

Is It Scriptural To Use Instrumental Music In Worship?

Much has been written on this subject. However, there are many who only became Christians in recent years. Children are growing up who are not acquainted with the discussions of yesteryear. Our minds dim with the passing of time. It is right to stir up your sincere minds by way of reminder (2 Peter 1:13; 3:1).

Some would dismiss the subject as relatively unimportant. I suppose Cain thought it was relatively unimportant how he sacrificed, but God thought otherwise (Genesis 4:5; Heb. 11:4). Nadab and Abihu no doubt thought it was relatively unimportant when they offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them (Lev. 10:1). God thought otherwise. We could multiply such examples. It is important to worship as God has commanded.

Many times sincere people have asked me why I think instrumental music is wrong. I do not think instrumental music is wrong. Let me illustrate: I do not think there is anything wrong with beefsteak. In fact, I would enjoy beefsteak if I could afford to buy it. If, however, beefsteak were placed on the Lord's table together with the bread and the fruit of the vine, that would be sinful. Instrumental music is not wrong, but its use in worship is wrong because God has not authorized it.

True worshippers "worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23). Only by the word of God can we know how to worship in spirit and truth.

Paul said: "I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15). By faith -- based on the word of God (Rom. 10:17) - I can pray in the spirit. By faith I can sing in the spirit. But where in the New

Testament does it say that one can PLAY AN INSTRUMENT IN THE SPIRIT?

We must worship in truth. What is truth? Jesus said: "Your word is truth" (John 17:17). To worship in truth we must worship sincerely and we must worship according to the word of God. Where does God's word say that any church of Christ used a mechanical instrument in worship?

God seeks worshippers who worship in spirit and in truth. The use of instrumental music in worship is not based on God's word. Such worship is therefore not in spirit and it is not in truth.

When is worship Scriptural?

Anything is Scriptural for which there is a direct command. The Lord's Supper is Scriptural because Jesus said: "Do this in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:24). We have a direct command.

A thing may be Scriptural because it is authorized by an inspired example. We meet on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). A comparison of this passage with other Scriptures indicates that this example was based on apostolic teaching.

We may conclude that a thing is Scriptural if there is a necessary inference, if it is authorized indirectly as an essential part of a command or inspired example.

Nowhere in the New Testament is the use of instrumental music in worship commanded. We have no approved example of its use. There is no necessary inference that it was used. Most of those who use it today freely admit that it was NOT USED in the New Testament church.

What about PSALLO?

There are some who contend that the use of PSALLO in the Greek New Testament makes instrumental music Scriptural.

If PSALLO means to play an instrument why do Greek scholars translate it as 'sing' in our New Testaments? If PSALLO means to play an instrument why did not the churches in New Testament times use an instrument?

As I write, I have the Greek-English lexicon of Henry Thayer before me. He gives definitions from various periods in the history of the Greek language. First he defines PSALLO as used by Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.): "to pluck off, pull out...the hair." This is obviously not the meaning in the N.T. He then defines the word as used by Euripides (480-406 B.C.): "to cause to vibrate by touching, to twang," then as it is used in the later Classical period: "to touch or strike the chord, to twang the strings of a musical instrument so that they gently vibrate, to play on a stringed instrument, to play the harp." He says it is used in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the O.T. made between 325 and 150 B.C.) to translate words meaning 'to sing to the music of the harp' and also with the same meaning as in the N.T. (to sing). Regarding N.T. usage he says it means: "TO SING A HYMN, TO CELEBRATE THE PRAISES OF GOD IN SONG."

Shall we take the Classical meaning, the meaning in the Septuagint, or the New Testament meaning?

The only definition of PSALLO which fits the context where this word occurs in the New Testament is 'to sing': "and sing to Your name" (Rom. 15:9); "I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15); "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19); "Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms" (James 5:13).

I want to include here a statement made by John W. McGarvey, one of the best Greek scholars of the past generation. Listen to brother McGarvey: "It is manifest that we cannot adopt the practice (referring to instrumental

music in worship) without abandoning the obvious and only ground on which a restoration of Primitive Christianity can be accomplished, or on which plea it can be maintained." Let me say I believe this with all my heart. So universal is the scholarship of the world on this point that this illustrious scholar says further: "It is universally admitted by those competent to judge that there is not the slightest indication in the New Testament of divine authority for the use of instrumental music in Christian worship."

What about the Psalms?

Some contend that instrumental music is Scriptural because it is mentioned in the Psalms. Those who so contend admit that we are no longer under the law of Moses (Gal. 3:24,25), but, so they claim, the Psalms were not part of the law, and therefore we are authorized to use the instruments they mention.

If this be true then we, as Christians, are free to do ALL things mentioned in the Psalms. David said: "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean" (Psalm 51:7). Is the use of hyssop Scriptural under the New Covenant?

And what about the following? "Let the saints be joyful in glory; Let them sing aloud on their beds. Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; to execute on them the written judgment - this honour have all His saints" (Psalm 149:5-9).

