

# What Does the Bible Teach About Instrumental Music in Worship?

(Compiled by Paul R. Blake)

## Introduction:

- A. There is not one thing written in the N.T. about instrumental music. But instrumental music is popular in most churches. How shall we determine religious practice? By majority rule or by rule of Scripture? To ask this is to answer it. What is God's way?
  - 1. Isa. 55:8-9
  - 2. One solution God chose was a flood; another was baptism for the remission of sins. What about music in worship?
- B. Examples of God's strictness. He wants what He asks for.
  - 1. Nadab and Abihu - Lev. 10:1-3
  - 2. Uzzah - 2Sam. 6:3, 6-7
- C. How do we answer the question of using an instrument in worship, whether addressing progressive churches of Christ or Christian Churches?

## I. DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT DOCTRINE

- A. Prophecy of Moses - Deut. 18:15; Acts 3:22
- B. God's chosen spokesman - Heb. 1:1-2
- C. Heaven's sanction - Matt. 17:5
- D. The last of court of appeal in religious questions is the Son of God and His Word - Matt. 28:18; Col. 3:17

## II. ATTITUDES TOWARD CHRIST'S AUTHORITY

- A. In the New Testament - Matt. 8:9, 21:23-27
- B. In History: Once the Pope had most religious authority, (so he thought) but men rebelled - Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin.
  - 1. Luther - "I favor bringing into the church of God and having a part and parcel thereof, anything and everything not specifically forbidden and directly condemned."
  - 2. Zwingli - "My platform is that in the matter of worship to God and service to the Lord, we will accept nothing unless the Scriptures authorize it."
  - 3. One is predicated upon what God does say, the other is based on what God does not say.
  - 4. Which is the correct approach to authority?
    - 1. 2Cor. 5:7; Rom. 10:17; 1Cor. 4:6

## III. ACCEPT AND APPLY THE AUTHORITY OF THE BIBLE

- A. 1Peter 4:11 - Speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where it is silent. Based on: "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent" (Thomas Campbell, Search for the Ancient Order: Volume 1, p 47).
- B. This attitude was common among the first men who worked to restore N.T. Christianity: Alexander Campbell, Raccoon John Smith, and Barton W. Stone who said, "The Bible alone should be my guide."
- C. Command - Matt 28:19

1. Divinely approved example - Phil. 3:17 (approved includes both apostolic examples and other authoritative examples without including incidental examples)
2. Divine implication from which we draw necessary conclusions - Acts 15:19
- D. Generic and specific authority: OT examples - gopher wood, red heifer
  1. Fruit: could include apples, oranges, plums, etc.
- E. Matt. 26:30; Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; 1Cor. 14:15
  1. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13
  2. In spite of what the Bible says to do, many are going to argue, "It doesn't say not to."
  3. Neither does it say not to sprinkle, say a rosary, practice polygamy, or supplement the Lord's Supper with pizza and beer.
  4. That which proves too much, proves nothing.
- F. The real reasons for use of instrumental music:
  1. "Its aesthetic appeal enhances our worship."
  2. "Without it we won't draw as many people to our worship."
  3. "We want what most other churches have."

#### **IV. REASONS THE UNINFORMED OFTEN GIVE FOR OUR REFUSAL TO USE MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTS IN WORSHIP TO GOD**

- A. We don't like mechanical instruments in music.
- B. We think vocal music is better than accompanied music.
- C. Our objection is cultural (like the Amish to autos).
- D. We cannot afford a piano.
- E. We don't have anyone qualified to play.

#### **V. THE REAL REASONS WHY WE REFUSE TO USE MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTS IN WORSHIP TO GOD**

- A. Jesus Christ did not teach the use of M.I. of music in worship.
  1. Matt. 28:20; John 14:26.
- B. The Holy Spirit never authorized the use of M.I. of music in worship.
  1. 2Peter 1:3; 2Tim. 3:16-17; 2John 9
- C. Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the apostles all taught us to sing.
  1. Command - Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16-17; Heb. 13:15; James 5:13
  2. Examples - Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9  
1Cor. 14:15; Heb. 2:12
- D. The New Testament teaches us that musical worship to God was:
  1. Congregational - no special singers, choirs, duets, solos
  2. Vocal - no mechanical instruments of music
- E. To worship with the human doctrine based addition of instruments would make our worship vain and unacceptable to God - Matt. 15:8-9

#### **VI. DENOMINATIONAL HISTORY OF THE INTRODUCTION OF MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP**

- A. First ascribed to pope Vitalian in 665 AD (Schaff).

