

The Bible versus the “Church of Christ”

Instrumental Music in Worship

Introduction:

1. This series of lessons is investigating the claims of a pamphlet titled: “The Bible versus the ‘Church of Christ’.”
2. The first lessons dealt with fundamental teaching about the church.
 - a. It is the spiritual body of Christ, but not a denomination.
 - b. Its name is important, and “church of Christ” is a scriptural one.
 - c. Its existence has continued since the Day of Pentecost.
3. The next accusations made against the church of Christ have to do with the worship of God.
4. As expected, the first criticism deals with the lack of mechanical instrumental music in worship.

I. Does the New Testament Command Singing in Worship?

- A. **The Accusation:** *“According to the Church of Christ, it is unscriptural to use musical instruments in worship services. Only vocal singing is allowed.”*
- B. **The Accusation:** *“In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, the apostle Paul is instructing Christians in matters pertaining to their PERSONAL FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST, not worship services. The Church of Christ is very quick to quote these two verses OUT of their proper context, ignoring the two chapters in which they are found. Neither chapter speaks of ‘assembled worshippers,’ and neither chapter forbids musical instruments.”*
- C. **First Response:** *It is unscriptural to use musical instruments in worship and only vocal singing is allowed.*
 1. The New Testament clearly commands Christians to sing praises to God.
 2. In fact, every reference to music in New Testament worship specifies singing.
 - a. Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26 – Jesus, before the church began
 - b. Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13
 3. Where in the New Testament is a command, example or inference for the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship?
 4. Because there is no Scripture for instrumental music in worship, it is by definition unscriptural.
 5. However, vocal music is authorized – by command, example and inference.
- D. **Second Response:** *Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 give instructions for Christians who are assembled together.*
 1. It is true that both of these chapters give instructions to individual Christians for their personal lives.
 2. However, the language of Ephesians 5:19-21 and Colossians 3:15-16 shifts to accommodate the church when assembled together to worship.
 - a. Colossians 3:15 mentions the “one body.”
 - b. The activity is to be done “to yourselves” or to “one another,” indicating a plurality of individuals.
 - i. These are reflexive pronouns, indicating reciprocity.
 - ii. This means that the action is performed in a way that reciprocates.
 - iii. Each individual sings, teaches, and admonishes all others as they participate in the same activity.
 - c. The verbs in these passages are plural participles, giving instruction to the church as a whole (*speaking, singing, making melody, giving thanks, submitting yourselves, teaching, admonishing, singing*).
 - d. The phrase *en humin* (εν υμιν - “among you”) usually refers to the assembled church (cf. 1 Cor. 1:11; 3:3; 11:18; etc.).

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3. If these passages do not refer to the assembly of the church, then what do they mean?
 - a. Are Christians to sing to one another when we pass on the street?
 - b. How is it possible to obey these verses without assembling with the church?
 4. If these passages do not refer to the assembly of the church, then where is the authority for singing when the church is assembled?
 - a. If these verses are limited to the individual Christian’s personal life, then there is no authority for the assembled church to sing.
 - b. Furthermore, if they authorize instrumental music, it is only in one’s personal life – not in the worship assembly.
 5. Clearly, both of these passages give instructions for the church when it is assembled for worship.
- E. **Third Response:** *These passages do not forbid musical instruments in worship; however, they do not authorize them either.*

II. Does the Silence of the Scriptures Allow or Forbid?

- A. **The Accusation:** *“The Church of Christ position is that we are FORBIDDEN to use instruments in worship because the New Testament does not specifically AUTHORIZE us to use them. ...This is unscriptural logic.”*
1. **The Response: This logic is entirely scriptural!**
 - a. When God authorized one kind of wood for the building of the ark, all other kinds were forbidden (Genesis 6:14).
 - b. When Nadab and Abihu offered “strange fire before the Lord, which He commanded them not,” they were punished (Leviticus 10:1-3).
 - c. When God specified that the priests would come from the tribe of Levi, all other tribes were excluded (Hebrews 7:12-14).
 - d. When God authorized bread and fruit of the vine for the Lord’s Supper, all other foods and drinks were forbidden (Matthew 26:26ff).
 2. The church is to worship God only in the manner He has authorized.
 - a. Worship must be “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).
 - b. Any other worship is vain and unacceptable to God (Matthew 15:9; Colossians 2:20-23).
 3. There are two types of commands in the Bible: generic and specific.
 - a. “Go ye into all the world” is a generic command (Mark 16:15).
 - i. Thus, man is at liberty to fulfill this command any way he chooses.
 - ii. One may go by foot, horse, car, train, airplane, ship, etc.
 - b. “Make thee an ark of gopher wood” is a specific command.
 - i. God did not say, “Make thee an ark of wood.”
 - ii. By specifying “gopher wood,” all other woods were forbidden.
 - c. The command to sing is a specific command.
 - i. God specified the specific kind of music He desires in worship.
 - ii. This eliminates all other kinds of music.
 - iii. Remember, God did not simply say, “Make music;” but, “Sing.”
- B. **The Accusation:** *“There are MANY things that are used in worship services that are not specifically authorized by the Lord Himself. For example, HYMNALS, MICROPHONES, and PITCH PIPES are not authorized in the Bible, but the Church of Christ still uses them in their worship services.”*
1. **The Response: These things are authorized by the New Testament!**
 2. When God gives a command, He authorizes what is specifically stated and gives liberty for the things necessary to carry out that command.

