

# **Instrumental Music and the church of Christ**

## *Basics of the church of Christ – Sermon Number Three*

Any series on the basics of the church of Christ *without* a discussion on the subject of instrumental music would be incomplete. Perhaps the one thing recognized the most about the church of Christ as different from other churches is the absence of instrumental music in worship to God. In fact, many denominations will consider themselves virtually identical to the church of Christ wherein the only difference is that those churches use instrumental music while the church of Christ does not. While this is not usually the *only* difference, it is certainly the one that stands out and needs to be explained.

In the approach to this controversial subject, one must be reminded of the importance of the scriptures and the authority they provide. To appropriately understand the issue of instrumental music, one must examine the scriptures and let those scriptures have the final word. A firm reliance on the bedrock principle of the necessity of Biblical authority stated below will help all who desire to know the truth to focus their attention solely on the scriptures:

*One must consider the following key passages: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work (II Timothy 3:16-17) and “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God” (I Peter 4:11). Upon the consideration of these passages, it should be clear, that in all matters of church organization, church doctrine and church practice, there must remain a firm reliance upon the Bible and it alone.*

### ◆ Does It Really Matter, Anyway?

Even with an understanding of the importance of Biblical authority in all that we do, some still question as to whether or not the division over instrumental music really matters. Many people view it as a personal disagreement among people from various churches and that it does not merit serious attention nor should it be the cause of great division. And certainly, many would argue that a loving God would not condemn someone for using a piano, organ, guitar or band while praising and worshipping Him.

To understand how we ought to approach this, we should be reminded that, throughout the Old and New Testaments, “little” things mattered to God.

- God killed Nabad and Abihu for offering “strange fire” on the altar (Leviticus 10:1-2).
- God cared so much that he killed Uzzah for merely touching the Ark of the Covenant (II Samuel 6:6-7).
- God’s concern over the spread of false doctrine was made apparent when he condemned the teachings of Hymenaeus and Philetus (II Timothy 2:17).

It stands to reason that, if God has continually cared about making sure that His people do exactly as He has commanded, He will expect us to render complete obedience to Him. This would certainly be true in how we worship Him in song.

#### ◆ Scriptures on the Subject of Singing ...

No one argues over whether or not singing is important. Worshipping God in song and praising His name is not a debated topic. Based on the scriptures, the church of Christ, desiring to be the New Testament church, engages in singing.

- In Ephesians 5:19, the Apostle Paul writes, “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”
- In Colossians 3:16, the same writer comments, “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.”

These two verses are the most direct verses in the New Testament on the subject of singing praises to God. It should be observed that in these two verses, as well as in any other verse discussing the church’s worship to God in song, that “singing” is commanded. The use of instrumental music is not discussed. Thus, if we are to only do things as we are authorized by the scriptures, there is *no* authorization for instrumental music. And, to do anything against the authority of the scriptures would be sinful on our part.

#### ◆ What About the Old Testament?

Members of the church of Christ are often accused of not “liking” the Old Testament or that they “only believe in the New Testament.” Both accusations are false. Certainly, the Old Testament *is* important or else God would not have provided it for us.

Under the old law, as we read in the Old Testament, instrumental music was discussed approximately 75 times. This, however, should not be viewed as the authorization wherein one can use instrumental music in worship to God today.

Paul engages the Christians in Galatia in a discussion on the subject of the old law. Paul says that the law, “was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made” (Galatians 3:19). Later, the Apostle writes, “But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” Paul continues, “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor” (Galatians 3:22, 24-25). If we are no longer under the tutor, we can no longer look to the old law for justification concerning the things we do, including how we worship God in song.

Paul also wrote to the church at Colosse on this matter. The Apostle tells us that Jesus “has made [us] alive together with Him, ... having wiped out the handwriting of the requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:13-14). The power of Christ’s crucifixion was immense – so much so that along with his hands and feet, the requirements of the old law were nailed to the cross to die. If the old law was put to death, we can not use it for authorizing our New Testament worship.

If one wishes to use the Old Testament scriptures for authority, he must keep the whole law. Paul told the Galatians that if one keeps part of the old law, “he is a debtor to keep the whole law” (Galatians 5:3). Those who keep the Old Testament “alive” so as to justify instrumental music *must* also be willing to do everything else commanded in the Old Testament scriptures.

#### ◆ What About Revelation?

Many will turn to the book of Revelation in order to authorize the use of instrumental music. In Revelation 5:8, a “harp” is mentioned. The sound of harps was heard in Revelation 14:2. Are these verses suitable for authorizing the New Testament church to engage in a type of worship which, up until this last book of the New Testament, was never discussed? The answer must be no.

At the outset of the book of Revelation, John states that he would speak in signs, using figurative language to illustrate the power of Christ over evil (Revelation 1:1). Furthermore, John uses these two verses to illustrate the scene of God’s throne and of his

habitation in heaven. These two verses are not used in the context of a church worshipping God when John was writing. To argue that the mention of harps in a set of verses showing paradise to come justifies us to engage in worship to God with instruments is irresponsible and inappropriate.

◆ Some Final Thoughts ...

Throughout the New Testament, commands are given and examples are cited wherein Christians engaged in song so as to worship God. Christians are commanded to “speak” to one another by “singing.” Since our worship to God must be in spirit and in truth, it is essential that we understand His commands (John 4:24). Given the fact that nowhere in the New Testament scriptures is there any authorization for instrumental music, to use an instrument in praise to God would be going beyond the authority of the scriptures. The church of Christ desires to worship in truth and therefore worships God in song just as the church did 2000 years earlier, *singing* praises to God.