1. Not in general use in Catholic churches until 14th century.
- B. Denounced by most of the prominent denominational scholars.
  1. Thomas Aquinas (Catholic, 13th century scholar) "Our church does not use mechanical instruments that she may not seem to Judaize."
  2. John Calvin (founder of Presbyterianism) "M.I. would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, lighting of lamps, or restorations of other shadows of the old law. The papists have foolishly borrowed this from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise, but the simplicity which Cod recommends to us is far more pleasing to Him."
  3. John Girardeau (Presbyterian author) "It has been proved that the church, although lapsing more into defection from the truth had no instrumental music for 1200 years. The Calvinist Reformed Church has ejected it from its worship as an element of Popery. It is heresy to the sphere of worship."

## **VII. DENOMINATIONAL ATTEMPTS TO JUSTIFY USE OF MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP:**

- A. "It was practiced under the law of Moses."
  1. That law is no longer binding - Col. 2:14; Gal. 5:4
  2. Nor would such advocates be willing to be bound by it
    - a. James 2:10 - animal sacrifices, priesthood, robes, etc.
    - b. That which proves too much, proves nothing.
- B. "There are harps in heaven."
  1. If that were truly justification for instruments, then it would only authorize harps in worship.
  2. Also horses, incense, wild beasts, thrones, lamps, jewels, etc. Will they introduce them into worship as well?
  3. Heaven is one realm; the church is another. What applies in one is not necessarily authorized or even appropriate in the other
- C. "If it is permitted at home, why not in the church?"
  1. We bathe, sleep, cook, watch TV, procreate in the home; that ok in the church, too?
  2. That which proves too much proves nothing.
- D. "We must use our God-given talents to His glory."
  1. Cattle and hog callers; belching contest winners; boxing; bull fighting; cow chip tossing; WV liars contest winner, etc. are gifts as well. Will they include them in worship?
- E. "We are not forbidden to use mechanical instruments of music in worship."
  1. Not forbidden to make mud pies and throw them around, either.
  2. The New Testament does not forbid everything that might be done. We are not forbidden to hog call, bull fight, or fly kites.
  3. The positive command to sing eliminates other activities; including cattle calls and mechanical instruments of music.
    - a. The Lord's Supper specifies unleavened bread and fruit of vine; that eliminates bagels, buttermilk biscuits, apple juice, and V8

4. Law of Exclusion - An expressly specific instruction eliminates all other alternatives, however reasonable they may seem.
    - a. Doctors' orders; shopping instructions
  5. How big would the Bible be if it contained a list of all of the things we were not to use in the Lord's Supper?
- F. "Psallo means to play an instrument."
1. E.V. Srygley - "A little Greek is a dangerous thing; and, I don't mean Aristotle Onassis."
  2. Reasons why this is a flawed defense: If mechanical instruments of music are required...
    - a. Then for 1200 years, Christians worshiped vainly.
    - b. The Church in the New Testament worshiped falsely.
    - c. None of the most acceptable translations of the Bible are correct
- G. "The piano is just an aid to our worship, like songbooks or pitch pipes."
1. It is an addition to what God has said - Rev. 22:18-19
  2. Aids do not change what God has specified or require a different action
  3. An instrument changes singing to playing - Gal. 1:6-9
  4. Common lament of denominationalists, "No one sings anymore."

#### **VIII. ABUSES TRACEABLE TO USE OF MECHANICAL INSTRUMENTS OF MUSIC IN WORSHIP**

- A. Violation of the command to sing by those who just listen to others play.
- B. Increased tendency to squabble over virtuosity.
- C. Second and third generation introducing more exotic instruments.
- D. Encourages alterations in other parts of worship.

#### **IX. LESSONS:**

- A. We are not being divisive in proclaiming the truth on this subject.
  1. Those who change God's requirements for worship by adding the instrument have caused the division.
  2. 1Kings 18:17-18 - History has repeated itself once again
- B. As churches have moved further away from demanding book, chapter, and verse for what is practiced in religion, the worship changes from praise and reverence for God to what is pleasing and agreeable to men
  1. Who are we seeking to please? - Gal. 1:10-12
  2. If we desire to please God with our worship, then let us worship God His way.
- C. Instrumental music is about man serving himself instead of God
  1. For the first 1400 years of Christianity, instruments of music in worship were seldom heard in the denominations of men. It has only become common in American churches for the past 150 years, about the same time in which the Bible began to be dismissed as the binding word of God for worship and Christian living.
  2. When a denomination chooses to use mechanical instruments of music in worship over what God specified in His word, they have ceased to worship God and have begun worshiping themselves.