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- a. For example, the command to make an ark of gopher wood specified what was to be built at the type of wood to be used.
 - b. However, Noah had liberty to use whatever aids were needed to build the ark – saw, hammer, etc.
 - c. God did not have to specify every tool to be used in building the ark.
 - d. However, when He did specify, all other kinds were forbidden.
3. The things mentioned by Mr. Melton are merely aids to carry out the command to sing.
 - a. When one uses a hymnal or songbook, he is not adding a new kind of music to his worship.
 - b. God specified the kind of songs to be used – psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs – but did not specify where or how they were to be written.
 - c. Using a pitch pipe to start a song in the right key is not adding music to one’s worship.
 - i. It is not played during the singing, nor in place of the singing.
 - ii. Often, it is not heard by anyone except the song leader.
 4. There is a difference between an aid and an addition.

<u>Command</u>	<u>Aid/Addition</u>	<u>Result</u>	<u>Conclusion</u>
Baptize	Baptistery	Baptism	<i>Aid</i>
Assemble	Building	Assemble	<i>Aid</i>
Give	Collection Plate	Give	<i>Aid</i>
Sing	Songbook	Sing	<i>Aid</i>
Sing	Instruments	Play	<i>Addition</i>

- C. **The Accusation:** *“There are many things that the Bible doesn’t specifically authorize, but this doesn’t mean they are forbidden! God gave us all a BRAIN to use when making decisions about such matters, and He has sealed real Christians with His Holy Spirit to lead and guide them in their decision making. One who insists on looking for specific authorization in all things is one who insists on IGNORING the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God, for the scriptures do not specifically mention all things.”*
 1. **The Response:** *God has given each man a BRAIN to understand that the Holy Spirit leads and guides by His inspired Word – the Bible!*
 2. The New Testament was given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit (John 16:13; 1 Corinthians 2:9-13; Ephesians 3:3-5; cf. 2 Peter 1:21).
 3. The Holy Spirit does not and will not contradict Himself!
 - a. The Spirit did not reveal one truth in the New Testament only to “guide” men today in a different direction (Galatians 1:6-9).
 - b. This argument has been used as an attempt to justify any number of unauthorized beliefs and practices.
 - c. The Bible must be our only guide (Acts 8:30-31; Eph. 6:17; 1 Peter 2:2)!
 4. Furthermore, when man begins to follow his own wisdom (brain) in contradiction to God’s revealed wisdom, he is deceived (1 Corinthians 1:19-21; 3:18-21).
- D. These statements by Mr. Melton illustrate the problem of denominationalism.
 1. Each denominational group has a different standard of authority.
 2. This is because they follow the desires, wishes, and wants of men.
 3. In order to do this, the standard of God’s Word must be ignored, altered or rejected.

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III. Does God Desire Instrumental Music in Worship?

