

The Churches of Christ and Instrumental Music

Christ stated in Matthew 16:18 that he would build his church. The Church of Christ today is that church. Because the Church of Christ is the church we read about in the New Testament, it must therefore follow the commands, instructions, and ordinances found in the Bible. This is why most members share a concern for carrying out the worship and work of the church as revealed in the Scriptures. Recently, the issue of using instruments of music in our worship has come to the attention of the public. We sincerely regret that some congregations have chosen to go public with their determination to leave the old paths and use mechanical instruments of music in their worship. The congregation at Pioneer and Bell in Elk City is determined to stand with the church in the first century on this or any other issue. We take this means to inform interested students of the Scriptures for the rationale for this position. We encourage the reader to consider carefully the following articles written by faithful Gospel Preachers.

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DOES GOD PERMIT SILENCE?

When a discussion about instrumental music in worship takes place, the one in support of it will often say, "The Bible doesn't say not to." Is there any merit in this line of argument? What can we learn from the scriptures?

What we discover in the Bible is that the silence of scripture authorizes nothing. God's silence is not permissive but it is prohibitive and to deny this puts one at odds with the Bible. Consider passages like Leviticus 10:1-3; Deuteronomy 4:2, 12:32; Proverbs 30:6; Acts 15:24; Second John 9; Revelation 22:18 and others like them.

Take for example when the Hebrew writer spoke of Jesus' priesthood. He wrote, "For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law..." "For him of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood" (Hebrews 8:4; 7:13-14). Because of God's silence, only those of the tribe of Levi could be priests under the Law of Moses. It required a change of law in order for Jesus to serve as our High Priest (Hebrews 7:12). You see, God did not forbid those from the tribe of Judah to serve as priests, he was just silent about it.

The moment God specified what tribe was to be the priestly tribe, he excluded any other. Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, sinned against the Lord because he did not respect the silence of scripture. In First Kings 12:31 we read where Jeroboam, "...made priests from every class of people, who were not of the sons of Levi." His actions, though not specifically prohibited, were sinful nevertheless.

In the New Testament, Christians are admonished to use their lips to offer up praise to God (Hebrews 13:15), to teach and admonish with their songs (Colossians 3:16), to sing to one another making melody in their hearts unto the Lord (Ephesians 5:19). God has specified the kind of music (singing) He wants offered unto him and in doing so has excluded any other kind of music (instrumental).

May we all learn to respect the silence of the scripture and "not to think beyond what is written" (First Corinthians 4:6) lest we stand condemned.

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ON INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

There are those in the body of Christ who tell us that the use of instrumental music in worship is a "nonissue." If worship truly is a matter of being "in spirit and truth," as Jesus said it should be (John 4:24), then one would expect to find something in Scripture about what constitutes acceptable worship, the truth of God in how He desires to be worshiped. Of course we do, but it's just that instrumental music isn't mentioned in the worship of the church in Scripture, only singing. This absence in Scripture is interpreted by some as being permissive, allowing instrumental music to be used, based primarily on human desires, not from what Scripture says about music in worship.

However, Scripture is clear that, once something is specified, silence becomes prohibitive, not permissive. For example, God specifically telling Noah to use gopher wood in building the ark (Gen. 6:14) eliminated the use of other types of wood. The Hebrew writer understood this principle as well, in speaking of Jesus as being our high priest under the new covenant, something He could not be under the Law of Moses. "For it is evident that our Lord hath sprung out of Judah; as to which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priests" (Heb. 7:14, ASV). The old covenant is silent regarding any tribe other than Levi serving as priests. But silence here is obviously prohibitive, as for Jesus to be our high priest, a new covenant had to be inaugurated. "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law" (Heb. 7:12). Since only vocal music is mentioned in worshiping God in the new covenant (attested by hundreds of years of church history, as well as Scripture), silence on instrumental music is prohibitive.

This is a principle that is not difficult to understand. If I told someone to go buy a loaf of bread, they would be free to buy any type of bread they wanted. But if I asked them to purchase a loaf of white bread, buying wheat bread instead is not doing what I asked. Why should it be different when it comes to doing what God said in worship? Are there those who want to please themselves instead of God? When it comes to what belongs to God, whether worship, or salvation, or Christian living, we must please Him, not ourselves. Putting human desires before the will of God has never been acceptable to God, whether by Cain (Gen. 4:5), King Saul of Israel (First Samuel 15:9-11), some in the churches in Galatia (Gal. 5:4), or others today.

How hard Satan has worked to convince so many that, what one wants will please God, no matter what those desires may be. Many are trying to mold God into their own image, rather than being molded in the image of God (Rom. 12:2). There is a day of judgment, and those things we feel may be "nonissues" may be very important to God and our salvation then. Jesus winnowed out those who would follow Him as the popular thing to do, rather than the committed thing to do (Luke 14:24-35). What about us today? What does the Lord say to us in His word? Do we accept His authority? Are we listening? It will matter. "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21).

