

Worship

Genesis 4 relates man's first attempt to worship God. Abel, a shepherd, brought an offering of the firstlings of his flock. Cain, a farmer, brought an offering of the fruit of the ground. The Bible says, "And the Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering, but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard" (vv. 4-5). Whatever may have been the difference in this case, one thing is clear: God does not accept everything offered Him as worship.

The Concept of Worship - Worship is our acknowledgment of God's worth. Occasionally, the Bible uses the term of everyday living which respects His will (Romans 12:2). Mostly, worship refers to special acts of devotion intended to express to God our regard for Him. Either way, the underlying principle is reverence for God. Worship may therefore be defined as a reverent attitude which is expressed by a life of service and special acts of devotion.

Common Mistakes - The prophets of the Old Testament had much to say about the ancient Israelites' worship. While the forms were different back then - offering animal sacrifices, burning incense, tithing, etc. - we can still learn much from their experiences. The prophets identified three common mistakes: (1) People often mixed their own preferences with God's instructions. Instead of honoring God by doing what He said, they added or substituted what they liked. (2) Even when people were doing exactly what God said, worship at times became a boring ritual. Isaiah called it "lip service," "traditions learned by rote" (29:13). (3) Daily lives were too often segregated from what people expressed in formal worship. People praised God in songs and prayers but lived in complete disregard for His will. This was perhaps the prophets' most common complaint (Isaiah 1:10-17; Jeremiah 7:1-11; Amos 4:1-4; 8:4-6; etc.). Surely you understand why God would not accept worship from people who are just going through the motions or who substitute their own will for His. How does that honor Him?

Modern Applications - Jesus taught that "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). Spirit emphasizes that worship is the product of a spiritual relationship. Worship is a privilege, not a right. It is the privilege of those who are in Christ, who "through Him . . . offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (Hebrews 12:15). Both in the formal sense and the broad sense of daily living, it is the conscious expression of a heart devoted to God. Truth emphasizes worship as God directs. Only that kind truly honors Him. Omission of spirit leaves empty formalism. Omission of truth results in honoring self, not God.

The New Testament reveals several avenues of formal worship, either in individual or group settings. The history of the first-century church begins, "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). Instruction in God's word clearly has a part in our assemblies. Breaking bread refers to eating the Lord's Supper, a memorial of Jesus' death (1 Corinthians 11:23-26). This is to be eaten on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7), the day also specified for the contribution, a means of Christians joining together to do the work God has assigned us collectively (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). Prayer is our means of communicating with God, both for praise and requests (1 Timothy 2:1-6). Singing is another means of praising God, with the added benefit of teaching and admonishing each other (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

Whether done individually or collectively, God's honor, not our pleasure, is the goal of worship. Therefore, His word dictates what is done and how. Is it surprising that the means He has given appeal more to the spirit than the flesh? How it looks, how it sounds, how it feels - these are not the critical factors. Instead, God says, "Let all things be done for edification" (1 Corinthians 14:26). Remember, "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24).

- by *Frank Himmel*

A Bit of Methodist History Concerning Instrumental Music

In a book called: HYMN STUDIES - ANNOTATED METHODIST HYMNAL by Charles S. Nutter, published in 1884, there was hymn no. 27, "Praise The Lord." We give the first and fourth stanzas:

1. "Praise the Lord! his glories show, Saints within his courts below, Angels round his throne above, All that see and share his love.

4. Strings and voices, hands and hearts in the concert bear your parts; all that breathe, your Lord adore, Praise him, praise him evermore!"

What interested us particularly was the comment which followed the above hymn. Mr. Nutter, author of this Methodist Hymnal, said: "The fourth stanza would not have been admitted into any hymn book by the early Methodist. Instruments of music in the church, and especially those with strings were an abomination to them."

"Dr. Adam Clarke [noted Methodist commentator] said, 'Music as a science I admire; but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor.'

"John Wesley ["founder" of Methodism] said, 'I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen.'"

Readers of church history are familiar with these "quotes" - but in a Methodist Hymnal??? Hummmmm!!

- by Robert F. Turner

Does the meaning of the Greek word "psallo" authorize instrumental music?

"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:19).

In this famous text, the expression "making melody" comes from the Greek word "psallo." Some have argued that this word, in its original usage, implied the use of instrumental accompaniment to the singing that occurred during the worship services of the early church. In response to this claim, consider these points:

1) All authorities and commentators are in agreement that the early Christians in the first century did not use musical instruments in their worship assemblies. Therefore, those who knew the language and used it as their native tongue DID NOT understand the meaning of the word to include the use of the instrument.

2) Around 600-700 AD, the Greek Orthodox church split from the Roman Catholic church, and one of the main contentions was the use of musical instruments. Those who knew the Greek language at that time DID NOT understand "psallo" to include the use of instruments. Interestingly, the Greek Orthodox church continues to this day to only sing and not use instruments in their assemblies.

3) In the last several centuries, there have been dozens of English translations of the New Testament. Among all of the hundreds of scholars who translated those versions, NONE of them believed that the word "psallo" should be translated to mean "sing with instrumental accompaniment."

So, think of it this way: in the first century, then around 600-700AD, and in this modern day, those who knew and know the Greek language the best have NEVER believed or taught that the word "psallo" should be translated to include the idea of instrumental accompaniment.

- by Greg Gwin