

Instrumental Music

Introduction.

1. Nothing strikes visitors to our worship more odd than the absence of instruments of music.
2. I want to make it clear that the reason we do not use instruments is NOT because...
 - a. We don't like music. Many of us here play an instrument.
 - b. We don't have the money. We could arrange a nice orchestra.
 - c. We just have not traditionally used them. This is not a matter of custom.
3. The reason we don't use instruments is because we don't believe God wants us to, and more than anything we want to please Him.
4. I realize this seems strange to an outsider, but I hope you will consider the biblical case I am going to present. Further, it may surprise you to know that the position I am staking out was actually the majority position until the last 150 years. But I am getting ahead of myself.

Discussion.

I. Singing Is the Musical Worship of the Church.

- A. The NT is the only rule of faith and practice for Christians.
 1. There is an OT and NT, but Christ came to remove the old covenant and put in place a NT -- Heb. 10:8-10.
 2. This is not to denigrate the OT. It still serves a purpose (Rom. 15:4).
 3. In fact, the OT said a NT was coming (Jer. 31:31). So it is not slighting the OT to say that we have a NT; it is honoring its message.
 4. The OT was the guiding force for Israel, and the NT is the guideline for the New Israel, the church (just as Articles of Confederation vs. Constitution).
- B. The NT only mentions singing in worship.
 1. Sample of passages: Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; James 5:13.
 2. The only place instruments in worship are mentioned in NT is in Rev. 5:8, in a context that is obviously symbolic, see 5:6, 5:8 with incense.
- C. When the God is silent, we have no permission to act.
 1. This is really true of any form of communication.
 2. Jesus only spoke and taught when His Father gave Him permission-- John 12:49; 5:30.
 3. Why? Not my will but thine be done.
 4. Illus. with the Lord's Supper.
 5. This is not a novel understanding:

- a. "I...believe that the use of ...instruments of music, in the Christian Church, is without the sanction of and against the will of God." Adam Clarke, Methodist commentator (*Clarke's Commentary* IV:684).
- b. "As the use of musical instruments in the New Testament Church has no sanction in the Bible, they shall not be introduced, in any form, in any of our congregations." *Directory for Worship United Presbyterian Church of America* (before 1881)

II. *Some Attempts To Justify Instruments in Worship*

- A. "God allowed them to be used in the OT, so why not now."
 - 1. "It's in the Bible, isn't it." Yes, but remember there are two covenants in this book. The Old one does mention instruments; the New one does not.
 - 2. Circumcision and animal sacrifice are also in the Bible, but we don't practice those religiously. Why not? Not our law!
 - 3. The reason famous figures in church history opposed the use of instruments is because they knew the NT didn't authorize them, and that to turn to the Old Law was a mistake:
 - a. "Instruments of music such as harps and psalteries, the church does not adopt for divine praises, lest it should seem to Judaize." Thomas Aquinas (1250) Catholic Theologian
 - b. "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law." John Calvin, founder of Reformed Theology *Calvin's Commentary* on Psalm 33
- B. "The Greek word *psallo* in Eph. 5:19 means to play an instrument."
 - 1. This effort is better, because in the right covenant, and using Scripture.
 - 2. However, that isn't what *psallo* means. It used to mean to pluck a string, but its meaning changed over the course of centuries: as lyric has changed for us.
 - 3. The instrument is the heart (John 4:24).
- C. "The instrument is just an aid to help us sing better."
 - 1. God did not consider instruments a mere aid to singing. God considered them an entirely different form of musical worship -- 2 Chron. 29:25, 28.
 - 2. In the OT, God authorized two kinds of music: singing, and instruments. But in the NT, He only authorized one. The NT records no instance of the apostles either teaching or practicing it.

III. Some Final Historical Thoughts

- A. Some comments from music historians:
 - 1. "In the early Christian church there was, however, a strong feeling against the use of instruments in divine worship." George W. Stewart, *Music in Church Worship*, p. 214.
 - 2. "The development of Western music was decisively influenced by the exclusion of musical instruments from the early Christian Church." Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization*, p. 54.
 - 3. "Only singing, however, and no playing of instruments, was permitted in the early Christian Church." Hugo Leichtentritt, *Music History and Ideas*, p. 34.

- B. Let me stress that many famous figures of church history adamantly opposed the instrument:
 - 1. "[The] organ is the ensign of Baal." Martin Luther (cited in *McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia* VI:762)
 - 2. "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen." John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church (cited in *Clarke's Commentary* IV: 684)

- C. The simplest way to illustrate the practice of the early Christians is the term *acapella*.
 - 1. Means in our vernacular, vocal music.
 - 2. Latin, " in the style of the chapel or church.

Conclusion.

- 1. The issue here is one that is much larger than simply whether to use an instrument or not. It is a matter of how we look at God's word.
- 2. 300 years ago I imagine many of the leaders of various denominations never dreamed instruments would be so widely accepted. And I imagine that 100 years ago, never dreamed that women would be ordained, that homosexuality would be justified and considered candidates for priesthood.
- 3. Once the attitude becomes, "I know God's word doesn't justify this, but it seems like a good idea, the barn door is open.
- 4. Authority applies to all areas of life!