

Why No Instruments?

by

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"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." — Col. 3:16

"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." — Eph. 5:19

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The chimes were striking 11:00 o'clock and all the people were seated in their pews ready for the church service to begin. The organist began to play very softly and a hush came over the whole assembly. It seemed to be the perfect atmosphere for worship. Then the organ became louder and everyone stood to his feet and began to sing. This type of service is very impressive and quite appealing to the emotional nature of man. Worship, however, should be designed primarily to be appealing to God rather than to man. Too often we become carried along with the mood of the times and we find it very difficult to answer adequately the query, "Why don't you use an organ in your worship services?" God, Who is sovereign, has laid down in His Word the way in which He desires to be worshipped. Suppose we examine the record in order to answer the question, "Why no instruments in your church?"

I. The Introduction of Instruments into the Worship of God.

The first place in which man gave praise to God was in the Garden of Eden. Adam, as he walked with God in the cool of the

day, would express to Him his adoration and praise from the heart. We can imagine no more wonderful experience than to be able to worship God in His very presence. In the account of this supreme fellowship between God and man we find no mention of the use of instruments to create the proper mood, or to help express to the Creator the praise due His name; nor would it seem reasonable because Adam's praise was the expression of His heart, and he expressed that ideal worship with the facilities which God had given him.

No mention of instruments is made at all in the Scriptures until we come to one of Cain's descendents named Jubal. In Genesis 4:20,21, we read, "And Adah bare Jubal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle. And his brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ."

Now this organ was very unlike the one we think of today. Smith's Bible Dictionary describes this as a pipe or perforated reed, played by blowing upon it. This is the first mention of instruments in the Bible and they are listed along with many of the other arts and crafts which the descendents of Cain developed, but there is no indication whatever that these instruments were

used in the service of the worship of God.

From this point on, the use of instruments becomes more prevalent, but to examine each passage in which they are mentioned would be impossible here, hence, consideration will be given only to those which deal particularly with the subject of worship. A reference in Genesis 31:27 shows that the art of instrumental music was carried on after the flood, for in the time of Jacob, Laban, his father-in-law, said, "Wherefore didst thou flee away secretly, and steal away with mirth, and with songs, with tabret and with harp." The mention of these instruments indicates that they were in use, but again they have no relationship to worship but rather to a celebration and a going-away party.

Going on a little further in history, we come to Moses. God had given Moses specific directions concerning each step which the Israelites were to take while journeying in the wilderness. "At the commandment of the Lord they rested in their tents and at the commandment of the Lord they journeyed." But notice this additional command which God gave to Moses in Numbers 10:1, "And the Lord spake unto Moses saying, Make thee two trumpets of silver of a whole piece shalt thou make them: that thou mayest use them for the calling of the

assembly and for the journeying of the camps." God not only commanded Moses to make these instruments, but also told him the specific purpose they were to fulfill. The trumpets were chiefly for the calling of the assembly and for use as signals on the battlefield. In verse 10 of this same passage their use is amplified as follows: "Also in the day of your gladness, and in your solemn days, and in the beginning of your months, ye shall blow with the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; that they may be to you a memorial before your God. I am the Lord your God." Here is a specific command of God regarding the appointment of instruments and their use. With respect to their use in worship, it is important to notice that they were directly associated with the ceremonial ritual, that is, the offerings and the sacrifices.

It is in the time of David that we find the most significant stage in the development of instrumental music. David, according to the command of the Lord, "spake unto the chief of the Levites to appoint their brethren to be singers with instruments of musick, psalteries, and harps and cymbals sounding by lifting up the voice with joy." (1 Chron. 15:16) Here David makes special appointment of the instruments to be used

by the Levites in worship. While in this specific passage we find no mention of the command of God to do this, elsewhere we find positive proof that it was God who gave the command. In the time of Hezekiah the record says, "He set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with Psalteries and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets." (II Chron. 29:25) Thus, the appointment of instruments in the worship of God came as a direct command of God, through His servant, David.

