



"SHOULD GOD BE WORSHIPED WITH MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS?"

"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. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." (Col. 3:16, 17).

ONE reason given in favor of using musical instruments is that **it may increase the chances of people coming to a church and hearing the word**. However, just because something is done with good intentions and/or gives good results doesn't make it authorized. For example, just because "Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it" when "the oxen stumbled" in order to prevent damage being done to the ark (2 Sam. 6:6) doesn't mean that it was authorized; we know this because "the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah" for what he did, "and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God" (2 Sam. 6:7). In other words, contrary to popular teaching, the end *does not* justify the means.

Of course, it also could be said that **we see examples in the Old Testament of music being played to God**, but this alone doesn't authorize it either. The old covenant has been made obsolete (Heb. 8:8–13), so isn't it strange that we see people during the Old Testament who played instruments to worship God (2 Sam. 6:5; 1 Chron. 23:4–5) but never people in the New Testament? For those in the New Testament, it's always been just singing (Matt. 26:30; Act. 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15). In fact, what we are told to do is sing, not play musical instruments (Eph. 5:18–19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 5:13).

I understand that it could be said that **the Bible never says not to use musical instruments**. However, the silence of the Scriptures is *prohibitive*, not permissive. For example, we read in the 7th chapter of Hebrews that the priesthood of the Old Testament had to be changed and that Jesus could not be a priest according to the order of Aaron because He "arose from Judah" (Heb. 7:14). But why would the fact that Jesus was of the tribe of Judah prevent Him from being a priest under the Old Testament Law? The Hebrew writer says that it's because Judah's a tribe "of which ... Moses *spoke nothing* concerning priesthood" (Heb. 7:14 [emphasis added]). Also, we're told, "... whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col. 3:17); we need to do what is "in the name [within the authority] of the Lord Jesus"—singing. (It's also interesting to note that this verse is placed right after one of the verses commanding to sing [v. 16], so surely Col. 3:17 would apply to it.)

It might be said that **it just seems strange to bind that we cannot worship God with musical instruments if we are to sing**, but this form of reasoning, that binding such just feels too weird to be valid, can't authorize anything (Prov. 14:12; 16:25). We see that the Christians of the first century understood musical instruments to be forbidden in worship, as the earliest proposed record of instrumental music being in worship is A.D. 190 (approximately 160 years after the church began), and even this date is questionable; a man by the name of David Lipscomb believed that it was 500 years before musical instruments were used in worship. Noninstrumental music existed for so long in churches that this genre of music became known as *a cappella* (Italian for "in the manner of the church" or "in the manner of the chapel"). The following observation of Lipscomb's is worth recognizing:

"Neither Paul nor any other apostle, nor the Lord Jesus, nor any of the disciples for five hundred years, used instruments. This too, in the face of the fact that the Jews had used instruments in the days of their prosperity and that the Greeks and heathen nations all used them in their worship. They were dropped out with such emphasis that they were not taken up till the middle of the Dark Ages, and came in as part of the order of the Roman Catholic Church. It seems there cannot be doubt but that the use of instrumental music in connection with the worship of God, whether used as a part of the worship or as an attraction accompaniment, is unauthorized by God and violates the oft-repeated prohibition to add nothing to, take nothing from, the commandments of the Lord. They have not been authorized by God or sanctified with the blood of his Son."

And finally, some argue that **we must have unity and as a result should be tolerant over this issue**. Though it is true that we are commanded to "walk by the same rule," it's more specific than just that: Col. 3:17 reveals that this "same rule" by which we are to walk is "the name of the Lord Jesus." So, as it says, "... whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus ..."

—Nick S. Wallace

