

Doy Moyer's Comments On Instrumental Music In Worship

On Instrumental Music in Worship

12/18/2013

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[A few disclaimers: 1) I represent no one but myself here. I do not speak for the "brotherhood," the "Church of Christ," a college, or anyone else. These are my conclusions. The reader is free to take them or leave them. 2) The intent here is not to cover every single facet of whatever touches on the question. I am making particular observations regarding the question of instruments in congregational worship. 3) I realize this can be an emotionally charged issue. I also know that many disagree with me and that I am in the minority today (though not historically). I do not claim to solve every question by some authoritative declaration. All I ask is for careful consideration of these issues. Please refrain from responses that would insult intelligence or call into question a desire to please God, for I know this much: we can please God without ever picking up an instrument in an assembly. 4) I'm not expecting to provide some all new groundbreaking argument. However, there are some points for consideration that some may not have thought much about, particularly in the latter section.]

The question of the use of instruments in congregational worship has continued to be one of the more emotionally charged issues of today. Some will argue that it just doesn't matter, and some will charge those who oppose their use with being legalists. While emotions can run high on both sides of this issue, it is yet fair to explain why some of us continue to oppose their use in worship. This is not so much out of a desire to debate the subject as much as to provide reasons for a more well-informed discussion. Here, then, is a synopsis providing a few basic reasons why there are those who still argue against the use of mechanical instruments in the congregational worship of God. The arguments typically fit within the following:

1. While the Old Testament shows their use by God's authority, the New Testament documents give no indication of God desiring instruments in congregational worship now. With no such

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indication of God's desire for instruments under the New Covenant, we are without warrant in using them, and those who do use them have the burden of proof to show such a warrant. The issue then revolves around how to understand God's silence on an issue. Some argue that silence is permissive, while others argue that silence gives no authority to act. There are many layers to these arguments, of course. The bottom line is that those who argue against instruments do so on the basis of authority. He is in charge of His worship, not us. God is particular about singing (e.g., Eph 5:19), which is one type of music, but gives no indication that He wants instruments, another type of music, added to the singing. Since God was so specific about them under the Old Covenant, His silence on the matter under the New Covenant is so conspicuous that we should be very careful about putting something into His worship that He gives no indication of desiring. Presumption is to be avoided.

2. Historically, the evidence that early Christians used instruments in their worship is lacking. The documented use of instruments does not occur for centuries later, within a Roman Catholic context, and even many of the reformers, like John Calvin, were solidly against their use. For example, Calvin, in his commentary on Psalm 33, argued in the context of speaking about bringing in instruments under the New Covenant, "To proceed beyond what we are there warranted by him [Paul] is not only, I must say, unadvised zeal, but wicked and perverse obstinacy." It is not just a modern "Church of Christ" issue, as if only churches of Christ began opposing instruments (see, for example, *Old Light on New Worship*, by John Price, a Baptist pastor who opposes instruments in worship). The use of instruments outside of the Roman Catholic context is, historically speaking, relatively new. The weight against the use of instrumental music in worship is historically strong and not to be lightly discarded.

3. It is sometimes argued that assemblies of Christians were modeled after the Jewish synagogues, yet Jewish worship in the synagogues did not entail the use of instruments, for the Jews saw instruments as connected to the Temple. After the Temple was destroyed, they refrained from recreating those instruments outside of that context. Even many modern synagogues still refrain from instrumental music (though they are divided on the issue). A simple search will show varying perspectives on this. Jewish Rabbi David Auerbach, who defends instruments if they enhance "the mitzvah of public worship," writes,

"There are those who claim that musical instruments should not be used in the synagogue service because it is an imitation of gentile (i.e. non-Jewish) practice. In its early years, the Church also prohibited instrumental music because it was considered secular and might lead to licentiousness. The Syrian, Jacobite and Nestorian churches still prohibit instrumental music." (<http://www.jewishperspectives.com/music.asp>)

