in a corner humming while others are singing. If not, why not? My friends, nothing is accomplished by such a practice except to violate the Lord's authority for the vain excuse; "well, we believe the song needed to be edified." I earnestly believe that this is a bogus argument. I cannot see the merit in it, for it is my honest opinion, that the true interest is not in edifying the song. The song should not need edifying. If the message in the song is truth, the merit of the truth will stand on its own. In my estimation, the entire design of

such practices, is to entertain. I recently received information taken from a bulletin, that a certain particular group would be "performing" at this particular congregation. Brethren, we are not in the entertainment business! Such is not the design of the Lord's church, nor is the unauthorized use of sacred songs. Yet, there are those who feel we must keep up with denominational trends. Since they entertain, then so must we. However, this should actually call attention to that which distinguishes us from denominations. They must entertain for there is no substance to their teaching. Since there is substance to the truth we teach, and the practices we follow, there is no need to entertain. Paul said that the inspired word "completely furnishes" us. Since the Word is the foundation upon which truth is found, and the truth being the source of the messages of sacred songs, why then would the songs need to be edified? Who are we actually trying to please; God or ourselves?

The Messages Of Our Songs

This brings to mind another matter as well. That is regarding the messages of the songs we sing. We must know that when we preach, we are limited as to what we can preach. We are limited to preaching the messages that are found or based upon the truths found in the Sacred Volume. Likewise, when we "teach and admonish" while singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, we are limited to teaching and admonishing with only the truth of God's word. If there are songs, and there are, in which there are messages that cannot be supported by the truth, then they must be avoided.

Is It Sinful?

So the vital questions will be, "Is it sinful to use the instrument in or out of worship?" "Is it sinful to 'ooo,' or 'aaah,' or hum, or to mimic sounds of instruments when we sing?" Paul would answer, "Whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Please ask yourself, from whence does faith come? Faith comes from the pages of holy writ. Paul said in Romans 10:17, "so then faith cometh by hearing." Hearing what? "Hearing, by the word of God." As we have established in the course of this lesson, if you look to the Scriptures for a command to use the instrument, it will not be found. If you search the Scriptures for implication for the authority to use the instrument, it will not be found. If you search the New Testament for examples of the instrument being used, in or out of worship, it cannot be found. Using the same method, one will not find the command, nor the implication, nor an example of New Testament Christians using nonintelligible sounds in addition to the singing of sacred songs.

Conclusion

Therefore, what is the bottom line? There is no authority for such practices. If it is not in the Word, then it is not of faith. If it is not of faith, what is it? Sin! Those which practice such things, and those who support the practices which are unauthorized, are going to find themselves having to answer for this before the Lord when they stand before Him in the judgment.

I am sure that there will be those wishing to take me to task on this matter. However, if there are those who wish to do so, do not come to me

with, "It's my opinion, that it should be this way or that." Others opinion are important, and I respect them greatly. However, in this matter, my opinion or your opinion is of no consequence. It's what The Book says that makes the difference. And I believe that this lesson has presented what the Bible says on this subject.

My friends, the most beautiful sound that can be heard, is the sound of the human voice, manufactured by the hand of God, singing praise to His high and holy name. While many of us may not have great talent to sing, it makes no difference; for when one sings psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, as they were designed to be sung, it remains to be a most pleasant sound. Why? Because it is a voice fulfilling the Lord's authority in teaching, admonishing, and praising God in accordance with His will.

Why would anyone want to jeopardize his soul in lieu of spoiling a way which is already perfect? My friends, the Lord's way does not need improving. It is perfect just like it is.

