

Singing and Humming

By Robert Meredith

Editor's Note: On Wednesday nights, we are working our way through the excellent book, Churches in the Shape of Scripture. We are currently going through the chapter that deals with singing. I thought it might be good to get another perspective on the importance of verbal singing which we discussed this past Wednesday night.

Patrick Swayne

What is the difference between humming and singing in the worship services? There is a great difference between the two. God has told us what to do, and one must obey the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21).

In Colossians 3:16 one reads, "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." (See also Ephesians 5:19) The Apostle Paul instructs us to sing. He said, "...singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." If he had commanded us to make vocal music, then humming or singing would have been authorized. But he did not say "vocal music," he said to sing. That is what one has authority from God to do.

Notice from Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19 that one is told, "...teaching and admonishing one another" and "Speaking to one another." One cannot teach and admonish nor speak by humming. One of the purposes of the song service is to teach, that is why we are commanded to sing. In the singing of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, people are taught and admonished. By the humming of these songs, no teaching, admonishing or speaking is done, therefore, humming does not fulfill one of the purposes of this act of worship, and that is to teach.

It is sad that some will say, "Yes, but it does not say not to, and I do not see any harm in it." It is not an accident that right after commanding Christians to sing in Colossians 3: 16, the Apostle said, "And whatsoever ye do in word (teaching) or deed (actions), to all in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Colossians 3:17). To do something in the "name of the Lord Jesus" means to do it by His authority. Therefore, one cannot do anything religiously unless it has been authorized by our Lord. It does not matter if one does not see any harm in it. The question is, "Has the Lord approved it?" What did the Lord tell us to do? Sing!

One needs to respect the silence of the Scriptures. In Hebrews 7:14, one reads, "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood." The great deliverer and lawgiver of the Old Testament times declared by inspiration that the priestly tribe was the Levites. He did not have to say, "Now Judah, Simeon, Reuben, Dan, Ephraim, Manasseh, Gad, Issachar, Naphtali, Benjamin, Asher, and Zebulun, you are not to be priests." When Moses said who was to be the priests, that eliminated all the others. Likewise, when God only said "sing" that eliminated everything else.

If God had said, "Make vocal music," then humming would be fine. If God had said, "Make music" then singing, humming, or mechanical instruments would be authorized. But, my friends, the Holy Spirit guided Paul to write "sing." The command is to teach and admonish (Colossians 3:16) or speaking to one another (Ephesians 5: 19). This requires congregational singing, because

if I am not singing, as would be the case if a choir or chorus were singing, then I am not speaking/teaching anyone and therefore not fulfilling what the Holy Spirit commanded me to do. Let us sing praises to His name, teach others through song, and only do as our Savior desires.