4. While everyone can agree that singing is desired by God under the New Covenant Scriptures, not everyone will agree on the use of instruments in public worship. Therefore, instrumental music is divisive in a congregational setting. Many, though not all, will concede that

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those who want to use instruments in their own private setting are free to do so as they live with their own consciences, but bringing it into the public setting will force it upon others and thus create a divisive situation. Others will respond that if the whole congregation agrees on their use, then no division has occurred and this objection is nullified. It is likely that this objection will not be quite as persuasive now as it might have been when instruments were initially being introduced and causing obvious splits. Yet, should unity not still be a consideration in what a group decides about a practice that will involve everyone? Pushing a practice out of self-will should never be an option for a Christian, especially when admitting that such a practice is unnecessary, if not wrong.

Instruments Under the Old Law

Here we will elaborate on the point about instruments being part of the old Law.

First, God was not silent about instruments in the Hebrew Scriptures, so their use was not presumptuous. They were commanded during the time of David in preparation for the Temple, and God was particular about them — what they were, who would play them, when and where they would be played, etc. In other words, their use of instruments was not a matter of self-appointed talent and desire that they expected God to rubber-stamp, but rather it was an issue of God's authority: "for the command was from the Lord through His prophets" (2 Chron 29:25). Contextually, the playing of the instruments in Hezekiah's reforms worked in conjunction with the burnt offerings (see 2 Chron 29-30 where all of this was re-established under Hezekiah as being what God wanted).

The same Law system that had them offering the burnt offerings also had them playing the instruments at the Temple. Let that sink in for a moment. This is the Law system that has been fulfilled in Christ. To take one part of that system as a justification for modern practice, but not take the other part, is to be guilty of proof-texting and misappropriating the passages to favor one's desired position.

What if we used the same arguments to justify modern day animal sacrifices or a separate priesthood? Why are we not hearing those arguments for these practices? They are part of the same system. If the arguments work for one, they work for the other.

Is it not odd, then, that those who argue so strongly against a Law-keeping mentality (what they call "legalism") will argue for a practice that is grounded in the Law system, then call those who oppose it the "legalists"? How is not wanting to be presumptuous being legalistic? If the argument for the practice is founded upon a Law system that they stringently believe is not a part of our system of grace, then why appeal to it as justification for modern practice under a New Covenant?

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Aren't there principles that we carry across? Of course there are (cf. Rom 15:4, and see below). What has changed are not the principles or the character of God, but the stipulations. The stipulations included the Laws, commandments, and expectations. Included in these commands, from the time of David, were God's instructions on the use of instruments for His worship.

If people wish to find justification for the use of musical instruments in corporate worship today, they won't find it based on appealing to the Law without also justifying continued ritual burnt offerings, circumcision (as a sign of the covenant), the Aaronic Priesthood, and the host of other Laws that went together. Those who would be offended at the suggestion that we bring back animal sacrifices based on the Law should also be offended at the suggestion that we bring back the instruments based on the Law. Why? Because they represent the same Law system we all agree cannot justify us, not the new covenant system of grace. If authority for the instruments is to be found, it will not be in the stipulations of the Law. Justification for the practice needs to be found another way or abandoned.

How, then, should we view instruments under that system? Rather than arguing that these have been "done away with," I argue that they need to be thought of as being fulfilled in Christ, just as the sacrifices, priesthood, and other items under the Law.

How are Instruments of Music Fulfilled in Christ?

The more I study the Scriptures as a whole, the more impressive is the idea of Christ fulfilling the Law. The concept runs deep and wide. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill" (Matt 5:17). We see this working in so many ways even in statements and events that are not necessarily "law":

He fulfills the image of God perfectly (Heb 1:3).

He fulfills the Exodus by providing the greatest exodus of all out of the slavery of sin (John 8:31ff).

He is the Prophet like Moses (Acts 3).

He is the Lawgiver (James 2).

He fulfills the Passover as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (1 Cor 5:7; John 1:29).

He fulfills the role of High Priest (Heb 5-8).

