

SHOULD WE USE PRAISE TEAMS IN THE WORSHIP SERVICE?

INTRODUCTION

- A. In the past decade, more and more congregations of the Lord's church have begun to use praise teams to lead in the worship service.
- B. What exactly is a praise team? "It is a group of four, six, eight, or more singers who lead singing as a group, providing four part harmony" as opposed to a single song leader leading with generally the soprano voice. (J. Furr, an advocate of praise teams)
- C. The basis for their use is purported to be to provide balance to the singing, to enable congregations to rapidly learn new songs, and to get a better blend in the singing in the public assembly.
- D. Quoting from one source which advocates the use of praise teams: "Through the praise team those gifted musically, men and women, can use their gift from God to encourage, strengthen, exhort, inspire, and edify the body of believers." (Gateway Church, A Church of Christ)
- E. The Scriptural basis is said to be in an Old Testament text from Hosea 10:11-12, from which they reason that the praise team can help to plow up and soften the ground so that the seed (the word of God, Luke 8:11) can be planted in good and tender hearts.
6. Initially, these thoughts sound good as most generally, all of us enjoy better singing in the worship assembly.
- F. Unfortunately, while the intent may be good, the fruit that has come from the use of praise teams have not been good.

DISCUSSION

I. ENTERTAINMENT.

- A. As one contemplates the need for a praise team, the initial question that arises is why? Is it necessary to please God?
 - 1. Is the Father in heaven more impressed with the quality of the singing with a praise team?
 - 2. Or is it more impressive and self satisfying to those who have assembled to worship? GA 1:10.
 - 3. Concerns that arise are the need for the singing to sound better. Granted, I myself have been in congregations where I wished the singing sounded better; but if it was offered unto God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24), who am I to question the quality of the singing?
 - 4. Is it any less Scriptural than good, powerful singing?
 - 5. Can it not be the case, that where it doesn't sound good, that it is offered in spirit and in truth, and where it does sound good, something is lacking?
 - 6. The quality of the singing should not be the criteria by which we make the evaluation as to whether God is pleased or displeased.
 - 7. It was upon this basis that is the lack of quality singing, that some congregations used instruments to accompany the singing, to make it more palatable to those who assembled.
 - 8. Actually, this stands in contrast with the principle in Scripture: Psalm 100:1.
 - a. Some of my brethren make a joyful noise in their singing.
 - b. It may be that they can't carry a tune that they are off pitch and to the human ears uncomfortable.
 - c. If God made it a stipulation that the singing had to be good and on key to please him, there would be a lot of folks in trouble.

- d. The instruction of God is to sing (EP 5:19; CO 3:16), and the quality of that singing is not the focus, but that it comes from the heart, and that it is according to truth.
 - B. What seems too often happen in cases where 4, 6, or more lead the singing, is that members tone down to enjoy listening to the songs that are being sung.
 1. It becomes more enjoyable to listen than to participate.
 2. While the intent expressed is, “using a praise team allows more participation...” (Gateway Church); the result is not necessarily what is intended.
 3. For the singing to be acceptable to God, it must come from the individual. EP 5:19; CO 3:16.
 - a. The concept in the original language is that of reciprocation.
 - b. By our singing, we are teaching and admonishing each other which cannot be done if our intent is only to listen.
 4. Again, that may not have been the intent of the use of praise teams, but it has become a fruit of their use.
 - C. It is much the same with drama, which congregations are going to, to help illustrate a particular point in a lesson, or the lesson itself.
 1. While we do know that Old Testament prophets on occasion used visual aids, nowhere do we find the early church using such a method of propagating the Gospel message.
 2. And like the use of praise teams, drama also has become more entertaining than instructive.
- II. SPECIAL SINGING.
- A. Another of the unfortunate fruits borne as a result of using praise teams has been special singing, such as choirs and solos.
 1. The talented voices are praised by the congregation and encouraged to hear them in doing special songs before the church.
 2. But this is without authority, without scriptural precedent.
 - B. Again, noting as earlier, the phrases in EP 5:19 and CO 3:16 are grammatically classified as reciprocal, reflexive pronouns.
 1. J.B. Lightfoot notes that the pronouns used give the idea of a corporate unity. When the church as a whole sings, there is speaking one to another, when one group is active (the choir), and another group is passive (the listening audience), there is no interchange of action.
 2. It should be noted that there is no authority in Scripture for proxy worship.
 3. If one group (the chorus or choir) can sing and praise God for another group (the audience), that is the equivalent to arguing that one group may “be filled” with the spirit for another.”
 4. And if we apply that principle to other areas of worship, it would be just as reasonable to allow a few from the congregation take the Lord’s Supper for the rest of the members of the church.
 - a. Are members of the church ready to let only a select few partake of the Lord’s Supper for them?
 - b. I am sure that they would get a resounding “No”; however, they cannot see this in the matter of singing.
 - C. We are also mindful that there are no Scriptural examples or precedents that lend to solos and choirs.
 1. Why then are these things being introduced? It is stated that the authority for it

comes from 1 CO 14:26.

