

Worship - Mechanical Instruments of Music

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Introduction

Acts 10:34-35, Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is not respecter of persons. But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

Hebrews 12:28-29, Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire.

Habakkuk 2:20, But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.

Unfortunately, many within the borders of truth have breached those lines of demarcation and have incorporated within their lives the use of mechanical instruments of music in their praise and worship of God. People have allowed their imaginations to lead them into error and destruction of the soul. The modern liberal or progressive in spirit does not anymore attempt to justify this error, they just plainly teach that it is so.

When we consider this error, it comes in various forms and justifications:

- The clapping of hands, as an addition to singing.
- The cultural argument, leaving people with the impression that in certain cultures the instrument is exclusively used within their diversity.
- The Jews used such to worship and praise God, thus we must likewise do the same today.
- Weak translations of the Bible lend itself to use mechanical instruments of music.
- Singing groups imitating the sounds of different mechanical instruments.
- Humming, whistling and other forms of sounds made by the mouth, short of forming words of praise.
- Yes, of course the out right use of the instruments themselves, from guitars to pianos to organs and the like such.

Each of these various forms, are arguments of departure from the simple truth to sing.

First of all, do we have God's authority to use mechanical instruments of music as an avenue of worship? The short answer is no. The scripture references, teach all Christians to sing and to sing only.

1. Romans 15:9, *And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written. For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and **sing** unto thy name.*
 - Singing is an avenue of worship through which we give honor and praise unto the Lord by means of the voice.
2. I Corinthians 14:15, *What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will **sing** with the spirit, and I will **sing** with the understanding also.*
3. Ephesians 5:19, *Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and making melody in your heart to the Lord;*
 - The English word *singing* is the Greek word *psallo*. In Greek Lexicons or Dictionaries this word has several usages and meanings, but only **one** New Testament meaning and usage.
 - The one and only New Testament meaning and usage of *psallo* is to sing praises or a sacred song or psalm or hymn.
 - It would be ethically wrong and dishonest for a Christian to opt for one of the other definitions of *psallo*, in place of the New Testament meaning and usage. This word in its worldly use can mean *to touch or to strike the strings or chords of an instrument*, i.e. a mechanical instrument of music.
 - The instrument that the Christian uses, is the heart. We sing *speaking to one another and to the Lord*.
4. Colossians 3:16, *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.*
5. Hebrews 2:12, *Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I **sing** praise unto thee.*
6. James 5:13, *Is any among you afflicted let him pray. Is any merry let him **sing** psalms.*

When it comes to lifting up our voices in praise to God in song, we have only one avenue provided for us from God to do so, and that is with our voice alone.

***Secondly, if we do not have God's authority for such a practice,
then how do people justify such false doctrine?***

One such argument is the heaven argument.

- Revelation 5:8, *The four beasts and the four twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having everyone of them harps and golden vials full of incense which are the prayers of the saints.*
 - The harps in this text *are the prayers of the saints*. The harps and golden vials are figurative representations of prayers.
 - There are not harps in heaven or amongst God's people.
- Revelation 14:2, *And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps.*
 - John did not literally hear waters, thunder nor harps. He *heard a voice from heaven* and using figurative language, that voice sounded like the rhythm of water, and the volume of thunder and the beautiful melody of harps. What a wonderful way to describe this voice from heaven.
 - To use this verse and justify the use of mechanical instruments of music within the church, would be dishonest. This verse uses figurative language and not literal language, thus the passage does not teach the use of such manmade instruments.
 - And, why would God want something manmade, when He made our voices.

The next argument, was provided to me by an elder in the San Diego area, a justification regarding the how and why we use singing in our worship and praise to God, notice within his argument or reason, he allows the use of mechanical instruments of music (i.e. he denies what he affirms): "The use of a cappella music exclusively in our worship assemblies is distinct to our heritage and practice. We use a cappella (Latin, 'in the style of the chapel/church') for historical and theological reasons, which we can articulate in a positive way."¹

- Notice, there is a failure to recognize the *why* we sing comes from God and heaven itself, not from our heritage and practice. This justification appeals to the intellect of this world.

¹ Kingwood Church of Christ, Fall Quarter, Lesson Six – What Makes Us Who We Are: Our View of A Cappella Music

- The wise man gives us this counsel, *Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.* (Proverbs 3:5).

