

Four Reasons Musical Instruments Cannot Be in Worship

Division

Something that members of the primitive church often find surprising is the great consternation that those who are members of denominations have with the issue of music in our worship. If we who practice first century Christianity were to point to the distinctions or divisions between our Christianity and the Christianity of the denominations and churches around us, that list might look something like this:

1. The source of authority in all things
2. The plan of salvation
3. The organization of the church
4. The false doctrines of men
5. The hope of Christianity

Yet if that same question were then asked of the various churches of today, that is, to ask what they saw as the divisive issues between our character and theirs, that list would be something more akin to this:

1. No instruments in worship
2. Baptism

Many Christians are surprised that the denominations have such a view; indeed, those of us who practice simple biblical Christianity might even say that the music of worship is not something we give a great deal of thought to, in that we simply obey the command to “sing” (Col. 3:16, Eph 5:19) and to “offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips” (Heb. 13:15). Is it that great of an issue?

There are four reasons why the use of instrumental music in worship is in fact a great issue.

1. It violates the authority of Christ
2. It contradicts the spirit of the commandment
3. It makes worldly a spiritual concept
4. It reflects a worship of ourselves apart from God

Definitions

Before we look at these points, we need to define some terms we use for clarity. When we speak about an instrument or musical instrument, it refers to any device that is used to accomplish the work of making music as commanded in the Bible. It would not include a pitch pipe, song book or class bell, as their purpose is not to make music, but instead to be expedients to authorized purposes. Second, we would want to make it understood that this pertains to making music within the realm of the work of the church. The church has a very specific purpose: to collectively worship God, to edify and care for saints, and to reach to the lost.

First, it violates the authority of Christ.

When Paul commanded the Christians of Colossae to sing with grace in their hearts, he continued in the next passage to say this: “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” (Colossians 3:17). What is the significance of “do all in the name of the Lord”? When a policeman says “stop in the name of the law”, what does he or she mean? It is a statement of authority; what is being asked is by the authority of the law. Paul told these Christians to sing, and then he states that whatever they do is to be done in the authority of Jesus. Meaning, Jesus authorized it. Is there any time in the entire New Testament that Jesus authorized musical instruments? We see that through His apostles He authorized singing on multiple occasions. But there is not one time

in commandment or example that He authorized musical instruments. Not once. Not even the backdoor argument a few have made that Psalms were originally set to musical instruments, which is contrary to the usage of the term in the New Testament. Musical instruments are not “in the name of the Lord Jesus”.

Second, it violates the spirit of the commandment.

If Jesus came to you and asked you for something, would you do it? Jesus said that one reason that God is good is that He gives what we ask for (in spiritual situations): *"Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"* (Matthew 7:9-11). In this case, what God has asked us to give Him in worship is quite straightforward: sing from the heart, and offer the sacrifice of the fruit of our lips. It is clear that God desires us to worship Him from the heart, and the mouth is directly attached to the heart (*"You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart"* Matthew 12:34). It seems clear that instruments made of wood and metal made by men would not satisfy the spirit of the command.

Third, it makes worldly a spiritual concept.

Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4 that the worship of God was about to go through a rather dramatic change. He said to her "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:23-24). In context, Jesus was describing the change from the physical Jerusalem of worship to the spiritual Jerusalem of worship (Heb. 12:22, Gal. 4:26, Rev. 3:12). We know that a great many things changed from their physical format to a spiritual format:

Old Testament Physical		New Testament Spiritual	
Jerusalem	2 Chon. 6:6, John 4:20	The Church	Heb. 12:22, Gal. 4:26, Rev. 3:12
Israel	Deut. 7:6, Ex. 19:5-6	The Church	Rom. 9:6, Gal. 3:29, Gal 6:16
Priesthood	Deut. 21:5, 1 Chron. 23:13	The Christian	1 Peter 2:5-9
Sacrifices	Lev. 7:29-34	Our lives	Rom 12:1-2, 1 Peter 2:5
Temple	1 Chron. 29:1-9	The church	1 Cor. 3:16, Eph. 2:21, 2 Cor 6:16
Altar	Heb 9:4,	Prayer (received)	Heb 13:10
Incense	Ex. 30:7-8	Prayer (offered)	Rev. 5:8, Rev 8:3
Robes	Ex. 39:22-26	Righteousness	Gal. 3:27, Rev. 19:8
Passover	Ex. 12:11, Num. 9:2-14	Death of Jesus	1 Cor. 5:7, 1 Peter 1:19, Rev. 5:6
Sabbath	Ex. 16:26, Ex. 20:8-10	Eternal Home	Heb. 4:1-11, Col. 2:16-17
Musical Instruments	2 Sam. 6:5, 1 Chron. 15:16	Our hearts and singing	Col 3:16, Eph. 5:19, Heb. 13:15

It can be clearly seen that the worship of the Old Covenant was worldly and carnal, with a physical priesthood offering physical sacrifices in a physical temple, and that physical musical instruments were later added to be used in worship. Yet the New Covenant of Christ offers spiritual worship with spiritual sacrifices by a spiritual priesthood in a spiritual temple, and the music of that spiritual temple itself is the ONLY spiritual musical instrument ever fashioned by God, the human heart. To return to the physical instruments of the Old Covenant (consider that an instrument is defined by Webster as *"a tool or device used for a particular purpose; especially: a tool or device designed to do careful and exact work"*, thus the physical temple, priesthood, etc are ALL instruments) is to make the death of Jesus a vain thing (Gal. 2:21).

Fourth, it reflects a worship of ourselves apart from God.

Men have often taken what they desired and brought it to the worship of God. In 2 Kings 16:10, King Ahaz visited Damascus and saw an altar that he had copied and brought into the temple of God in Jerusalem. The account is given as an example of his wickedness before God. Historically, musical instruments were never part of the worship of the church (consider the archaic word “acapella”, which describes singing without instruments, means “as in the church”). Why then would they have been introduced? Perhaps the answer lies in the often cited “authority” of men who have a love of instrumental music in worship: “*it sounds okay to me*”. Universally, NO ONE has ever brought instrumental music into their worship because they decided that it was more pleasing to God. Instead, musical instruments are brought into worship because it is pleasurable to the senses of the hearer. Jude says that such are “*sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit*” (Jude 19). James warns that reasoning which goes to support our own desires is “*earthly, sensual, demonic*” (James 3:15). Consider again that authority men implore for musical instruments: “it sounds okay to me”. In such a case, who is their worship meant to please? Clearly, the answer is themselves.