
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: **Does the New Testament authorize instruments of music in the church?**

HISTORY

The use of instrumental music in Christian worship is so commonly practiced that many people think it has always been that way. But actually it has not!

- 1) The first organ used by a body of people claiming to be Christian was 670 years after Christ. Pope Vasilian I introduced it in the Roman Catholic Church and it threatened to split the church, so it was promptly removed.

The Greek Orthodox Church refused the organ then and continues to do so now.

Eight hundred years after Christ the organ was reintroduced into the worship of the Catholic Church and it remained this time.

- 2) John Calvin, the founder of the Presbyterian Church, opposed musical instruments. He said:

"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 restoration of the other shadows of the law." (via, V. E. Howard, What is the Church of Christ?, 235)

- 3) John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, was asked his opinion of the instrument and he replied:

"I have no opposition to the organ in our chapel provided it is neither seen nor heard." (ibid.)

4) Adam Clarke, a great Methodist commentator, wrote this:

"I am an old man and a minister; and I declare that I never knew [mechanical instruments] productive of any good in the worship of God; and I have reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire, but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music and I here register my protest against all such corruption in the worship of the Infinite Spirit who requires his followers to worship him in Spirit and in truth." (ibid.)

On and on we could go with such quotations, but my point is that musical instruments in worship have not always enjoyed such popularity as they do today.

DIVINE HISTORY

As we look into the pages of the Bible we find that musical instruments were used very freely during the Old Testament days. In fact, not only were they allowed in worship to God, they were even required by divine command:

2 Chronicles 29:25-28

25 And he stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the LORD by His prophets.

[NOTE: The house of the Lord had instruments at the commandment of God by His prophets.]

26 The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets.

27 Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD also began, with the trumpets and with the instruments of David king of Israel.

28 So all the assembly worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

[NOTE: There is a difference between singers and those who played instruments.]

THE IMPLICATIONS

Now, what may we infer from all this?

We may infer that since God commanded instruments to be used, it would have been sinful if Israel had NOT used them. For Israel, the use of instrumental music was not a choice at all. God commanded it and Israel was required to use it.

THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we move on to the New Testament, we see that musical instruments are conspicuously missing. Instead of praising God with musical instruments, the New Testament instructs us to sing with our voices alone and produce the melody (or tune) of the song with our hearts rather than upon an instrument of music:

Ephesians 5:19

19 Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.

Some argue that because the Greek word for "singing" means "to pluck, or to twitch" and we are therefore at liberty to use musical instruments. But if the word "singing" inherently means to pluck on a mechanical instrument of music, then mechanical

instruments would not be optional. Instead, instruments would be required. Who is ready to say that Christians today must sing with instruments? The New Testament certainly does not teach this. There are several examples of men who sang praises to God in the New Testament without using any instruments of music:

Acts 16:25

25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

Hebrews 13:15

15 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.

James 5:13

13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

SUMMARY

In summary, the Old Testament taught a distinct difference between singing to God and playing on an instrument. Both of these were authorized under the Old Testament economy and to fail to use instruments would have been rebelling against God's plan.

In contrast, the New Testament teaches vocal singing only is to be used. It is completely silent about the use of instrumental music and to use an instrument in praise to God is to act without divine authorization. We are clearly taught that everything done by the church must be authorized by the Lord (Col 3:17).