He fulfills the Davidic promise of the King who built the House of God in the greatest sense (Acts 2, 13, Matt 16:18).

He fulfills the Temple as God dwelling among His people in the flesh (John 1:14).

He fulfills all the sacrifices (Heb 9-10).

He fulfills the seed promise to Abraham (Gal 3:16-17).

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The list can go on, but it doesn't stop with Jesus. His body (His people, His church), also, fulfills very specific aspects of what the Law represented:

We are the completion of the nation promise (1 Pet 2:9).

We are the fulfillment of the levitical priesthood as a kingdom of priests (1 Pet 2:9; Rev 1).

We are, with Christ, the fulfillment of the Temple (1 Cor 3).

We are, with Christ, the fulfillment of the sacrifices (Rom 12:1-2; Heb 13).

As the priests were to wear garments that represented holiness, so we put on Christ and are to live our lives adorned with holiness (Rom 13:14).

We are the fulfillment of the true circumcision, "who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil 3:3).

We partake of the Lord's Supper as fulfillment of the Passover and feast of Unleavened Bread — feasts that showed the end of slavery and beginning of a new life.

I don't want to overdo it, but it seems pretty clear that God intended for specific actions under the Old Covenant to represent spiritual qualities for fulfillment in the New Covenant. God didn't do anything without meaning, and it is this very point that I want to explore with reference to the instruments of music, by asking this question:

How are instruments fulfilled in Christ? I believe that the instruments are fulfilled in Christ through His people. Like other aspects of the Law and promises, instruments have a typological significance in terms of praise. Just as there was a special priesthood under the Law, there were also special singers and instrumental players under the Law. While Solomon was still trying to serve God, we find this: "Now according to the ordinance of his father David, he appointed the divisions of the priests for their service, and the Levites for their duties of praise and ministering before the priests according to the daily rule, and the gatekeepers by their divisions at every gate; for David the man of God had so commanded. And they did not depart from the commandment of the king to the priests and Levites in any manner or concerning the storehouses." (2 Chron 8:14-15) Though instruments are not specifically mentioned here, they were part of the very same order (2 Chron 29:25). Notice again the stress on all of this being by God's command. The Levites had duties of praise.

Now all of God's people fulfill this purpose of praising God and proclaiming His excellencies (1 Pet 2:9). Under Christ, all of us form a kingdom of priests and all share in the duties of praise equally. God's specified form of praise is through vocal singing, and the instruments are our hearts: "singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16). Here the instrument accompanying the singing is the heart. All of us are the priests, all of us are the singers, and all of us are the instruments of praise--and this would extend beyond the assemblies into one's life of holiness. Yet, as Calvin, again, wrote in his commentary on Psalm 33, when they "frequent their sacred assemblies, musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the

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restoration of the other shadows of the law." The argument here is against resurrecting the shadows of the Law, of which instruments were a part.

We should clarify that our reason for refraining from an activity is not just because that activity is found under the Law. Those in Israel taught and sang, too. Yet God has specifically told us how to praise Him through song as we psalm in our hearts to the Lord. The fulfillment of these activities is found in the way that we tune our hearts to His glory. "I will put My Laws in their hearts," God said through Jeremiah. This doesn't mean that He didn't want it in their hearts before, but it does show an emphasis that God intends. It is not through the outward ways by which He had Israel express themselves — a visible priesthood, animal sacrifices, instruments of music, specific clothing, etc. All of these are fulfilled in the hearts of God's people as they offer up themselves as living sacrifices. Our clothing is Christ. We are His instruments for praise. We are His priesthood. So why do we still sing and teach? Because that's what God has expressed as His desire. The bottom line is still that it is an issue of His authority. He has the right to tell us what praises Him.

Do I, then, believe in instruments of music today? In fulfillment, yes. I believe that we, His people, are the fulfillment of the shadow cast by the mechanical instruments under the old system. They were given for a reason in connection with the Temple. So we, in connection with being God's Temple, are also the holy priesthood in holy array, offering ourselves as the spiritual sacrifices, presenting ourselves as the instruments for praise, and offering up prayers as incense. What began in the Temple is fulfilled in us and will find its ultimate completion before God in heaven (see Rev 15 where that imagery is carried forward).

