

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. - 1 Peter 2:2

THE SINCERE MILK OF GOD'S WORD

The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword... - Hebrews 4:12

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Singing to the Lord

Ephesians 5:19: *speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;*

Colossians 3:16: *Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your heart to the Lord.*

These two verses teach the truth about how we must worship God through music. Notice toward the beginning of both verses that the phrases "*speaking to one another*" and "*teaching and admonishing one another*" are used. An important purpose of "congregational" singing is to edify one another.

This does not mean though that the purpose of such singing is to *please* ourselves. Notice the ending of both verses says "*to the Lord.*"

It is God who we must please. It is God who has the right to determine what is and is not acceptable in our worship. We must therefore follow His commands.

The New Testament commands He's given concerning worship in song all reference singing (**Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 5:13**). The *examples* He's given concerning New Testament worship in song also reference singing (cf. **Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15**).

In the Old Testament, worshipping God with mechanical instruments of music was acceptable (cf. **Psa. 33:2**), as was offering animal sacrifices. The fact that animal sacrifices were willed by God under the Old Law does not make it so under the Law of Christ. Likewise, the presence of mechanical music in the Old Testament does not make it God's will for worship today (cf. **Col. 2:14-17**).

Some question how worshipping with

mechanical instruments of music can be wrong if God has not *directly* forbidden it.

Consider an illustration. If we are asked to paint someone's kitchen white, we would recognize that it needs to be painted white. The person asking doesn't have to say *not* to paint it green, blue, or any other color. The understanding is that white means white *alone*.

When God asked Noah to make an ark of gopher wood, God did not have to list hundreds of woods that could not be used (**Gen. 6:14**). The command necessarily inferred that gopher wood was the only kind of wood that was acceptable.

In the New Testament, God commands making melody *in our heart* by *singing*. Making melody (in worship) with a piano or other mechanical instrument is worshipping God differently than He authorizes.

Having said all of this, it's important to note that the need for obeying God's command to sing is not fulfilled *only* by ensuring our outward actions follow His pattern of "*singing.*"

Our singing must be sincere, as indicated by the phrase "*making melody in your heart to the Lord.*" Our hearts should be moved as we worship in song. Those who are afraid their singing is not up to par should remember that God listens to our hearts.

We must also sing with thanksgiving, as **Colossians 3:16** says. A thankful heart that means the words being sung pleases God.

This should be the goal of our worship to God. Mankind can devise numerous ways to worship that *seem* good. Yet, only those who follow God's commands are showing the love for Him He desires (**1 John 5:3**).

May we sing with grace while making melody in our hearts, and thereby make a sound that is beautiful to God and edifies others.

Context and Full Picture

As we study God's will for us, it's important to look at both the context and full picture of things He says. Looking only at "bits and pieces" of a biblical subject often leaves an incomplete and distorted view of His will.

For example, Jesus commanded "*Don't judge, so that you won't be judged*" in **Matthew 7:1**. Stopping there leads some to believe that judging others is sinful. Yet, when one looks at the *context* and *full picture* of what Jesus teaches about judging, it is clear that He has something else in mind.

The context of **Matthew 7** shows that Jesus is warning against *hypocritical* judging. Notice **verse 5**: *You hypocrite! First remove the beam out of your own eye, and then you can see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye.*

The full picture of Jesus' teaching about judging shows that not only is it not forbidden, but it is actually *required* in certain situations. Jesus does not forbid judging others, but He forbids *unrighteous* judging. Notice, for instance, **John 7:24**: *Don't judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment.*

Consider another subject, alluded to in **Ephesians 2:8-9**. There the Spirit says, "*for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.*"

These two verses are often (ab)used to promote "faith only" doctrine and deny that God requires works of obedience, such as baptism, for one to be saved.

Yet, what the context of the verse really stresses is that no keeping of the Law ("Old" or "New") makes one deserving of salvation, because no one (besides Jesus) has kept the Law perfectly. This is not the same as saying that God does not require works in order to receive forgiveness.

If we want to know if "faith only" saves, we can look at the full picture of what God teaches about how to receive salvation. Notice, for instance, **James 2:14-26**. There, the Spirit says, "*Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself*" (**verse 17**). He further says, "*You see then that by works, a man is justified, and not only by faith*" (**verse 24**).

Verse 24 makes clear that to be justified (i.e., to stand before God un-condemned), one must "work" the good works God requires. If one is *not* justified, he or she still stands condemned before God, and thus is not saved. The full picture of God's Word shows clearly that good works are essential to receive salvation (also see **Phil. 2:12 & Heb. 5:9**).

The point is that to understand God's will concerning faith and works, or any biblical subject for that matter, we must look at *all* that the Bible says on the subject. Moreover, we must not remove a verse, sentence, or phrase from its context and twist it in a way that goes against what is taught in context.

These principles demonstrate the diligence needed in studying God's Word. It's much easier to read just a few words on a biblical subject than it is to study the full context of multiple passages that deal with the subject.

These principles also show the need for *honesty* when studying God's Word. For instance, if one has his or her mind made up that judging others is sinful (before diligently studying what the Bible says about the subject), there will likely be a temptation to take **Matthew 7:1** and "run with it" in whatever direction the person desires.

If, on the other hand, we study God's Word with a sincere desire to know the truth (whether it agrees with what we currently believe or not), then greater care is likely to be taken to study a given biblical subject with the diligence God's Word deserves.

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