

- Few questions are more polarizing in the religious community than that of “to play or not to play?”. Of course, I am referring to the issue of instrumental music in worship to God. Many, if not all of us have heard numerous sermons and Bible classes taught on the subject. We have more than likely had conversations with our friends about our congregation and when mentioned that we attend a Church of Christ, the response is something like, “Oh, so you go to the church that doesn't believe in music?”. We shrug the comment off and try to explain that we do have music, it just isn't of the instrumental type. We sing “a cappella”, which literally means “of the chapel.” We sing without the accompaniment of music instruments.
- For man, this is very strange because that is not the norm in the religious world we live in, today. Today, not only do we see instruments used, but we see what amounts to a full on concert type setting in many churches. Unfortunately, this is not something that is specific only to the churches of denominationalism. As is normally the case, trends of the denominational world seem to somehow find their way into the Lord's churches. In recent years, there have been major pushes by churches claiming to be New Testament churches to include instruments in the regular assembly or in new separate “contemporary” assemblies.
- The first church named a church of Christ to introduce a mechanical instrument was in Midway, Kentucky. It was such a controversial move that a United States census of religious organizations recognized the Disciples of Christ and the Churches of Christ as being near identical, except for the acceptance of mechanical instruments by the D of C and the lack of acceptance by C of C. Since then, other churches of Christ have introduced mechanical instruments into the worship assembly. One of the most famous introductions was done by the Richland Hills Church of Christ, which is located in Texas, in November of 2006. Rick Atchley, the main preacher, presented 3 sermons giving the churches reasoning for introducing the Saturday night service which offered mechanical instruments in the song worship and a serving of the Lord's Supper. It will probably surprise you none that this church is now simply known as The Hills Church. Nothing wrong with that per-say, but it is not surprising that they give no reference to being a church of Christ any longer. Closer to home we have seen the Otter Creek church in Nashville introduce mechanical instruments within the past two months, and in Murfreesboro, the Stones River church, just within the past 3 weeks, began to offer a worship service that featured mechanical instruments.
- To many, this isn't a big deal. However, I believe the Bible teaches us some important principles that we need to discuss this morning. For many of us, this will be a reminder and a confirmation of our current beliefs. However, for some, this might be a question that you have often wondered about. You might have asked yourself if this is really that big of a deal. That's ok! It's ok to ask questions, but you must also be willing to accept the answers that you will find within God's Word. Let's open God's Word and seek to find an answer to this pressing question of to play or not to play?

Instrumental Music in Worship to God

I. This issue is not about ability or preference.

- A. We have plenty of talent at this church, and other churches have plenty of talent that could play instruments during worship.
- B. No one I know of, hates music that uses instruments.
 - 1. I like listening to music on the radio that uses instruments.
 - 2. I have talked to others about this issue, and they would have no problem with the use of instruments, but we recognized that this was not about our own preferences or desires.
- C. This is not a matter of opinion. If it was then we wouldn't need to have this study from the pulpit. However, I believe through this study we will come to realize that God has given us a pattern to follow in this matter.

II. It is possible to worship God in an unacceptable manner.

- A. Not all worship is acceptable worship. Worship can be unacceptable in different ways.
 - 1. Worship that is unauthorized: People can worship in a way that God has not approved of. (**Nadab & Abihu Lev. 10:1-3**)
 - 2. Worship that is less than best: People can put little to no effort into it, and they can treat worship as something that isn't desired but as something that is forced. (**Malachi 1:6-10**)
 - 3. Worship that does not include the heart: People can worship God in action without putting any heart into it. They offer up lip service to God. (**Matt. 15:8; Isaiah 29:13**)
 - 4. Worship that elevates man's traditions over traditions given by God: The Jews were nullifying God's command's with their own tradition of Corban. (**Matt. 15:9**)
- B. Unacceptable worship does not glorify God. In fact, it dishonors Him.
 - 1. Respect is not shown to God when we worship Him in a way that He has not said honors him. This applies to all forms of worship, not just the music.
 - 2. Notice the reactions to each of these offerings of worship. None of them were received well! We must not think that just any type of worship will honor and please God. None of these examples give us this idea.

III. God demands proper worship from man.

- A. As the Creator, He has the authority to demand worship how He pleases.
 - 1. We have established that God is not pleased with just any type of worship that is laid before Him.
 - 2. Jesus teaches us this very important principle during the sermon on the mount. Not everyone who worships God in just anyway will be accepted by Him. (**Matt. 7:21-23**)
 - 3. If we do not listen to God's instructions on how to conduct our faith, then we will not stand up when He comes in judgement. (**Matt. 7:24-27**)
- B. As the created, we must humble ourselves to worship as God has dictated, even if that does not match our personal preferences or desires.
 - 1. Jesus is our perfect example of someone who sacrificed His own preference desires of the Father. (**“not My will, but Yours be done” Luke 22:41,42**)
 - 2. Is this the type of mindset that we have? Are we willing to submit to what the New Testament says in regards to New Testament worship? Or are we seeking to worship the creature and his/her desires more than the Creator? (**Rom. 1:25**)