My assessment, then, is this: when we focus on physical, mechanical instruments, we are missing the bigger picture. It wasn't the physical Temple God was ultimately interested in. It wasn't the animal sacrifices, the incense, the levitical priesthood or the instruments He ultimately wanted. All these were shadows of the greater fulfillment found in Christ. Instead, let us focus on how we, as God's people, ought to be a holy Temple, a royal priesthood, and instruments of praise for Him now. Don't focus on the shadow. Focus on the substance.

Edwin Crozier

12/18/2013 01:24:31 pm

Thank you for this. The last section was very interesting. I appreciate the idea of not viewing things as being done away, but being fulfilled.

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Boyd King

12/18/2013 03:28:23 pm

Thanks Doy. You mention silence regarding instruments at the beginning of the article. As you point out toward the end, though, the instrument is specified in Eph 5 - it's the heart.

Ang

12/19/2013 05:53:13 am

This is so good. I don't agree with this belief, but reading your beliefs on the matter was very refreshing. I don't think you had a single exclamation point and that helps it to be well-received. I read so much literature written on this subject, and it almost always comes across with great condemnation. You were not condemning at all and I thank you for it. You expressed your Biblical beliefs with a spirit of grace rather than a spirit of condemnation. Thank you.

Cherobee

12/20/2013 08:37:52 am

Good reading but I would love to see this much energy spent on all the Great Teachings of our Lord, like maybe the Great commission, Teach, Baptize and Teach... Why so much energy spent on something that is not mentioned? Satan loves division and that is what this causes... God hears what comes from the Heart, not what comes from the mouth or a Musical instrument... Speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent.... If we remove all traditions and opinions we could unite in a Body of Christ that was intended in the first place.....

Doy Moyer

12/20/2013 07:09:05 pm

I appreciate your desire for unity. I want that, too. Ideally, we would be able to move beyond issues like this so that we would all be united. But let's make one thing clear: God has always cared about His own worship. It is never wasted time to think and study about that. Further, there is a richness to a study like this that I wonder if we have often missed. My own study of fulfillment principles like this has led me to a greater appreciation of who we are as God's people. The imagery that comes from the type/antitype relationships are rich and wonderful. This, then, is not a matter of speaking where the Bible doesn't speak. It is a matter of recognizing overarching biblical teaching. This, in my mind, is not just a fuss about physical elements of worship; it is a recognition of how we, as God's people, are part of His glorious Temple, engaging in sacrifices as a kingdom of priests and offering up ourselves as instruments of praise to His glory. Again, thanks for your concerns.

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Cherobee

12/21/2013 02:16:50 pm

I thank you for your response and answer you this way....I am a Christian and attend a non-instrumental Church..... I would not change it for the world, at the same time I believe that the stand we take is causing division. When we say we do not believe we should use a musical instrument we are implying that all others that do, are wrong. I have been asked that at times... I tell them that I cannot say they are wrong anymore than I can say that we are right... There is nothing spoken by our Lord about it..... I believe that God's word will stand for ever and that we should not ADD TO or TAKE AWAY. In other words, if nothing was said, then this is a lot to do about nothing.... We lose our freedom, that God has given us, to worship from our hearts.... The Church is not always inside the building... Jesus says that where there are two or more gathered in my name, there I am also. My wife and I worship many times in our home and I do it with a musical instrument in my hand. I can not believe that God will condemn us for this, do you? Even the law of the land doesn't condemn you for something not written....

Doy Moyer

12/21/2013 03:34:19 pm

Thanks again. I understand your concern. Just a couple of things:

1. If God cares about how He is worshiped, then we ought to care. If people stray from what God wants, then that is a problem. This can be illustrated multiple times through biblical history.
2. As I indicated in the article, the issue has indeed been divisive. But let's be clear about this -- everyone can agree that singing is acceptable. Not everyone will agree that the instruments are acceptable in the congregational setting. Now if people bring in something that forces others to do what they cannot conscientiously do, then who is causing the division? Maintaining the historical position is not what causes the divisions. I don't know of any churches that divided just because they sang. But many divided when the instruments were brought in.

