

SHOULD EVERYONE SING?

L. O. Sanderson

It is no secret that too many Christians fail or refuse to sing hymns of prayer and praise or Gospel songs of admonition to others; and when one is exhorted to join in the sacrifice of our lips in praise, the answer is: “I can’t sing,” or “my voice will not respond” (even though they can talk a blue streak!), or “I simply am not musically inclined” (though they play records, radio, attend musicals, and even enjoy singing!). It is agreed that we are born with varied degrees of the senses of pitch and rhythm—it is difficult to believe that anyone is born with none. But the question is: Should everybody sing? Is one more obligated to try than another? Can one who is talented do the singing for another who is not as talented? Has God authorized a practice in the kingdom of His Son which cannot be obeyed?

A number of years ago, during a lecture on the music of the church, one from the audience asked to be recognized. We listened as he reasoned: “There is singing and there is making melody in the heart; both are included in the New Testament teaching. One has the talent to sing audibly, while another can only make melody in the heart.” (And he cited a Bible commentary to prove his point.) However, this writer, who was the speaker of the occasion, just had to ascertain if he thought a dual command, connected by the conjunction “and,” could be performed by two people—one doing one part, another the other part—and please God. The auditor’s answer was affirmative. We remarked, this would not hold true in other cases. For instance, the Lord says, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16)—can one believe, the other be baptized, and both be saved? You say this is absurd. Yes, but not any more than saying, “You make melody in the heart and I will sing with the voice, and we will both please God.” It takes both for one to complete his own obligation.

Surely, we can know that God does, or does not, authorize us to sing with the voice from the heart. If He doesn’t, then we do not have to utter praise and devotion—we can eliminate singing altogether! If He does (and the Bible is clear on this point), how can we honor God and admonish others without doing our best in song? The moment we admit that God commands us to sing, rather than offer mechanical praise, we are faced with a searching question: Can we go to heaven while disobeying a command? There is no alternative—to do or not to do, to the best of our ability, is the real concern. One endowed with greater potentiality in song has no stricter duty, no greater reward; neither is one of lesser talent relieved of duty nor denied blessings and rights of participation. As men judge, one can teach better, lead a better prayer, or give more, but this cannot excuse others from their obligation in these realms. If God says sing, and He does, we must do our best.

Paul said to speak (and this is oral expression) psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, “singing and making melody in your heart” (Eph. 5:19); to teach and admonish (and this is with the voice) in the same fashion (Col. 3:16); with him, it

was personal, “I will sing” (1 Cor. 14:15), and he practiced it (Acts 16:25). The Hebrews writer said it must be “in the midst of the church” (Heb. 2:12), and that “By him [Christ] therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Heb. 13:15). These and related Scriptures assure that God wants each and all to sing.

Grant that someone has waited too long to do well at singing, he could still try; and, anyway, this should not check our teaching that God expects His children to sing! If this had been emphasized fifty years ago, more, if not all, Christians would be joining in the exercise today. For the sake of the present and coming generations, we must urge God’s pleasure with respect to music in the worship. It is a fact that we must be taught to do what God requires— Jesus taught His disciples to pray, and by what manner; He actually went through the manner of observing and serving the Lord’s supper; we are taught to teach but must be taught before we can do so. Hence, to sing, we should be taught to sing.

One of the errors of teachers of singing schools in the past is that they pile up a stack of theory and often make the undertaking appear difficult, while under-emphasizing the joy of singing, the art of it, and promotion of spirit and understanding in the practice. May the Lord bless everyone who strives to improve our singing, but may we prove, with Solomon, that “man should rejoice in his own works” (Ecc. 3:22). The old saying is that “the proof of the pudding is in the eating”—may we also insist that the means and reward in singing is the doing of it! The least a Christian could do to effect improvement is to be on hand and try in every singing effort. The elders, who must of necessity be concerned with the teaching of and by the flock, should certainly encourage one of the most powerful means of teaching and admonishing. If all members of the church should attend worship and Bible study, let us put forth every effort to gain 100 per cent attendance; but if we fail, let us not give up. If all are to sing, let us put forth a special effort to attain full participation; but failure with some must not deter our efforts toward better singing.~

Deceased