Notice, however, the specific purpose for which these instruments in the worship of God were used. Vs. 26, "And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets and with the instruments ordained by David, king of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. (II Chron. 29:26-28).

Notice the clear distinction which is made here between the offering of the

sacrifice and the other part of their worship. Vs. 29, "And when they had made an **end of offering**, the king and all that were present with him **bowed themselves, and worshipped**. Moreover, Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to **sing praises unto the Lord** with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped." (29-30)

In this second part of the worship when they sang praises, there is no indication that the instruments were used—rather, the text would lead us to believe that when the offering was finished the instruments stopped.

Throughout the Old Testament, the use of instruments for the worship of God is related to the Temple service. And, as is commonly accepted by almost all Biblical scholars, the Temple ritual was all symbolic in nature and pointed forward to the coming of Christ. W. D. Killip, in his "*History, Doctrine and Worship in the Ancient Church*", page 213, says, "As the sacrifices, offerings and other observances of the temple, as well as the priests, the vestments, and even the building itself, had an emblematic meaning; the singing, intermingled with the music of various instruments of sound, was also typical

and ceremonial.”

The passages cited clearly indicate that the use of instruments was introduced into the worship of God principally by David, and only by the direct command of God; and also that these instruments were a specific part of the Temple worship which was ceremonial in nature.

II The Removal of the Instruments from the Worship of God.

A. The Evidences of the Removal of Instruments.

The evidences of the removal of instruments from the worship of God are clear and precise.

1. There is not a trace in the complete New Testament of the use of instruments in the Church of Christ or of the Apostles. Surely, it would seem reasonable that if Christ expected the N.T. Church to use the pipes, organs and trumpets, He would at least have made some reference to them. However, the accounts we have of when Christ entered into worship give no indication that instruments were used. The followers of Christ, Peter, John, Paul and others in their writings in the N.T. are silent concerning the worshipping of God with instruments—rather they use such phrases as, “making melody in your HEART

to the Lord”. And, “Offer praise continually, that is, the fruit of your lips.” Both the words and example of our Lord and His disciples show us that instruments were not used in their worship service.

2. Another evidence of the removal of instruments from the worship of God after the O.T. period, is that in the early church (i.e. the period following the apostles) there were no instruments used in the churches. The early church fathers, as we call them, bear testimony against the use of instruments as being a sin against God. Justin Martyr, who lived 150 years after Christ, has this to say, “Plain singing is not childish, but only the singing with lifeless organs, with dancing and cymbals. Whence the use of such instruments and other things fit for children are laid aside, and plain singing only retained.”

Another church father, Chrysostom, who lived 400 years after Christ, says, “Instrumental music was permitted to the Jews, as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because they were lately drawn off to idols; but now instead of instruments we use our bodies to praise Him withal, ... Instruments appertain not to Christians.”

History bears witness that there was no

evidence of instrumental music in the churches until the 7th century. In the year 666 A.D. one of the popes of the Catholic Church, Pope Vitalian, brought into his worship Latin singing to the accompaniment of the organ. This is the first time instruments were formally used in worship since the time of the Jewish Ceremonial Ritual.

3. The Catholic Church adopted this practice, and it continued until the time of the Reformers. Striving to return to the purity of worship and obedience to the law of God, the Reformers cast out the use of instruments in their worship services. John Calvin made this statement, "Instrumental music is not fitter to be adopted into the public worship of the Christian Church than the incense, the candlestick, and the shadows of the Mosaic law—in popery, a ridiculous and unsuitable imitation of the Jews, they employed organs and such other ludicrous things, by which the Word and Worship of God are exceedingly profaned."

We have seen that no mention of using instruments for worship is cited in the N.T. Neither Christ nor His apostles advocated it, nor was it a practice in the church for nearly 700 years after Christ. Later, the Reformers, in order to purify the worship, cast out the instruments from their

worship service. Why? There must have been something wrong with their use. There must have been good reason for this removal of the instruments.