2. Citing a quote from Rubel Shelly, preacher for the Woodmont Hills church in Nashville, Tennessee: "The New Testament precedent is actually clearer for solo or small group singing than for congregational singing." (Lovelines, July 19, 1989)
3. But of interest, he says that the congregation where he preaches will stay with congregational music. --Why? If that is the case?
4. This was the same basic contention that the late Don DeWelt of the Independent Christian Church argued for, as he said there is little, if any authority for congregational singing.
5. As you look at 1 CO 14:26, we are impressed with the fact that singing is not specifically mentioned.
6. Further, if one had a spiritual gift which enabled them to sing an inspired song, it is reasonable to conclude that once the song was taught to the church, then the congregation would sing that song in harmony with Paul's instructions in EP 5:18-19 and CO 3:16.

III. TALENTS.

- A. Scripture records for us the parable of the talents (MT 5:14-30).
 1. In the parable, three individuals are singled out, as one has 5 talents, one has 2, and the other is given one.
 2. From the parable we are impressed with the fact that no one is without a talent.
 3. Everyone is blessed with at least one, and for others several.
 4. And it may well be that many talents are suppressed that could be used to the glory of God.
- B. As we look at the use of praise teams in worship, instead of causing a person to excel in their singing and to develop a talent, it is actually causing the opposite effect.
 1. A person listens to the four part harmony, and the talented voices that lead the congregation; and the individual tones down.
 2. In the realization of how much better the teams' voices sound, and how poor the person in the pew thinks they sound, it leads one to tone down or quit singing.
 3. It is not as though they are actually being helped to sing the song; but rather, with the use of four microphones or more, they are in effect being drowned out.
 4. This is the same problem that is often found in denominationalism with the use of an organ or a band. It is very difficult to hear the voices as they are drowned out.
- C. Our effort in the church is not to stifle spiritual growth, but to work toward the end of helping one to grow in Christ. 1 CO 14:26.
 1. We should strive to help a brother or sister develop their talents.
 2. This course of action, in using praise teams, is actually detrimental to such an effort.
- D. We are afforded an opportunity on Sunday evenings at 5:30, for those who want to, to come and learn new songs and develop their talent.
 1. Why bring something into the worship service that has caused considerable problems, when it is not necessary.
 2. The only answer appears to be for man's desire to make the worship service more pleasing to himself than to God.

IV. BORROWING THE PRACTICE.

- A. 1 SA 8:4-7.
- B. The children of Israel wanted to be like the nations around them. And unfortunately, we see a similar trend in our own day with congregations of the Lord's church wanting to be like the denominations around them.
 - 1. I did not realize, until I prepared for this lesson, the use of praise teams in denominational churches; to realize their abundance and the unfortunate reality that our brethren got the idea from them.
 - 2. Just because a religious body uses something, on the basis of enhancing their worship service, does not mean it is right (cf. PR 14:12).
 - 3. The very fact that religious groups which are in error are using them should be reason to give closer examination to the practice.
- C. Regrettably, in borrowing the practice, another practice has also been borrowed; that of a greater role of women in the worship services of the church.
 - 1. Praise teams, in taking a role in leading the singing in a worship service, most generally have women involved in leading the praises to God.
 - 2. If it is acceptable for women to have a part in leading the singing, is it not also acceptable for them to have a part in leading in other parts of the worship service?
 - 3. 1 CO 14:34-35; 1 TI 2:11-12
 - 4. The contention of those who use praise teams, in their defense, is that there is a song leader and that the women are only aiding in his leading songs.
 - 5. But in actuality, they have a very dominant part in leading the singing; as generally speaking, they have the soprano lead in the song which is usually the melody and what the congregation follows.
- D. Why tamper with Scripture and place women in a role which is in violation of the word of God?
- E. Regrettably, this course of action has led to women being deacons as well as preachers.
 - 1. While it is true that Phoebe is mentioned as a deaconess in the original language in RO 16:1, where it is translated *servant*; we understand that in the general sense of the word and not in the specific office as set forth in 1 TI 3 and TS 1.
 - 2. It is not possible for a woman to assume the office of a deacon since she is not the husband of one wife.

CONCLUSION

- A. There are congregations, much closer to this building that I care to admit, who have taken the road of using praise teams in their worship services.
- B. It is sad that this choice has been made, as the fruit from such an effort has turned sour, and is not yielding the desired outcome.
- C. Our goal in our worship is not to please ourselves, but to please God.
- D. It is extremely unwise to adopt a practice which itself is questionable, and which has such a detrimental effect upon the church.