

Will there be instrumental music in heaven?

2006-09-05 17:09:35 Kevin Cauley

Revelation 5:8 and other passages in the book of Revelation talk about there being harps in heaven. If there are instruments of music in heaven, why can we not use them here on the earth in worship to God?

Frequently those who defend the use of instrumental music in the worship of the church appeal to the book of Revelation for justification of their worship practices. The following passages are cited and the instrument devotee will then say, "See, there are instruments used in worship to God in heaven. Therefore, one may use instruments in worship to God on earth." The passages are:

Revelation 5:8 And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

Revelation 14:2 And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps:

Revelation 15:2 And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

The argument stated in classical form would be as follows:

Major Premise: Anything that is permitted in worship in heaven is permitted in worship on earth in the church.

Minor Premise: Instruments of music are permitted in worship in heaven.

Conclusion: Instruments of music are permitted in worship on earth in the church.

The first thing that ought to be noted is that the major premise of the argument itself is flawed. The major premise of the argument is that anything that is permitted in worship in heaven is permitted in worship on earth. We ought to note that in the same context of Revelation 5:8 John speaks of golden vials full of incense. Are we thus allowed to burn incense in worship to God? According to the argument set forth by those who believe in instrumental music, we are. But where, other than in the highly symbolic book of Revelation, do we find in the New Testament the church offering incense in worship to God? We do not. There is simply no authority for it.

The second thing that ought to be noted is that the minor premise of the argument is flawed. The idea that instruments of music are permitted in worship in heaven is suspect because of the highly figurative context of the book of Revelation. In fact, in Revelation 5:8 John explains that the golden vials full of incense are in fact symbolic of the prayers of the saints. Why would instruments of music not be symbolic of the songs of the saints and not the literal instrument itself. Given the context, that ought to be the conclusion one should draw. In addition, it ought to be questioned whether or not these allegedly literal harps are literally in heaven as physical things. Heaven is a spiritual place (1 Corinthians 15:42-50), not a physical one and we know that all material things on the earth are going to be burned up at the end of time (2 Peter 3:10), but those who argue for the instrument must say, "They will all be burned up, EXCEPT for instruments of music! They will be preserved so that we may worship with them in heaven!" The very idea that in heaven, a spiritual place, we will be reduced to worshiping God with physical harps of wood and string is contradictory to everything the Bible teaches about the spiritual nature of heaven (see 2 Corinthians 4:18 and 2 Corinthians 5:1).

Finally, it is often overlooked by those arguing that in Revelation 14:2 John doesn't hear harpers, he hears the sound of harpers. The ASV translates the verse as follows: "And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping with their harps:" The ESV translates it like this: "And I heard a voice from heaven like the roar of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder. The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps." This passage gives no support to the USE of instruments of music in worship whatsoever. The Greek clearly includes the word *hws*, which means that the description of harpers

harping with their harps is a simile to describe the sound that John heard. Just as the sound he heard was AS the voice of many waters and was AS the voice of great thunder, so also it was AS the voice of harpers harping with their harps. The figure of the water emphasizes the unity of what John heard; the figure of the thunder emphasizes the volume of what John heard, and the figure of the harps emphasizes the beauty of what John heard. But the fact of the matter is that what John heard was singing! That is what verse 3 tells us plainly; "and they sing as it were a new song before the throne..." Those who argue for the use of instruments of music in the worship of the church based upon these passages do nothing but show their biblical ignorance of God's word. The book of Revelation is stated at the outset to be a book of things that were put in signs, or signified (Revelation 1:1). To use such signs literally completely ignores the context of the book.

The real question that needs to be answered from those who defend the instrument is where, in the New Testament, is it authorized? There is not one single passage of New Testament scripture that authorizes the use of mechanical instruments of music in the worship of the church, and that is the bottom line.