

Should We Sing During the Lord's Supper?

A recent trend in the church is for congregations to sing while partaking of the Lord's Supper. Is this acceptable to God? Elders must decide on the issue by looking into God's Word. Many say that since the Bible doesn't say we cannot do it, then we are free to do as we wish. *Is this true?*

The worship of the Lord's church is governed by the principles taught in the New Testament. Jesus said *"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:24). This means that our worship must be offered with the right heart, motive and intent, and it must be based on love (I Corinthians 13:1-8). Since our worship is directed to God, He alone has the right to specify what is acceptable in His sight.

This principle has been true from the beginning of creation. By faith (Hebrews 11:4), Abel brought to God an acceptable offering of the firstborn of his flock (Genesis 4:4) and was called righteous (I John 3:12). In contrast, Cain offered from the fruit of the ground (Genesis 4:3) for which God had no respect (Genesis 4:5). In so doing, Cain's actions were called evil (I John 3:12). The difference between these two offerings is the fact that one was chosen according to the will of God. The other was chosen according to the desire of man. This example teaches us that we must always submit to God, and whatever we do in word or deed should be by the authority of God (Colossians 3:17).

So how do we determine whether singing in the assembly during the Lord's Supper is authorized by God? The truth can be found in Scripture in different ways. **One**, we can look for instructions in the teachings of Jesus or from the inspired writers of the New Testament. **Two**, we can follow the examples of worship conducted under the leadership of the Apostles in the first century church. And **third**, we can examine corrective teaching where the Apostles have identified and

addressed problems in the worship assembly to see what and why certain practices are unacceptable.

Teachings on the Lord's Supper are plentiful. It was instituted by Jesus (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-20) in memory of the sacrifice that was being made on behalf of all men under the New Covenant (Luke 22:19-20). The unleavened bread and fruit of the vine represent the body and blood of Jesus. The importance of the Lord's Supper was made clear by the Apostle Paul who emphasized four distinct purposes for its observance in I Corinthians 10 and 11.

There also are many New Testament passages that provide teaching and examples of singing praises to God (Matt. 26:30; Acts 16:25; I Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15). Scripture describes the act of singing as a means of speaking to, teaching and admonishing one another. As such, it requires the use of both spirit and mind (I Cor. 14:15) and touches the lives of those who hear it (Acts 16:25).

The Bible clearly authorizes Christians to sing and partake of the Lord's Supper in separate acts during the worship assembly on the first day of the week. However, where do we find the authority to combine the two together as offerings to God? Following our proposed approach, we search the Scriptures looking for three things. **One**, specific teaching from Jesus or inspired New Testament authors endorsing the practice. **Two**, examples approved by the Apostles. Or **three**, some insight and basic approval provided by an Apostle's discussion or corrective teaching dealing with related issues of worship.

What do we find in Scripture? First of all, there is no teaching either from Jesus or the Apostles supporting the practice of singing while partaking of the Lord's Supper. Furthermore, there are no biblical examples of Christians doing so in the worship assembly. I Corinthians 10:16-22; 11:17-34 and Acts 20:7 all refer to the Lord's Supper, but none of the passages says anything about singing. Looking elsewhere, a full examination of the verses dealing with singing uncovers no mention of the Lord's Supper. Since the Scriptures are silent, can we draw any conclusions from the discussion and corrective teachings

found in the Epistles? Yes, we can! **First** of all, we learn that it is possible to partake of the Lord's Supper in an unacceptable manner. In I Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul rebukes the Corinthian church for their neglect of fellow Christians and their failure to give due attention to the importance of the Lord's Supper as they turned it into an ordinary feast. **Secondly**, we know from I Corinthians 14 that there are other ways by which men can conduct themselves improperly in the assembly. The entire chapter deals with Paul's efforts to restore proper order to their worship. Specifically, those with the miraculous gift of speaking in tongues were doing so publicly without an interpreter. In rebuking the practice, Paul cited the importance of speaking to men for edification, exhortation and consolation (I Cor. 14:2-3). Hence, the value of prophecy was emphasized so the Lord's Church could grow spiritually and be edified (I Cor. 14:12). Paul continues teaching that both spirit and mind must be actively engaged in worship (I Cor. 14:13-19). His objective was to eliminate confusion in the assembly and to build up the body. Paul concluded with several directives.

The two guiding principles in this context are that God is not a God of confusion but of peace (I Cor. 14:33), and all things must be done in an orderly manner (I Cor. 14:40).

So what does I Corinthians 14 have to do with the issue of singing while partaking of the Lord's Supper? If we are speaking to, teaching and admonishing one another when we sing, then we must be listening and concentrating on the words. *"I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also"* [or mind] (I Corinthians 14:15). However, when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are to be communing with Jesus and having a period of individual self-examination (I Corinthians 11:28) during this special time of remembrance and proclamation. ***It is simply impossible for an individual to properly execute both acts of worship at the same time since they have different requirements.*** While it may be possible to select a

meaningful song that centers on the death of Jesus, being only human, we cannot give due attention to all these activities at once. We cannot carry a tune, sing the written words of the song, listen to what the members around you are singing, acknowledge the sins in your life along with the price that has been paid for your redemption, assess your attitude, have appreciation and awareness of just what Jesus has done for you personally, etc. Similarly, if we are properly attentive to the conduct of the Lord's Supper, then we must be neglecting the singing. So we can either sing in spirit and mind and neglect certain aspects of the Lord's Supper, that is, partake in any unworthy manner, and thereby sin (I Corinthians 11:27) or we can partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner and neglect certain aspects of the singing, that is, not singing in mind and spirit, and thereby sin (I Corinthians 14:15). But these are not real choices, because they both lead to sin. It is even worse than this for the following reasons:

1. If we sing while others are partaking of the Lord's Supper, we are obstructing those who choose not to sing and instead to focus properly on all aspects of the Lord's Supper.
2. If we combine worship activities, we are violating the intent of Paul's directive to do things one by one, in turn, in order (I Corinthians 14:27, 31), since we have some people speaking to others who are trying to examine themselves.
3. By having communion (giving due attention to all its aspects) while singing together, we are promoting confusion.
4. If we partake and sing at the same time, we are not doing things properly and in an orderly manner. (I Corinthians 14:40.)
5. If we accept this practice of combining things, we establish a precedent and bind the tradition of men on all in the worship assembly, like it or not, contrary to the teaching of Matthew 15:1-10.
6. Requiring this of everyone will deny some faithful brethren the opportunity to partake of

the Lord's Supper in the assembly as they must simply refuse to participate.

7. Requiring this of everyone will force some to sin as they participate in violation of their conscience and feeling guilty because "*whatsoever is not of faith is sin*" (Romans 14:23).

These considerations show that it is not acceptable to combine singing with partaking of the Lord's Supper. There is no indication that the first century Christians either taught or practiced such. Moreover, without spiritual authority for doing so, there is no justification for placing souls at risk. If the congregation is not satisfied with partaking of the Lord's Supper during a period of thoughtful meditation in silence, then the problem and solution do not reside with the ears but rather with the heart (Matthew 15:19). May God help us to grow and always seek out and yield to His will in all things.



Truth For The World

truthfortheworld.org

info@tftw.org

P.O. Box 241
Bethel Springs, TN 38315
U.S.A.



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