I am willing to allow that God will sort it all out in the end. In the meantime, I must do what my conscience permits based on my understanding of God's word.

Thanks.

Jan Hunt

12/20/2013 06:41:55 pm

Thank you so much for this concise article. I was especially interested in the "type/antitype" relation of music under the Old Covenant and under the New Covenant. I don't believe I have ever heard it expressed that way, and I myself recently came to understand that. Isn't it good to hear a brother or sister come to the same independent conclusion? Thanks again.

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Aaron Whaley

12/21/2013 12:53:04 am

Mind your Faith

While I very much appreciate your thorough approach to the topic and especially the gentleness with which you presented it, I disagree with your analysis. Here are some of my thoughts (note: my numbered comments don't correspond with your numbered comments).

1. Instrumental music was not tied to the Law. You cited the one verse in the entire OT that suggests that God commanded it, and that really has more to do with the habitual and ordered temple worship rather than all of OT worship. Instrumental music was used in Numbers, Judges, and 1 Chronicles (David prior to the temple). It even was used prior to the Law of Moses (Exodus 15)! None of these instances involved God commanding the worship. It was in fact a "matter of self-appointed talent and desire". But it was a good desire to glorify God. People chose to do it in response to the great things God was doing. Instrumental music (and the entirety of song worship for that matter) is more consistent with the free offering of praise (such as dancing) than it is with a strict obedience to the Law.

2. You are assuming that people today who want to use instruments are trying to re-establish temple worship. They are no more doing that than we are when we choose to provide a church building to worship in. If I applied your arguments to the church building issue, I could make a pretty strong case that the building is also not authorized (God was specific about the temple but silent about buildings in the NT; in Christ we are God's temple, therefore purchasing a building today would also validate the use of animal sacrifices). The book of Hebrews makes it abundantly clear that animal sacrifices and the priesthood are obsolete. But nothing in the New Testament suggests that instrumental music is obsolete. You can speculate that we are the instruments, but you cannot put that speculation on the same level as what Hebrews says about animal sacrifices.

3. You say, "With no such indication of God's desire for instruments under the New Covenant, we are without warrant in using them." I think you are creating an either/or situation here that doesn't really exist in scripture. You seem to be saying that either God desires something or it is unwarranted (essentially saying that He does not desire it). You might be able to argue that in some issues, but not every issue. We have no indication that God desires pitch pipes, laptops, electricity, etc. The Israelites in Exodus 15 had no indication that God desired singing or dancing or instrument use. Yet it did not make the actions unwarranted. And we must consider how specifically God is indicating His desires. I know that God desires that whatever I do be done to His glory (1 Cor. 10:31). Paul didn't feel the need to list everything that could be done to His glory, but that certainly doesn't make most actions unwarranted. Ephesians 5:19 may sound specific to you, but Paul does not specify vocals, instruments, song books, etc. Nor do I believe it is his aim to specify or exclude what may go with singing. His command is to be filled with the Holy Spirit, with the result being singing and making melody with the heart to God. He is teaching about

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what should go on inside you, not what can't go on outside you.

4. I feel have to turn the burden of proof around on this issue. If something is completely foreign to the Bible, we may need to prove it is acceptable. But for something that God permitted all throughout the OT (not just temple worship), I think the burden of proof should rest on those that say the act is sinful. Wouldn't you? People no doubt justify all sorts of behavior by saying it isn't mentioned in scripture. But people also speak for God in the other direction by declaring sin without proof (e.g. the Pharisees). We need to be careful not to make either mistake.

