

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Is congregational singing authorized?

(Jerry Fite)

If we did not have congregational singing where many voices harmoniously blend to offer praise to God, would you miss it? Would you implore the elders to incorporate it in our public worship? If so, on what basis would you want it established as a continual practice: “I like it?” Or, “congregational singing is authorized in the New Testament.”

Not *presumptuous* regarding God’s silence, and respecting the revealed parameters of *not “adding to,”* nor *“subtracting from”* God’s revealed word, we are ready to inspect the details of a proposition to see if God authorizes it (*Hebrews 7:12-14, 1 Corinthians 4:6, Revelation 22:18-19*). Is it *“commanded”* in the New Testament? Is there an *“approved example”* of the proposed practice in the new covenant of Christ? Or, is the practice in question *“implied”* by an inspired writer of the Gospel that creates a *“necessary inference”* that such proposition and consequent practice is authorized by the Lord.

Considering the proposition of applying the Lord’s supper in our lives, we must respectfully approach the Scriptures seeking what is authorized. Yes, the Lord’s supper is *commanded*

for us to do (*1 Corinthians 11:24*). The *“approved example”* of the church at Troas provides *“the first day of the week,”* or our Sunday, as to when we can partake of the Lord’s supper (*Acts 20:7*). The fact that every week has a first day, it is implied, and can thus be *“necessarily inferred,”* that it is authorized to remember the Lord’s death by partaking of the Lord’s supper every first day of the week.

The word “congregation” denotes an “assembly” or “gathering” of a “plurality” of people. Is congregational singing or plurality of voices harmonizing praise unto God together authorized in the New Testament? James 5:13 is a command to sing: “Let him sing” when he “is cheerful.” But this command for an individual to sing is not addressing the congregational aspect of our song service.

What passages do provide the authority of God for congregational singing?

We have *“one to another”* singing being authorized in *Ephesians 5:19*. Christians are exhorted to be *“speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord...”* You have to be

gathered together with others if you are going to be speaking in song one to another. Thus the “congregational” aspect of singing in worship is addressed and properly authorized. *Colossians 3:16*, a complementary passage to *Ephesians 5:19* exhorts all to *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God.”* Being gathered together in singing praise unto God, we are also speaking one to another the revealed wisdom of God teaching and admonishing one another.

In chapter 2 of the Book of Hebrews, the author emphasizes Jesus’ humanity as one who took on flesh and blood, like man. Jesus partook of flesh and blood so he could die, and through death, destroy the works of the Devil, including freeing man from sin and death. In the context of identifying with man, the Hebrew writer quotes from Psalm 22, clearly a Messianic Psalm. Jesus, in identifying with man, states, *“I will declare thy name unto my brethren; in the midst of the assembly will I sing Thy praise thee”* (*Hebrews 2: 12, Psalm 22:22*). Singing in the congregational setting is therefore authorized by the Lord.