## **Addition Notes on Instrumental Music in Worship**

### **I. GRADUAL INTRODUCTION OF THE INSTRUMENT IN WORSHIP BY THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

"Leave the pipe to the shepherd, the flute to the men who are in fear of gods and are intent on their idol-worshipping. Such musical instruments must be excluded from our wineless feasts, for they are more suited for beasts and for the class of men that is least capable of reason than for men... In general, we must completely eliminate every such base sight or sound - in a word, everything immodest that strikes the senses (for this is an abuse of the senses) - if we would avoid pleasures that merely fascinate the eye or ear, and emasculate." (Clement of Alexandria, 190 AD, *The Instructor*, *The Fathers of the Church*, Catholic University of America Press: Washington, 1954, pg. 130)

"David formerly sang songs; today we sing hymns. He had a lyre with lifeless strings; the church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre with a different tone indeed but much more in accordance with piety. Here there is no need for the cithara, or for stretched strings, or for the plectrum, or for art, or for any instrument; but, if you like, you may yourself become a cithara, mortifying the members of the flesh and making a full harmony of mind and body. For when the flesh no longer lusts against the Spirit, but has submitted to its orders and has been led at length into the best and most admirable path, then will you create a spiritual melody." (John Chrysostom, *Exposition of Psalms 41*, (381-398 A.D.) *Source Readings in Music History*, ed. O. Strunk, W. W. Norton and Co.: New York, 1950, pg. 70)

Eusebius of Caesarea in his commentary on Psalms 91:2-3: "Of old at the time those of the circumcision were worshiping with symbols and types it was not inappropriate to send up hymns to God with the psalterion and cithara and to do this on Sabbath days... We render our hymn with a living psalterion and a living cithara with spiritual songs. The unison voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument. Accordingly in all the churches of God, united in soul and attitude, with one mind and in agreement of faith and piety we send up a unison melody in the words of the Psalms."

Niceta, a bishop of Remesian (Yugoslavia) concerning instrumental music: "It is time to turn to the New Testament to confirm what is said in the Old, and, particularly, to point out that the office of psalmody is not to be considered abolished merely because many other observances of the Old Law have fallen into disuse. Only the corporal institutions have been rejected, like circumcision, the Sabbath, sacrifices, discrimination of foods. So, too, the trumpets, harps, cymbals, and timbrels. For the sound of these we now have a better substitute in the music from the mouths of men. The daily ablutions, the new-moon observances, the careful inspection of leprosy are completely past and gone, along with whatever else was necessary only for a time - as it were, for children."

Theodoret, a bishop of Cyrhus in Syria, wrote a work called "Questions and Answers for the Orthodox." 107. Question: "If songs were invented by unbelievers to seduce men, but were allowed to those under the law on account of their childish state, why do those who have received the perfect teaching of grace in their churches still use songs, just like the children under the law? Answer: It is not simple singing that belongs to the childish state, but singing with lifeless instruments, with dancing, and with clappers. Hence the use of such instruments and the others that belong to the childish state is excluded from the singing in the churches, and simple singing is left."

"Pope Vitalian introduced an organ in the church in the seventh century to aid the singing but it was opposed and was removed." (James Hasting, *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*)

"The first organ certainly known to exist and be used in a church was put in the cathedral at Aix-la-Chapel by the German Emperor Charlemagne, who came to the throne in 768. It met

with great opposition among the Romanists, especially among the monks, and it made its way but slowly into common use. So great was the opposition even as late as the sixteenth century that it probably would have been abolished by the council of Trent but for the influence of the emperor Ferdinand... In the Greek church the organ never came into use... The Reform church discarded it; and though the church of Basel very early introduced it, it was in other places admitted only sparingly and after long hesitation." (Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia, Vol. II, pg. 1702)

"The Council of Trent met in 1545. Even among the Roman Catholics, around 800 years passed before the instruments were widely accepted. "The general introduction of instrumental music can certainly not be assigned to a date earlier than the 5th or 6th centuries; yea, even Gregory the Great, who towards the end of the 6th century added greatly to the existing Church music, absolutely prohibited the use of instruments...Sir John Hawkins, following the Romanish writers in his erudite work on the history of music, made Pope Vitalian, in A.D. 660, the first who introduced organs into the churches. But students of ecclesiastical archaeology are generally agreed that instrumental music was not used in churches till a much later date; for Thomas Aquinas [Catholic Scholar in 1250 A.D.] has these remarkable words, 'Our church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may seem not to Judaize.'" (McClintock and Strong, Encyclopedia of Biblical Literature, Vol. 6, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1894, pg. 762)