I agree that we should focus on the substance rather than the shadow. Yet I do not see how instruments prevent that any more than the building prevents the real temple of God (the people) from serving faithfully as the temple. Again, thank you for your peaceful words and careful consideration of scripture. And may we always seek to praise God from the joy welling up in our hearts, from the Spirit, and for His glory.

Doy Moyer

12/21/2013 07:45:05 am

Aaron,

This will have to come in two parts. First, thank you for your kind response — and for giving your name (I'm not really into anonymous responses that just take pot shots, so thanks). I understand that many disagree with me. All I can ask for is careful consideration. I'll respond to your points here and we can let that rest.

1. Yes, there are a handful of instances where we find instruments. However, even these appear to be tied to prophets/prophetesses like Miriam (Exod 15) or David, which is not an identical comparison to us. A prophet doing something under God's authority is different from just anyone else doing it. In a few of those cases, they are related to paganism or individual settings. I don't oppose instruments as inherently evil. I actually play some myself — I just don't bring them into congregational worship. I don't oppose sports or other talents as inherently evil either. But I am talking here in particular about what is appropriate in a congregational setting based on what God has authorized in that setting.

When it came to congregational worship, the use of instruments became very particularized, commanded directly by God. In my mind, the huge issue at stake is this: who is in charge of God's worship? Who decides what is pleasing to Him and what isn't? To see the highly specified nature of this, I recommend going back to 2 Chronicles 8 and 2 Chronicles 29-30. The statements are clear — these instruments were commanded by God. It was not arbitrary, and they were connected to the Temple, the sacrifices, the priesthood, and the other associated rituals. This began under David but was fully implemented with the Temple. Prior to this, we see no indication of instruments being used at the tabernacle. Again, the instances you refer to are still under the direction of prophets of some kind. I think that is important, as it indicates their direct connection to God's will being expressed.

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2. I am not assuming that people want to use the instruments to re-establish temple worship. I just don't think they've made the connection. I don't think they are dishonest about it. But due to the emotional nature of instrumental music, we may find that this is the practice to justify rather than ritual circumcision, ritual cleansing, burning incense, and sacrificing at an altar. Who wants to bring those back? But I'm appealing to the consistency of the issue. If someone is going to say, "but they did it back then," then that argument will come back to bite. Appealing to the Psalms, for example, which are covered in the Temple context, as justification for instruments, yet ignoring that some also refer to animal sacrifices (e.g., Psalm 51:16-19), doesn't do justice to the overall position. 2 Chron 8, 2 Chron 29 and Neh 12 all show how steeped the instruments were in the rituals surrounding the sacrifices and Temple. My point is simply this: if the instruments are justified based on their usage here, so are the other elements.

A church building is certainly not identical to the Temple. As you rightly note, God's people are God's temple. A building is just a place to meet, and a place to meet, whether a building or by a river, is necessary to fulfill God's will in coming together. A building as a meeting place, then, is not the same thing as the entire Temple system with its sacrifices, music, and priesthood. What Hebrews shows is that all of that system is fulfilled — the tabernacle/Temple, the priesthood, the sacrifices, etc. Your objection here is that "nothing in the New Testament suggests that instrumental music is obsolete." My point would be this: if the greater is fulfilled, so is the lesser. Why does it need to mention every specific? The instruments were wrapped up in that whole system, and here is the problem: in that system, God specified the Levites as the ones who played the instruments (the specific instruments). If we are going to argue that these are not obsolete, then let's be consistent: we should have Levites playing those specified instruments. But that misses the bigger picture: there was a change in the Law (Heb 7:22) because Jesus wasn't a Levite and couldn't have been a priest under that system (7:14). The only way we could be priests today (and we are) is for that Law to have been changed. There are no Levites to play those instruments anymore. There was no need to specifically say the instruments were obsolete because the very ones who played them were not around to do that anymore. Do we just do it anyway?

