

## Sing Praises to God

*Companion Paper to the Sermon Delivered November 11th, 2018, at Firm Foundation Christian Church, Woonsocket, RI, By James Moriello*

**“Sing praises to God, sing praises!” (Psalm 47:6, NKJV)**

The gift of music was given by God to men from the very beginning. The first musician mentioned in the Bible is “Jubal...the father of all those who play the harp and flute” (Genesis 4:21). Music was used throughout the history of Israel as a means of praise and worship. Under King David and King Solomon, Israel had skilled musicians and singers appointed for the purpose of leading God’s chosen nation in the worship of the Lord (1 Chronicles 16:7-43, 25:1-31; 2 Chronicles 5:12-13). The Book of Psalms was the hymn book of Israel, and the divinely inspired verses were set to music. The people were enjoined to “worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Psalm 29:2). The worshiper was urged on to “Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding” (Psalm 47:6-7). There was to be a personal understanding of God, who He is, His majesty, and His work among men. The singing of Psalms also had a didactic (teaching) purpose to it, in addition to an expressive one. “Oh come, let us sing to the LORD! Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving: Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms” (Psalm 95:1-2). Corporate worship had the following components: congregational singing first and foremost, attended to by musical instruments and (sometimes) dance. The last two Psalms, 149 and 150, illustrate this well.

It also became the custom of the early church to sing “hymns to God” from its earliest days (Acts 16:25). New Testament Scripture also was set to music early on. A couple examples of this are 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and 2 Timothy 2:11-13. Men and angels are heard together singing God’s praises for the redemptive work of Jesus Christ in Revelation 5:9-10. There are two prescriptive verses in Paul’s inspired writings that are of particular interest to us. The first is Ephesians 5:18: “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” Why three classifications? Simply put, and I concede this may be oversimplification, “psalms” are the actual words of God, “hymns” are praises filled with

reference to the doctrine and attributes of God, and “spiritual songs” are songs which lead the worshiper to spiritual regeneration and renewal. They are to be spoken to one another, which means that in the context of a church service, the congregational singing ought to both praise the Lord and encourage the worshipers (as they hear the voices of others). The second prescriptive New Testament verse is Colossians 3:16: “And 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.” The requirement is that we “worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). The psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs we sing are to be those which teach and admonish the worshiper, even while he or she is engaged in pure worship of the living God. The mind and heart must both be engaged. Again, “one another” implies congregational participation in the singing at church.

Now we will turn to some common questions:

1. Are all instruments permissible in church services? Yes. The Bible does not forbid any specific instruments, and where God is silent, it is wise to be silent also.
2. Are church choirs biblical? Yes. Professional singers were employed in the monarchy of Israel under David and Solomon. See references in the first paragraph of this paper.
3. Are contemporary church bands with their “worship leaders” and “song leaders” biblical? Only if they do not violate biblical standards of worship. An excessive cacophony of music can actually detract from true worship. In pagan worship, such cacophony is used to direct worship to idols (Daniel 3:5-15). The lyrics and melody of the songs must be clearly understood and easy to follow (Psalm 47:7). The congregational singing must not be drowned out, lest Ephesians 5:18 and Colossians 3:16 be violated. The worship of the living God must be different than the experience the world offers through its music. The use of darkened rooms, strobe lights, and the like are a distraction to the worshiper, and set a tone opposite that of the spirit of light that Christ is supposed to bring (Cf. Ephesians 5:8-14). Bearing in mind that one of the Apostle John’s main themes was the contrast between light and darkness, I am fully convicted of the

- applicability of the preceding statement. Finally, the band or leader must attract no attention to itself. The congregation should “Know that the LORD, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves” (Psalm 100:3).
4. Does the Bible allow for song leaders? Yes, absolutely, there is precedent for it, but one is not required.
  5. You don’t need a complex music ministry. The absolute necessary elements of a Christian worship service is the preaching and teaching of the Word of God, the assembly together in fellowship, the Communion Table, and Prayer (Acts 2:42). Do your best to align the music ministry with these four points, and within God’s bounds.
  6. How do I do that? Glad you asked. Make sure you have scripturally sound psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in your song book or song list. Incorporate a Call to Worship just prior to the singing time. Have someone announce the name of the song and hymn number (if applicable). The congregation does not need anyone to talk about what is being sung, just sing to the Lord! If the songs are spiritual, the Spirit will do His work. If you have musicians on hand, great! If you have a choir, great! But whatever you do, make sure that the congregational singing is the main thing. Let the entire church be your choir! The leaders of the church, and gifted vocalists in the church, should sing aloud and set the tone. God will be praised and the people will be blessed. “Whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).