B. The Reasons Why the Instruments Were Not Continued in the N.T. Church.

1. The first reason is, that the N.T. Church was patterned after the Jewish synagogue and not the temple. One Jewish historian after describing the temple ritual has this to say, "The worship of the synagogue was more simple. Its officers did not intrude instrumental music into the congregational services. The early Christians followed the example of the synagogue; and when they celebrated the praise of God in Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs, their melody was the fruit of the lips."

Archaeologists have found no instruments of music among the furniture of the ancient synagogues. And even today in the Orthodox Jewish Synagogue, no instruments are used. The Christian Church in its original state was patterned after the synagogue and therefore the instruments had no place in their worship.

2. Another prominent reason for the removal of the instruments is that the perfect sacrifice of Christ did away with all cere-

monial ritual. The instruments, as has been shown, were directly connected with the sacrificial service, and when Christ abolished the sacrifices, He also abolished the symbolic use of the instruments.

There was no need to seek God through the ritual and ceremony of Old Testament forms and symbols because Christ had provided a new and living way. Thus, leaving the sacrifices to follow Christ meant to those early Christians leaving also the use of instruments in their praise service.

3. Also, the instruments were an expression of joy and happiness which filled the heart of the Israelite when his sins were taken away, and was symbolic of the fulness of joy which believers can enjoy in Christ. Our joy no longer needs to be expressed symbolically because Christ said, "These things have I spoken unto you that MY joy might remain IN you, and that your joy might be full." (John 15:11) Christ has promised to give us now, the fulness of what the forms of the Old Testament were only a symbol.

4. Furthermore, the New Testament tells us that this joy and praise which fill our hearts as Christians is to be expressed from the heart by our lips. Hebrews 13:15 declares, "By Him therefore let us offer

the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name...for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." In Ephesians 5:19, we read, "Speaking to yourselves in Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord," The word for "making melody" in the Greek is "Psallo", which means originally "to pluck the strings of an instrument." This gives a beautiful picture of what the true and acceptable praise of God really is. Because this word cannot be separated from the word "heart", therefore, it would literally mean, "plucking the strings of your heart unto the Lord."

The praise which God desires is the melody of our hearts and the fruit of our lips. He no longer has any place for lifeless instruments.

Since God has seen fit to remove the instruments from His desired worship, and the use of them is simply an invention of man, what then, is the Christian's responsibility toward the present use of instruments of music in the churches today? This is a problem which faces every Christian. It isn't a problem that develops between Christian and non-Christian, but rather between the Christian and his fellow-Christian. It isn't a matter which determines our

eternal salvation, but it does deal with our obedience and our willingness for complete submission to the Lord Jesus Christ. Many Christians today say, "What difference does it make? The organ helps us to get into the mood of worship and the soft music adds a lot to the service." To them that's enough to sanction the use of instruments. It's interesting to note that the same persons who use an organ as an aid to their worship condemn the group which uses statues as aids to their worship, but is there any real difference between the two? Both are aids to worship, and both are man's invention, unauthorized in the Holy Scripture.

God laid down the plans for the worship in His Church, and they were observed for many years, but today the Christian Church has forsaken the commandment of the Lord and has catered to the emotions of the people. The Covenanter Church has maintained throughout the years a rigid testimony for the purity of worship, but it takes more than that—it takes the witness of each Christian as individual members of the body of Christ, holding high the banner of truth.

There are three essentials which must be observed if the banner of truth on this matter is to be held high First: KNOW

THE DOCTRINE. Examine God's Word and determine what it teaches on this subject. Study it until you're sure. Be ready always to give an answer for what you believe. Second: BE CONSISTENT IN YOUR OWN LIFE. God certainly is not pleased with a person who professes one thing and practices another. Third: Most of all, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name... for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