Does this Psalm authorize Christians to execute vengeance with the sword? Jesus said that His kingdom is not of this world. If it had been, His servants would fight (John 18:36). He also warned Peter: "Put your sword in its place, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52). In Revelation this warning is repeated: "He who kills with the sword must be killed with the sword" (Rev. 13:10).

No, the Psalms were written under the Old Covenant and contain many things which are not applicable to Christians.

Jesus quotes from the Psalms as part of the law. "Jesus answered them, 'Is it not written in your law, "I said, 'You are gods'""?" (John 10:34). This quotation is from Psalm 82:6. "But this happened that the word might be fulfilled which is written in their law, 'They hated Me without a cause'" (John 15:25). This quotation is from Psalm 35:19. The Psalms are part of the law.

May Christians worship according to the law of Moses? "But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter" (Romans 7:6).

Is singing required?

A friend with whom I contended over the issue of instrumental music, as well as other things, claimed that the whole thing is a matter of option, even whether we sing or not. According to him, instruments may accompany the singing since singing is not necessary anyway.

Let us look carefully at this. Jesus said true worship must be 'in spirit' (John 4:23,24). Paul said: "I will sing with the spirit" (1 Cor. 14:15).

How can singing be optional? We are commanded to sing both to one another and to the Lord: "Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:18,19); "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).

Nor can one maintain that the use of an instrument is a matter of indifference. Jesus said: "In vain they worship Me,

teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:9). How did the use of instrumental music get into the worship? It is not found in the New Testament. It was BROUGHT IN and it was TAUGHT IN by MEN. Jesus said - and I believe it - that such worship is VAIN.

An innovation

A stream can rise no higher than its source. Both in earlier centuries and in more recent times, instrumental music has been introduced hand-in-hand with a general disregard for the authority of the Scriptures.

The following was written in 1860. "So far as known to me, or I presume, to you, I am the only preacher in Kentucky of our brotherhood who has publicly advocated the propriety of employing instrumental music in some churches, and that the church of God in Midway is the only church that has yet made a decided effort to introduce it" (Franklin and Headington, *The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin*, p. 409-411). This statement was made by Dr. L.L. Pinkerton about the introduction of a melodeon a year earlier at Midway, Kentucky. This man also believed that the unimmersed could be fellowshipped in the church (H. Hailey, *Attitudes and Consequences*, p. 232).

The effort of some brethren to use the instrument and stop there is doomed to failure. When one does not require Biblical authority for one practice, he no longer has a valid defense against other unscriptural innovations.

Is it an expedient?

This is the argument of most: There is no Scriptural basis for it, but we use it as an expedient. IS IT EXPEDIENT? In the decades since the instrument was introduced in America those who DO NOT use it have GROWN FASTER than those who do, and large numbers of those who use the instrument have gone into abject apostasy. This indicates that it is NOT

expedient to use the instrument, so these brethren can not justify their practice by saying it is expedient.

Furthermore, this is an improper use of the word 'expedient'. Before something can be classified as an expedient, it must be authorized but not specified. We are commanded to 'go' into all the world, but 'how' we are to go is not specified. It may be expedient to fly. More often it is expedient to travel by car. Sometimes it is expedient to go by train. If the manner of going had been specified - if we had been told, for example, to 'go on foot' - we would not be free to choose an 'expedient'.

We have been commanded to worship. We have also been told HOW to worship. Therefore we may not worship just any way we please. HOW we worship is not a matter of expediency.

We have been authorized to 'sing' in our worship. In order to sing we must in some way know what words to sing. This has not been specified. Therefore, the use of songbooks is an expedient. It is a way of knowing what to sing.

Instrumental music, however, is not a way of singing. It is not an expedient of anything because it is a distinct act within itself which has not been authorized. If the use of instruments had been authorized, then it might be expedient to use an organ, rather than a piano. Since instrumental music is not authorized, since it has no Scriptural basis, it cannot be an expedient.

Playing an instrument is not an expedient way to sing. It is an independent act. An expedient can only exist as an acceptable way of doing something which has been authorized. One cannot 'fly' without 'going'. A songbook has no function unless one sings. But an instrument can be played without anyone singing. I have noticed when attending churches which have corrupted the worship by the use of the instrument, that they often spend as much time

playing the instrument without any singing as they do playing it along with the singing. How can it be an expedient?

Conclusion

Many years ago we had a discussion with some of these brethren. Various ones had spoken in connection with the subject but finally one person said: "I like it, and to me it is worship." I am afraid that is the real reason for its use. I love these brethren and I would like to be in fellowship with them, but they would rather have an instrument of music in their worship than to have the fellowship of their brethren. They LIKE it, so they do it, even though God has not authorized it, and even though it causes division.

The instrument is a sign of a disease. To remove the instrument without removing the condition of heart which makes its use in worship possible, would not avail a thing. The disease would only break out in some other way.

Brethren, let us worship God according to the New Testament. Let us have Scriptural authority for all that we do and teach. Let us be joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

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