"Although Josephus tells of the wonderful effects produced in the Temple by the use of instruments, the first Christians were of too spiritual a fiber to substitute lifeless instruments for or to use them to accompany the human voice. Clement of Alexandria severely condemns the use of instruments even at Christian banquets. St. Chrysostom sharply contrasts the customs of the Christians when they had full freedom with those of the Jews of the Old Testament." (Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. 10, pg. 652)

"We need not shrink from admitting that candles, like incense and lustral water, were commonly employed in pagan worship and the rites paid to the dead. But the Church, from a very early period, took them into her service, just as she adopted many other things indifferent in themselves, which seemed proper to enhance the splendor of religious ceremony. We must not forget that most of these adjuncts to worship, like music, lights, perfumes, ablutions, floral decorations, canopies, fans, screens, bells, vestments, etc. were not identified with any idolatrous cult in particular but they were common to almost all cults." (Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. III, pg. 246)

## **II. EARLY OPPOSITION TO THE INSTRUMENT IN WORSHIP BY PROTESTANT CHURCHES**

The Church of England was the only Protestant church that continued using it in the beginning. When their leaders met to make a decision on this issue, 59 voted to use instruments and 58 voted against their use. Notice what some of the leaders of this movement said concerning instrumental music: "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps and the restoration of other shadows of the Law. The Papists therefore have foolishly borrowed this as well as many other things from the Jews. Men who are fond of outright pomp may delight in the noise, but the simplicity which God commands to us by the apostles is far more pleasing to Him."

John Calvin, Commentary on Psalms 23: "The organ in the worship is an insignia of Baal."

Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran Church: "Music in churches is as ancient as the apostles, but instrumental music is not so."

Joseph Bingham, Church of England: "I have no objection to the organs in our chapels, as long as they are neither seen nor heard."

John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church: "The great congregation which is blessed with the privilege of listening to His instruction has no organ 'to assist' them in singing their praises to their God and Savior. They find their vocal organs sufficient. Their tongues and voices express the gratitude of their hearts... I would just as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery."

Charles Spurgeon (Baptist), *Instrumental Music In the Public Worship of the Church*, p. 176: "David appears to have had a peculiarly tender remembrance of the singing of the pilgrims, and assuredly it is the most delightful part of worship and that which comes nearest to the adoration of heaven. What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettiness of a quartet, bellows, and pipes. We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it..."

"'Praise the Lord with harp.' Israel was at school, and used childish things to help her to learn; but in these days when Jesus gives us spiritual food, one can make melody without strings and pipes... We do not need them. That would hinder rather than help our praise. Sing unto him. This is the sweetest and best music. No instrument is like the human voice." (Charles Spurgeon (Baptist), *Commentary on Psalm 42*)

"In my earliest intercourse among this people, congregational singing generally prevailed among them... This instrument, [the organ] which from time immemorial has been associated with cathedral pomp and prelatical power, and has always been the peculiar favorite of great national churches, at length found its way into Baptist sanctuaries, and the first one ever employed by the denomination in this country, and probably in any other, might have been standing in the singing gallery of the Old Baptist meeting house in Pawtucket, about forty years ago, when I then officiated as pastor (1840)... Staunch old Baptists in former times would as soon tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries, and yet the instrument has gradually found its way among them... How far this modern organ fever will extend among our peoples and whether it will on the whole work a RE-formation or DE-formation in their singing service, time will more fully develop." (Benedict, (Baptist Historian), *Fifty Years Among Baptists*, pp. 204-207)

"But were it even evident, which it is not, either from this or any other place in the sacred writings, that instruments of music were prescribed by divine authority under the law, could this be adduced with any semblance of reason, that they ought to be used in Christian worship? No; the whole spirit, soul, and genius of the Christian religion are against this; and those who know the Church of God best, and what constitutes its genuine spiritual state, know that these things have been introduced as a substitute for the life and power of religion; and that where they prevail most, there is least of the power of Christianity. Away with such portentous baubles from the worship of that infinite Spirit who requires His followers to worship Him in spirit and truth, for to no such worship are these instruments friendly." (Adam Clarke (Methodist), *Clarke's Commentary*, Vol. II, pp. 690-691)

"I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire: but instruments of music in the house of God, I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity. The late and venerable and most eminent divine, the Rev. John Wesley, who was a lover of music, and an elegant poet, when asked his opinion of instruments of music being introduced into the chapels of the Methodists, said in his terse and powerful manner, 'I have no objections to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen.' I say the same." (Adam Clarke (Methodist), *Clarke's Commentary*, Vol. 4, p. 684)