Doy Moyer

12/21/2013 07:49:39 am

And yet, an even bigger point is at stake: We are the Temple. We are the Priesthood. We are the sacrifices. Why is it a stretch to argue that we are the instruments of praise? I believe that is what Ephesians 5:19 tells us: "psalming with the heart to the Lord" makes our hearts the instruments as we sing with the spirit and with the mind (1 Cor 14:15). There is a richness to all of this that I believe we miss when make the physical instruments our focus. Rather than a picture of a few people playing instruments for others, the NT picture is all of God's people psalming with the heart as a kingdom of priests and offering themselves as living sacrifices — "let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name" (Heb 13:15).

3. I believe your objection here is conflating general and specific issues in authority — something I address in other articles. I do not argue that everything must be specified in order to be authorized. But what is striking about the New Testament documents is this: 1) the instruments were spelled out exactly under the old system; 2) use of instruments was well documented in pagan practices of this time; 3) yet

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the NT documents say nothing about them as part of congregational worship, and history shows that early Christians were not using the instruments. That kind of silence and evidence is significant. I do not think we can sweep all this away lightly.

The problem is that once you start getting into this type of argument, where does it end? Shall we play sports in our congregational assemblies? Does God need to specifically say "not to" in order for us not to? You say, "Paul didn't specify vocals." He most certainly did, for one cannot "speak" or "sing" without them — and the "fruit of lips" are not just literal lips. Vocal is exactly what is specified. Song books just give us the words, and words are necessary for singing. But again, general authority doesn't need to specify everything. I've gone into this issue in detail elsewhere.

4. I'll just have to disagree with you on burden of proof here. What God permitted throughout the OT is not what is generally authorized for NT worship. Since there was a change in the Law, we must find our authority in the NT documents for what pleases God. Again, what is so striking about instruments in the NT is their absence. Wouldn't you think that if God really wanted them, we might have a little more of an inkling of their use among NT Christians? Yet... nothing. Again, I cannot take that kind of silence lightly, and I do not want to presume upon God.

Well, we have stayed long enough on this mountain. If you wish further dialogue, I'd encourage you to contact me by email through the contact page. Thanks for your thoughts.

Nathanael Welch

12/21/2013 05:09:40 am

Good thoughts, thank you for this. It is well thought out.

Steve Wolfgang

12/21/2013 07:01:53 am

Thanks, Doy -- I've made most of these same points preaching and writing about this issue for decades; obviously this has become more a hot-button issue over that time as opinions have shifted in many places and some Christians and churches seem bent on issuing engraved apologies for past opposition. On your point about God's approval, authorization, even commands to use instruments under the Mosaic covenant, what is recorded in 2 Chronicles 29:27 about the use of instruments pre-dates the Davidic era (an argument, as you know, advanced by some that God tolerated IM because he had affection for David). Numbers 10 details the construction of the trumpets, down to the materials and workmanship, as well as usage for alarm, call to assembly AND worship during burnt offerings, etc. This was not an "invention of David" (though he may have actually invented and built instruments) but a "statute in Israel" from the time of the Exodus (Psalm 81:1-5. Thoughts?

Doy Moyer

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12/21/2013 07:08:28 am

Steve,

Thanks. I agree. And Psalm 81 is interesting in this regard to show that the instruments were "a statute in Israel." The details and specificity are pretty significant, it would seem. That, contrasted with the lack of any mention of these in the NT, is again pretty striking to me. You, as a historian, are, I'm sure, well versed in the historical controversies surrounding instruments. I don't see the issue going away any time soon. Thanks for your thoughts.

Tim Harris

12/21/2013 11:57:17 am

I read this article on 12/18 when it was published and have been re-reading it and wording my reply since. Some of my points are similar to previous comments, but I will post them to provide context to my overall thoughts.

First, I echo previous statements regarding the information Doy shared on the fulfillment of various old covenant shadows. A comprehensive study on the topic of shadows and their fulfillment would be very interesting.

A couple of years ago I wrote the article linked at the bottom of my comments based on my personal study of singing instruments in worship. I'd like to offer some observations and questions for consideration. (In the interest of up-front full disclosure, the congregation I'm a part of sings acapella in our assemblies.)

