



TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Articles

Why Should We Sing?

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This is multiple choice. The reason we sing in our services is: (a) we don't like music; (b) to fill the time until the preaching starts; (c) to make ourselves feel better; (d) it's how we've always done it.

I don't think God would want us to choose any of the above, but I suspect someone somewhere has thought such things about us (answer a) or thought the reason to be no more substantive than these choices (answers b-d) or others like them.

I also suspect answer (d) may reflect the thinking of more people than the others. Every Sunday, we go to church. We hear family news. We sing. We pray. We commune. We give. We listen to a sermon. And then we leave. Over and over. Sunday after Sunday.

But do we *think*? Do we see the connection between the rite and the right? Between liturgy and life? Between the supper and the sanctification? Look inward. Be honest. Why do *you* gather? Habit? Duty? Guilt? Are you entering God's presence, or merely being made to feel better, perhaps even entertained?

An early 5th century writing, *Questions and Answers for the Orthodox*—attributed to Theodoret—dealt with questions like these with particular concern for singing. Here's what he wrote:

It is not simple singing that belongs to the childish state, but singing with lifeless instruments, with dancing, and with clappers. Hence the use of instruments and the others that belong to the childish state is excluded from the singing of the churches, and simple singing is left. For it awakens the soul to a fervent desire for that which is described in the songs, it quiets the passions that arise from the flesh, it removes the evil thoughts that are implanted in us by invisible foes, it waters the soul to make it fruitful in the good things of God, it makes the soldiers of piety strong to endure hardships, it becomes for the pious a medicine to cure all the pains of life. Paul calls this the "sword of the Spirit," with which he arms the soldiers of pity against their unseen foes, for it is the word of God, and when it is pondered and sung and proclaimed it has the power to drive out demons (Everett Ferguson, *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, 4th ed., 64).

Theodoret knew why God's people should sing. He saw the church's singing as the purest form of music, a praise offering to God that anyone can give and a vital tool for spiritual growth. We will receive this benefit only if we sing with God in view.

"Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods" (Ps 95.1-3 ESV).

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