IV. As Christians, we do not have authority to use instruments as we worship God.

- A. Christian churches and leading figures have not always embraced instrument music in worship to God.
1. **Justin Martyr** (Early Christian 150AD) *"The use of instrumental music was not received in the Christian Churches, as it was among the Jews in their childish state, but only the use of plain song. Simply singing is not agreeable to children, but singing to lifeless instruments and dancing and clapping is. On this account the use of this kind of instrument and of others agreeable to children is removed from the song of the church and there is left remaining simple singing."* (Answers to the Orthodox)
 2. **Thomas Aquinas** (Early Catholic Writer) *"Our church does not use musical instruments as harps and psalteries to praise God with all, that she may not seem to Judaize."* (Bingham's Antiquities, p.137)
 3. **Philip Schaff** (church historian) *"The use of organs in churches is ascribed to Pope Vitalian."* (History of the Christian Church) Introduced in 666 AD to great opposition.
 4. **Catholic Encyclopedia** *"Although Josephus tells of the wonderful effects produced in the temple by the use of instruments, the first Christians were of too Spiritual a fibre to substitute lifeless instruments for or to use them to accompany the human voice."* (Catholic Encyclopedia, vol. 10, p.651)
 5. **Martin Luther** (Leader of Protestant Reformation. *"The organ is worship in the insignia of Baal"* (McClintock & Strong's Encyclopedia)
 6. **John Calvin** (Protestant Reformer) *"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. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as other things, from the Jews."* (Calvin's Commentary on Psalm 33)
 7. **John Wesley** *"I have no abjection to instruments of music in our chapels provided they are neither heard nor seen."* (Clark's Commentary on Amos . p.684)
 8. **David Benedict** (Baptist Historian) *"Staunch old Baptists in former times would as soon have tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries. (50 Years Among the Baptists, p.283)*
 9. **Charles H. Spurgeon** (One of the greatest Baptist preachers of all time. Preached to a church of over 10,000 in England during his time.) *"What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettinesses of a quartette, the refined niceties of a choir, or the blowing off of wind from inanimate bellows and pipes! We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it."* (The Treasury of David)
 10. These men are not our authority, but it shows that this practice has not always existed. It is something that has been added to the practice of Christian churches.
- B. We must find the correct pattern to follow in regards to our worship.
1. Some would seek to use the Old Testament as their authority and pattern for the use of instruments.
 - a) It would be dishonest for us to say that God has never allowed the use of instruments in worship.
 - b) Many times throughout the Old Testament, instruments are discussed and approved of by God. (**I Chron. 25:1; II Chron. 7:6; Psalm 33:1-3; Psalm 150**)
 - c) The problem we have with this approach is the fact that the Old Testament and it's authority does not apply to us anymore today. (**Gal. 3:23-25; Col. 2:14**)
 2. We must follow the teachings and pattern laid out for us in the New Testament.
 - a) Jesus gave them authority to lead the church. (**Matt. 16:19**)
 - b) They were to sit on "twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (**Matt. 19:28**)
 - c) We are to hold to the traditions that were handed down by them. (**II Thess. 2:15**)
 - d) Paul even goes so far as to say that whatever we do, we must do in the name and by the authority of Jesus. (**Col. 3:16**)
 - e) The Apostles themselves looked to God for guidance concerning the Gentiles (**Acts 15**). They came to know what they should do through a forced conclusion (vv.7-11), approved example (v.12), and direct statement/command (vv.13-21)
 - f) If we are to hold to authority in one thing, then we must hold to it for all things. There is no way to properly apply authority to only some subjects within the Church.
- C. There just isn't any type of authority (forced conclusion, approved example, or direct statement/command) that can be found in the New Testament to give us the green light in regards to worship that includes anything but singing. In fact, all we have are examples Christians of singing!
1. "Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God." **Acts 16:25**
 2. "And I will sing to Your Name." **Romans 15:9**
 3. "I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also." **I Corinthians 14:15**
 4. "Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." **Ephesians 5:19**
 5. "singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God" **Colossians 3:16**
 6. "In the midst of the congregation I will sing Your praise." **Hebrews 2:12**
 7. "let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that gives thanks to His name." **Hebrews 13:15**
 8. "Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises." **James 5:13**
- D. There is zero mention of mechanical instruments in the New Testament besides **Revelation 5:8**. That text also mentions bowls of incense being held by 4 living creatures and 24 elders and the setting is heaven. I doubt that spiritual beings will have a need for physical harps and incense in heaven. We must remember the apocalyptic nature of the book.
- E. If someone can look at these 8 verses and come to the conclusion that God desires instruments of music in worship, then they are seeing something I don't, and they are going someplace that I am not willing to go. If people want to demand their way and use them, then that is their prerogative, but I am not willing to go beyond what I see God desiring in His Word.

The question of instrumental music in worship has been a tough one for many years. Some desire it so much that they are willing to go to whatever means to show that they can have them. Others, are content with only doing what they see given to them in the New Testament. Those that use mechanical instruments aren't necessarily bad people, many are just uninformed. May we be the type of people who are willing to show them the truth in God's Word. May we be those type of people who are content with God's revealed pattern. May we be the type of people are not willing to risk their souls for the sound of a drum, guitar, or piano. May God help us and give us the strength to worship and honor Him only as we can find fit through His Word.