- A. **The Accusation:** *“The Bible is very clear in stating that the Lord loves good music of praise and worship, and this DOES include musical instruments. Please check the following references in your Bible and see for yourself. In fact, you will even see that three of these references have musical instruments IN HEAVEN!”*
- B. **The Response:** *Though these references mention instrumental music, none of them have to do with worship during the New Testament age.*
1. Psalm 33:2-4; 150; 2 Samuel 6:5; 1 Chronicles 16:42; 25:5-6; Nehemiah 12:27
 2. Revelation 5:8; 14:2; 15:2
- C. Obviously, instrumental music was used during Old Testament times.
1. There were some things done in worship in the Old Testament that are also practiced under the New Testament.
 - a. Prayer is one example.
 - b. However, we pray in worship today because it is commanded in the New Testament (Acts 4:31; 12:5; 1 Timothy 2:8).
 - c. Just because it is in the OT does not mean that it applies under the NT.
 2. There were also some things done in worship in the Old Testament that are not practiced under the New Testament.
 - a. The church does not offer animal sacrifices today.
 - b. The church does not burn incense in worship today.
 - c. The church does not dance in worship today.
 - d. The church does not use instrumental music in worship today.
 - e. None of these things are authorized by the New Testament, the binding law for the church.
 3. It is inconsistent and irresponsible to pick and choose parts of the Old Testament to bind upon the church today while not following other parts.
 - a. The Law has changed (Matthew 26:28; Hebrews 7:12, 22; 8:6-7; 9:15-17).
 - b. To hold on to the Old Testament – in part or in whole – is to reject Jesus and His New Covenant.
 4. The Old Testament was to bring men to Christ; then, His Gospel – the New Testament – would become the authoritative law for the church (Matthew 17:5; Galatians 3:24-25).
- D. God’s law for man today is not the Old Testament, but the New.
- E. The book of Revelation, part of the New Testament, mentions harps – instruments of music – being used in Heaven.
1. However, this does not authorize their use in worship here on Earth during the Gospel Age.
 2. First, the book of Revelation is highly symbolic.
 - a. In Revelation 5:8, Jesus is pictured as a Lamb and prayers are pictured as bowls of incense – neither of which is literal.
 - b. In Revelation 14:2, a voice is described as “harpers harping with their harps,” just as the voice from Heaven sounded like “many waters” and “great thunder.”
 - c. In Revelation 15:2, those who are said to have harps are standing on a “sea of glass mingled with fire” – again, a symbolic image.
 - d. It would not be wrong to surmise that the harps in these passages are also symbolic, not literal – after all, Heaven is a spiritual place.
 3. Also, there are many things that are different in Heaven from what God has designed for man here on Earth.
 - a. There is no marriage in Heaven, but that does not mean that there is to be no marriage on Earth (Matthew 22:30).

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- b. There will be no baptism in Heaven, but it is commanded by the Gospel.
 - c. Today, man is governed by the Gospel of Christ, not by what things will be like in Heaven.
- F. To know what God desires in worship, one must look to His Word for the answer.
- 1. Mr. Melton presumes to tell us that the Lord loves “good music” including instruments; when, in fact, Mr. Melton is simply telling us what *he* loves.
 - 2. God has revealed clearly what He desires in worship during the Gospel Age.
 - 3. He has specified one particular kind of music – congregational singing.
 - 4. There are only two kinds of music – vocal or non-vocal.
 - a. Non-vocal music includes two distinct ways of making music.
 - b. Mechanical music involves the use of instruments (brass, strings, woodwinds, percussion, electronic, etc.).
 - c. Non-mechanical music involves the use of the human body, excluding the voice (snapping, clapping, stomping, etc.).
 - 5. By authorizing vocal music, God declared all non-vocal music is unscriptural.
 - 6. Yet, not all vocal music is acceptable to God in worship.
 - a. Non-verbal music requires the human voice without the use of words.
 - i. This includes whistling and humming.
 - ii. It also includes sounds that are not words (“Ahh,” “Ooo,” etc.).
 - iii. Using the human voice to imitate the sounds of mechanical instruments is vocal, but non-verbal.
 - iv. None of these qualify as “teaching” or “admonishing.”
 - b. Verbal music requires the human voice expressing words.
 - 7. Still, not all vocal, verbal music is pleasing to God.
 - a. For example, one may use words, but if they are unscriptural or teach error, they are not acceptable.
 - b. Also, one may use words that are in a language that is not understood by the congregation.
 - i. This would include the so-called “angel language” or “heavenly language” claimed to be used by those who “speak in tongues.”
 - ii. Biblically, to speak in tongues was to speak in a previously unlearned human language.
 - c. God commanded the church to “sing with the understanding;” thus, understandable language must be used.
 - 8. Finally, it is possible to sing in words that can be understood by all and still disobey God’s instructions.
 - a. Remember, God commanded the church to teach and admonish “one another.”
 - b. Our singing must be reciprocal; that is, congregational.
 - c. The use of solos, duets, trios, choirs, vocal bands, etc. is a violation of God’s directions for true worship.
 - 9. God has authorized congregational, unaccompanied singing as the music He desires in worship.
- G. Because He has all authority, God decides and dictates what is acceptable in worship.
- H. If we seek to please Him, we will not add to, take from, or alter His will in any way.