

IS SPONTANEOUS SINGING ACCEPTABLE IN WORSHIP?

Dear Brother Waddey: What do you think about the practice of spontaneously singing while taking up the collection? Ella

Dear Ella: While the Bible does prescribe singing as the proper way to worship God (Eph. 5:19), it does not provide the details about congregational singing. For example nothing is said about a song leader, a hymn book, the number or arrangement of the songs we sing, or the number of verses we sing of a given song. Nothing is said of how to arrive at the proper pitch such as the use of pitch pipes or tuning forks. No mention is made of musical notations.

All we know is that early Christians sang psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Over the years we here in America have developed many useful traditions. For example all our congregations use hymn books; generally we sing some six or seven songs in a service. We normally sing three or four verses, even if the song has more. We have a designated song leader. The song leader in most cases picks the hymns to be sung. We have folks who can sing the various part of harmony. We might stand for at least one song, usually before the sermon. We usually have songs relating to prayer, communion, giving, the sermon and dismissal before those events take place. In most of our congregations you will find in general the same collection of hymns. Although these things are all human traditions, they are good traditions that help us conduct our services decently and in order. They expedite our worship to God.

Occasionally we hear of a church that has some spontaneous singing. By this I mean that before the actually hour of worship arrives various men of the church might begin singing a hymn without announcing the number or standing before the assembly. The audience joins with them in the song. In this case, it is a "call to worship." It notifies the people to take their seat and cease visiting. During lectureships or special teaching services, I have often witnessed someone leading forth in an appropriate song at the close of a moving lesson. For example if a great lesson has been delivered on the church, someone might lead out with "I Love Thy Kingdom Lord." A moving lesson on Missions might be followed by "Send the Light." I see no harm in the practice you mention of singing a hymn while the contribution is being gathered. It is in the same category as having an appropriate hymn before the collection is taken.

As in all matters elders should be careful lest such a practice cause confusion. Not everyone is capable of leading a song. Not every song would be appropriate for that point in the service. I would also add that it should not be done without first making sure that the elders approve the doing of such. JHW

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