

# Why Churches of Christ Do Not Have Solos, Duets, Trios, Quartets, or Choirs in Their Worship Services

By Donald Townsley

One of the obvious differences in a worship service of a local church of Christ and a worship service in a denominational church would be the absence of "special music" (the use of solos, duets, trios, quartets, or choirs). The reason for this difference is the fact that we in the church of Christ are a people who "walk by faith" -- the word of God ( II Cor. 5:7; Rom. 10:17), and there is no authority in the word of God for the use of these things.

Bible authority is established in one of three ways: (1) a direct command, (2) an approved example, or (3) a necessary inference. There is no command, no example, nor is it necessarily inferred in God's word that a special group is to be chosen from among the congregation to do singing. EVERY MEMBER of the church is commanded to sing ( Eph. 5:19; Col. 3: 16). When all the members are "speaking" to one another and "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace" in their hearts to the Lord, the command in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 is being carried out just as it is stated in the word of God. The congregation is doing what is commanded when every member sings; to add a special group of singers (a choir, whose purpose is to perform before the congregation) is to violate the specific pattern of congregational worship as revealed in the New Testament.

Teaching is one function in worship and preaching is one way this teaching is to be done (Acts 20:7); another type of teaching is in song. We are commanded to "speak to yourselves" (Eph. 5:19) and teach and admonish one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Col. 3:16). The entire congregation is to be involved in the action of the command to teach in song: Singing is HOW we "speak", "teach" and "admonish" one another; "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" are WHAT WE USE in carrying out the command. The phrase "speaking to one another" in Eph. 5:19 (NKJV) shows that there must be an interchange of action involved; we reciprocate in the teaching and admonishing. There is no interchange of action or reciprocation when there is just one (a solo) or a special group (a choir) singing while the rest of the assembly sits in silence.

God's command to sing was not conditioned upon the basis of a natural talent for singing. God nowhere said, "Let the gifted or better qualified singers teach and admonish", He said for ALL to worship Him in song (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Choirs are made up of the most talented voices; poor singers are left out. Choir and solo singing is a performance (a show of talent), and this is not in keeping with the command to sing. The only requirement given in carrying out this command is simply that WE ALL SING.

The purpose of choir and solo singing is out of harmony with the purpose of congregational singing that is authorized in the New Testament. Choir and solo singing is for entertainment and exhibiting the ability to sing. The use of choir and solo singing encourages people to display their talents for the entertainment of others. In congregational singing EVERY MEMBER is on an equal basis with all other members, ALL UNITING IN SONG to praise and glorify God in worship and to teach and admonish one another in song (Col. 3: 16).

The practice of choir and solo singing in worship originated in a departure from the faith. We know from the New Testament and from history that choral music did not exist in the beginning of the church; it came as a gradual development a century or two after its beginning. In an article entitled, *"All Ancient Christian Music Was Vocal"* (20th Century Christian, undated), Harold Fletcher made this statement: *"In the primitive church, the unaccompanied vocal music was the joint act of the whole assembly in unison."... "And by the seventh century most members could only sit by as passive spectators."* Tolbert Fanning wrote the following in 1856: *"The disciples are commanded to 'teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in the heart to the Lord.' We are to 'sing in the spirit' and with a proper understanding of what we sing. It is scarcely necessary for us to say to our readers that we regard the organ and violin worship, and even the fashionable choir singing of our country, as mockery to all that is sacred."* (Gospel Advocate, 1856, p. 199)

Churches of Christ do not use choirs and solo singing in their worship services because this type of singing is without authority in the New Testament. We reject solo and choir singing upon the same basis that we reject the use of instrumental music -- THERE IS NO NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORITY FOR EITHER!