1.) As has been pointed out, instances where instruments were used in the Old Testament—including various Israelite assemblies—are not confined to the temple. Additionally, a number of these occasions give no indication that GOD provided any prior instruction for their use, yet we see His approval. (See my linked article for details.)

2.) In both Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16, the instructions about singing are found in the context of a discussion of individual Christian life. While church assemblies certainly provide logical occasions for Christians to sing (see 1 Cor. 14:12-18, 26, for example), it is important that we recognize that scope of these two verses is by no means limited to public assemblies. In fact, per Strong's Concordance, the Greek word translated "one another" in Eph. 5:19 literally means "alone, herself, himself, itself, own" indicating that we fulfill this command (and receive the benefits of singing) even when we are singing by ourselves. If we begin reading in Eph. 5:15, I imagine virtually everyone clearly sees these instructions are pertaining to our individual Christian walk. Yet, when we get to verse 19, people often seem to make this abrupt leap to discussing singing (only?) in church meetings. The same is true with Col. 3, as the two letters closely parallel one another.

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3.) Over the years, I have come to realize that many—if not most—of the subjects over which there is much disagreement are a result of our overlooking some more fundamental, more basic truth. In other words, we're debating over points 5 and 6 when, if we hadn't missed some key truth back at step 1 or 2, there would be no disagreement. I believe topical examples of this include "biblical authority", giving, and singing with or without instruments.

In the case of singing and instruments, I believe the root issue that we often misunderstand is how the New Testament defines "worship". (As an aside, I appreciate Doy using the phrase "corporate worship" which indicates the recognition that there is also private worship.) Does the New Testament ever explicitly describe church assemblies and their activities as worship? If so, where? If not, then what _is_ worship, biblically speaking? I strongly believe a proper understanding of worship is critical to this and virtually all other spiritual topics.

Now, is it wrong (sinful) for the individual Christian to praise GOD while playing their guitar privately at home? Doy says, "Many, though not all, will concede that those who want to use instruments in their own private setting are free to do so as they live with their own consciences..." My personal experience affirms Doy's statement. Using only the biblical definition of what it is to "worship", is this Christian worshipping GOD while singing to Him and playing their guitar at home by themselves?

If you say, "Yes, this individual is sinning.", how do you reach this conclusion? If your reasoning is, "GOD is silent about using instruments to praise Him (privately and publicly).", I can accept that point of view, assuming you are consistent in your application. And I don't know any person that takes this position who is consistent. You see, GOD is silent about a lot of things—most, in fact. For example, He didn't say anything about writing or commenting on Web site posts, owning a car, playing tennis or attending a college football game. These examples may seem absurd at first, but if we apply the same logic (i.e., that an individual may only do those things GOD has specifically authorized), these are each individual choices about which GOD is silent, just as He is with individually playing an instrument while singing to Him (in this case, specifically, alone in private).

If you say, "No, this individual is not sinning when they play an instrument and sing to GOD while they are by themselves.", then I ask how you reached that conclusion? Someone says, "An individual may do anything not forbidden in Scripture, but the church may only do only those things that are expressly authorized.

Doy Moyer

12/21/2013 03:26:49 pm

Tim,

Thanks for the thoughts and questions. I'm not going to do endless articles on here, so I'm just going to respond to a couple of points, and let it rest:

1. I understand your point about Eph 5:19 and Col 3:16, but I think it is off due to the fact that the term for

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"one another" is, in fact, in the plural, which means that it refers to a reciprocal relationship: "to one another." This is not about what a person does alone.

2. The reason I am stressing congregational worship here is simply due to the fact that I think the individual question requires a little different examination. I don't want one issue to cloud the other. While there is a principle to consider, we all recognize there are still individual activities that some can conscientiously participate in, and others cannot. That would be the discussion to consider -- but that's not the point of this article.

The point I am making is simply this: there are many things that we may be good at, like to do, enjoy, etc. that are not wrong, but that are still not appropriate for the congregational setting. I have other articles on this website addressing some of that principle.

Thanks again.