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PSALMS, HYMNS, AND SPIRITUAL SONGS - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Recently there has been a great deal of public discussion concerning the biblical application of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs as set forth by God in the Christian Age. From this discussion it is evident that many are confused concerning the New Testament teachings on the subject. To help us understand this important teaching we will consider how people throughout the Christian Age have understood and applied the teachings of the New Testament.

The confusion, as one compares it to religious history, is of relatively recent origin. From the establishment of the Lord's church, on the first Pentecost after Christ's resurrection, in A.D. 33 until the 13th century the majority of people understood an applied the New Testament teaching of "vocal singing" in their use of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs. Around A.D. 112 Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, wrote about the congregation in Ephesus, "The theme of your song is Jesus Christ...God will give the scale. Thus one harmonious strain will rise up from all and reach the ears of the Father." (J.B. Lightfoot, The Apostolic Fathers, Part Two, Ignatious and Polycarp, Vol.2, p.40). Eusebius (ca. 260-339) offered a comparable summary of Christian usage of psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, "Throughout the world - in cities, in villages, and in the country - in all the church of God the people of Christ, who have been chosen out of all the nations, send up, not to the native gods nor to demons but to the one God spoken of by the prophets, hymns and psalmody with a loud voice so that the sound of those singing can be heard by those standing outside." (Eusebius, Commentary on Psalms, Pg. 23:657D-660A).

The gradual departure from the vocal singing of Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual songs to the addition of instruments came to general accep-

tance in the late 1200s or early 1300s within the Roman Catholic church. The first account of adding instruments was by Pope Vitalianus in 670 in Rome but was quickly rejected. In the churches of England, the instrument (organ) made its first appearance in the 9th century because of the influence of St. Dunstan, archbishop of Canterbury. However, its usage was isolated for hundreds of years and faced strong opposition. John Girardeau wrote, "There is no evidence, but the contrary, to show that instrumental music was commonly introduced into the church until the thirteenth century." (Girardeau, John L, Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church. Richmond: Whitter & Shepperson, Printers, 1888). It was during the Dark Ages of the 14th and 15th centuries that the use of the instrument gained acceptance in the Roman Catholic Church. This usage of the instrument by the Roman Catholic Church is one of the contentions that caused the separation of the Greek Orthodox in A.D. 1024, who still rejects the use of the instrument even today. Even though the Roman Catholic Church added the use of instruments, most people throughout the world continued to praise God with Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs simply and purely with vocal music only.

On October 31, 1517, Martin Luther sparked the Protestant Reformation by nailing his ninety-five theses on the door of the Wittenberg church. History notes that as the early reformers left the Roman Catholic Church they removed the instrument from use when singing Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs. The reformers call them, "monuments of idolatry." "Luther called the organ an ensign of Baal! John Calvin said that instrumental music was not fitter to be adopted into the Christian Church

than the incense and the candlestick; John Knox called the organ a kist (chest) of whistles. The Church of England revived them, against very strong protest, and the English dissenters would not touch them." (McClintock & Strong, Cyclopedia of Biblical Literature. Vol. VI, p. 763). John Wesley (founder of Methodism) stated concerning the addition of instruments, "...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." (Clark, Adam, Clark Commentary. Amos 6:5). John Calvin (founder of Presbyterianism), "Musical instruments in celebrating to praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law." (Calvin, John, Commentary on Psalm 33). Charles H. Spurgeon (Baptist Minister), "What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettinesses of a quartet, the refined niceties of a choir, or the blowing off of the wind from inanimate bellows and pipes! We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it." (Spurgeon, The Treasury of David, Vol. 1, Par 2, 272). David Benedict (Baptist Historian) wrote, "Staunch old Baptists in former times would as soon have tolerated to Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries, and yet the instrument has gradually found its way among them, and their successors in church management, with nothing like the jars and difficulties which arose of old concerning the bass violin and smaller instruments of music." (Benedict, Fifty Years Among the Baptist, 1859). Even though these protestant leaders stood adamantly opposed to the addition

of instruments, by 1714 the first organ was introduced at King's Chapel of Boston. With much controversy and division, the addition made its way into the majority of protestant churches. Of late, Protestants like John Price (Pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Rochester, New York) have raised the questions concerning whether or not the use of musical instruments is scriptural when singing Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs. In his book "Old Light on New Worship," Price brings to light the need for Protestants especially Baptist to reconsider this important topic.

As for the Lord's church, vocal singing (**only**) has always been practiced when singing Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs. From A.D. 33 until today, we have striven to hold firmly to the teachings of the New Testament in all we do in glory to God without addition or subtraction. And it is my hope and prayer that there will always be a remnant of those who faithfully stand on the foundation given us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

With this article, I hope you will be encouraged to look deeper into the history of Christianity and come to an understanding of how our predecessors understood the New Testament teachings. This is not, of course, to replace our study and understanding of God's inspired word but an opportunity to see how honest people, through the ages, have resisted the human desire to ADD to the New Testament that which is not authorized. These people apparently understood that the Scripture repeatedly warns against adding or subtracting or changing what the Lord instructs. May God bless your study of His word and may you find His Truth. (John 8:31-32)

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