

WHY NO ORGAN?

If you are not accustomed to congregational singing without some accompaniment, perhaps you haven't asked this question because you don't want to offend anybody. And if you are accustomed to it, perhaps you have hoped nobody would ask the question because the answer might offend somebody.

Or perhaps you have asked and received a frivolous answer like, "Organs are expensive!" or "Do you think we need a piano?"

Actually, singing in public worship without instrumental accompaniment is part of our effort to observe the Lord's instructions. Our practice is based on a principle which we feel should be applied to all formal worship of Almighty God, who is glorified in His Son Jesus Christ.

Let us "in truth and love" try to explain how, on this principle, we challenge the common use of organ and piano in Christian public worship.

WHAT PRINCIPLE?

Simply this: Public worship should include only what the Lord Himself authorizes.

WHERE STATED?

In "the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life," we find the principle stated and recognized in a number of places. For example, the writer of Hebrews (8:4,5) calls attention to God's specific instructions to Moses for building the Ark and the Tabernacle: "See that you make them," God said, "after the pattern for them, which was shown to you in the mountain" (Exodus 25:40). God's elaborate instructions about sacrifices were given with His strict order, "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it" (Deuteronomy 12:32).

HOW CONFIRMED?

Some very prominent servants of the Lord were severely punished when they went beyond God's specific instructions for honoring Him. Most Bible readers are familiar with what happened to Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10), to Moses (Deuteronomy 32:48-52), to David (I Chronicles 15:2-15), or to Uzzah (II Chronicles 26:16-21) when each of them added something to God's orders for worship. Perhaps we should see God's confirmation of this principle in the awful judgments visited on Jerusalem when the Jewish people kept up the typical ritual of the Temple service after the Lamb of God had been offered and the veil of the Temple had been torn from top to bottom (Matthew 27:51).

HOW PERMANENT AND IMPORTANT?

There is evidence in the New Testament as well as the Old that God's Church is required to observe whatever Christ commands in worship, not just to refrain from what He forbids. He denounced as vain the worship of those who taught for doctrine the commandments of men (Matthew 15:9), and His apostle warned against "will worship," observing things which seem desirable and appropriate to men, but which have no divine authority behind them (Colossians 2:16-23). When the woman at the well complained to Jesus about disagreement between Jew and Samaritan over where to worship, Jesus said, "Neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem . . . True worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:21,23). Jesus here is not implying that the form of worship is unimportant, but He is certainly assuring our freedom from materialistic, typical elements, such as altars and sacrifices, as "aids to devotion."

HOW INCLUSIVE?

We are really stating here a few scriptural bases for what many Christians accept and refer to as the "regulative principle of worship," and our application of this principle to the music we offer in public worship involves the very important question about what features of worship are definitely prescribed by the Lord and what necessary aspects (time, place, building, seats, order of service) are not. We believe that both what and how we sing are essential elements of formal worship which are limited to what God authorizes.

HOW RELATED TO PIANOS AND ORGANS?

Since these instruments which are frequently associated with Christian worship today were not available in Bible times, we must examine God's authorization of similar instruments in His worship, or any instruments used to lead or accompany singing.

WHEN AUTHORIZED?

From early times (Genesis 4:21) there were lutes, pipes, and drums available, but the first to be authorized by God in connection with worship were silver trumpets (Numbers 10: 1-10) for calling the assembly, celebrating new moons, and memorializing various offerings in the days of the Ark and the Tent of Meeting. Even singing was not an authorized part of formal worship until the time of David, who organized a huge choir for the premier presentation of a special psalm he composed in dedication of the tent he pitched for the Ark in Jerusalem (I Chronicles 16:1-7). Harps, lyres, and cymbals he appointed to accompany the singers (I Chronicles 16:37-42; 25:1-7).

God's authorization of this singing and of the accompanying instruments is clearly stated when the service of the Temple was established under David's son, Solomon, who "set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet: for the command was from the Lord through His prophets" (II Chronicles 29:25,26). Not one but three persons received instructions from God to introduce instruments into the Temple service, even under a dispensation of grace dominated by "external elements."

We feel that, because musical instruments were introduced into true spiritual worship only by explicit instructions from God and only as part of the Temple service which foreshadowed our atonement by the blood of Christ, it would be necessary to have similarly explicit instructions in the New Testament for such instruments to be used in today's Christian worship. We find no such instructions.

HOW RELATED TO OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES?

Can we be sure that musical instruments which God ordered were such an integral part of the Temple service that they are excluded from New Testament worship in the same way that the rest of that glorious service is? We do not find in the New Testament any command not to offer animal sacrifices, for example, but Christians don't, because we believe the ceremonial law was completely fulfilled in Christ's life on earth, His death on the cross, His resurrection and ascension, and His outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Were harps and lyres and cymbals in the same category? It is because we believe they were that we sing without the instruments now.

WHY BELIEVE THIS?

The association of Temple instruments with the blood sacrifices is vividly described in II Chronicles 29:27-30, when Hezekiah commanded burnt sacrifices to be offered according to "the command of the Lord through His prophets." "When the burnt offering began," we read, "the song of the Lord also began with the trumpets, accompanied by the instruments of David, king of Israel. While the whole assembly worshiped, the singers also sang and the trumpets sounded . . . until the burnt offering was finished." Singing then continued "with the words of David and Asaph the seer," but the instruments were silent when the sacrifice was completed.

We conclude from this God-ordered procedure that His people should still be singing "praises with gladness" but no longer accompanied by blood sacrifices and musical instruments, now that Jesus once for all has "offered Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God" and has poured out His Spirit on all flesh.

WHY SING AT ALL IN WORSHIP?

The New Testament authorizes singing in public worship as it does prayer, reading and preaching of God's Word, and the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. In Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 13:15, and James 5:13 we are urged to sing praise to God, with specific reference to psalms of the Bible, the fruit of our lips, and melody in the heart. But no place is suggested for instrumental music.

The Psalms help us see the true significance of Old Testament forms. In appreciation of the spiritual blessings in Christ we sing about being sprinkled with hyssop (51:7) and about presenting burnt offerings (66:13), but we recognize that we are no longer authorized to use priests and sacrifices in our Christian worship services. In the same way we sing about sweet-voiced lutes and clanging cymbals which God once ordered to foreshadow the outpouring of His Spirit following Christ's ascension.

ANY QUESTIONS?

Many who associate organ music with Christian worship have never heard of those who believe God authorizes only voices in the singing of His praise. Now that you have, should we try to answer some of your questions?

Can't a Christian glorify God by playing or listening to an organ or a piano?

Certainly, but worship is a very special service to God. Eating and drinking must glorify God (I Corinthians 10:31), but only the giving and receiving of bread and wine according to Christ's appointment (I Corinthians 11:23-29) is a service of worship. Bathing glorifies God, but only baptism is a sacrament. God's deep concern for the way we worship Him is called jealousy in the second commandment (Exodus 20:5).

Why does God let so many Christians use instruments in worship if He doesn't approve of them?

For the same reason that He permits ignorance and even "willful sins." Only Christ's obedience and His death for our sins makes any worship acceptable to God. But the Bible warns us not to presume upon God's kindness and forbearance (Romans 2:4).

Don't Psalms God gave for worship invite us to use harps, lyres, cymbals, and trumpets?

Yes, and they also urge us to bring burnt offerings and sacrifices. We do all of these things when we offer the groanings of the Holy Spirit which cannot be uttered (Romans 8:26), and when we trust the Lamb of God, slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8).

Isn't heaven a place of harps? Why doesn't God approve their use on earth?

The Revelation is a picture book, and the harps mentioned there (5:8; 14:2; 15:2) are no more models for a worship service on earth than are the vials of incense (5:8), or than are New Jerusalem's foundations of precious stones, gates of pearl, and streets of gold (21:19-21).

Weren't instruments used in the Jewish synagogues before and during Christ's days on earth, and also in the early Christian churches modeled after the synagogues?

The Bible says nothing to suggest musical instruments in the synagogues, and some scholars insist there never were any there. But, even if there were, we cannot assume that they were authorized by God, who didn't approve of many other things the Jews introduced into His worship.

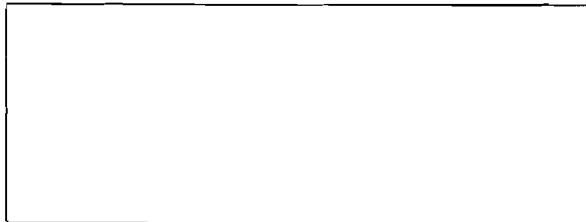
Doesn't organ music create a mood that is especially appropriate for worship?

Musical therapists classify organ music as soothing. Is that an appropriate preparation for the "joyful noise" God requires? Even more important, the thing to consider in worship is what pleases God, not just what makes us feel good.

Isn't there some a cappella congregational singing that sounds so bad it can't possibly be honoring to Christ?

Some of it certainly hurts human ears. But if a piano or an organ only covers up bad sounds, or fills in where there's silence, the Lord isn't deceived. Sincerity is no substitute for poor singing, but neither is beautiful music a substitute for grace in the heart.

"Let us sing psalms to Him with grace!" (Psalms 95:2)



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