In this section, we will examine the various arguments that are put forth by this elder, in his document, concerning the *why or reasons* "...for using only A cappella music in our assemblies."²

Let us consider the first argument, "The New Testament does not require nor does it exclude musical instruments in the church's worship. There is no specific command on this subject."³

- Oh to the gainsayer, God does *exclude* the use of mechanical instruments of music when He commands us to *sing*.
- For example of illustration: If you were to go into a Mexican food restaurant and order a hard shell taco and bean burrito with a glass of water, you have done by the specific command of authority, eliminated all other food items on the menu. But, if the attendant had in addition to your specific food order, financially charge you for every item on the menu, you would object based on the authority of giving a specific command and you would go on to say, that you did not order all of these other food items. In turn, your attendant would say, *You did not tell me not to order these other food items* (This is the reasoning of the elder and others like him). Dear friends, each of us understands the use of authority in our simple day to day situations. But, there are some who fail understand or respect the simple authority of God's word.
- Revelation 22:18-19, *For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.*

Here is another argument presented by this elder in his material: "Singing is mention specifically on several occasions in the New Testament.... Despite numerous references in the Old Testament to instruments in worship, the Spirit of inspiration chose to totally exclude any such in the New Testament. The best translators all refer to singing when religious music is mentioned."⁴

- In a very subtle way, the argument equates the authority of the New Testament to that of the Old Testament. There is no *rightly dividing of the word of truth* (II Timothy 2:15) by this material and its author.
- As a side point, there is no example in the Old Testament where the Jews used mechanical instruments of music in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle, which represents the New Testament church.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid

- Unfortunately, some will justify the use of manmade instruments of music because the Jews used such to worship and praise God, thus we must likewise do the same today.
 - This is a common argument that some may make to justify the use of mechanical instruments of music. This idea is rooted in misunderstanding the authority of the Old Testament in our lives today.
 - It is true, that in the Old Testament God's people used mechanical instruments of music in worship and praise. But, today our authority is the word of Christ – the New Testament (Hebrews 9:14-17).
 - In the Christian age, we must follow the New Testament for our guide in the worship and praise of God.
 - Hence, within the New Testament we find authority to sing. The New Testament of Jesus Christ is absent of any command or example or inference (implication) to the use of mechanical instruments of music

The third argument: "A cappella music promotes the greatest participation by all persons who gather for worship. This is consistent with Paul's writing to the church in Corinth to avoid sects and divisions, especially in the assembly (I Corinthians 11:17-22)."⁵

- It may be true, that singing allows for the greatest number of souls to participate. But, is that the reason given from Deity for its use? Also, the New Testament does not teach use of singing only as a *doctrine of avoidance* of sects and divisions.
- Why not just accept the fact that God gave a command, and we as God's people must obey His simple command.
- Ecclesiastes 12:13, *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.*

The fourth argument: "Early church history indicates that the church used a cappella music in its worship of God."⁶

- Dear friends, it makes no difference what man has done nor what man's opinion is about a matter. The difference is, what does God say.
- I Peter 4:11, *If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;....*

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

The fifth argument: “Most Biblical scholars agree that the church’s music in the first several centuries was exclusively vocal.”⁷

- The Theologian’s commentary of the first century may agree with what is recorded in the Bible. But, it matters not, what their educated opinion may be, when God has the final say.
- Our faith does not originate with the minds of Biblical scholars, but from the word of God. Paul told the church at Rome, *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.* (Romans 10:17).

A sixth argument presented: “One source writes, ‘For almost a thousand years⁸ Gregorian chant, without any instrumental or harmonic addition, was the only music used in connexion with liturgy.’”⁹

- I am sure that Peter, Luke or Paul are unaware of the Gregorian chant. But, this argument plays right into the world’s language, especially the denominations, in attempt to attach the Lord’s church to our religious neighbors.
- II John 9, *Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.*

The seventh argument: “Thus, since we have long had a commitment to imitate the life of the early church where possible, we have chosen to worship God through singing without musical instruments.”¹⁰

- The author of this material and the elder who gave me this material, both promote the idea that our beliefs are no more than a choice we make. That we have been given the choice, out of a selection of religious items and we ended up with singing only. This is nothing more than simple false doctrine.
- In Romans 14:23 we read, *...for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.*
- Hebrews 11:6, *But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*

The eighth argument presented: “Further, we believe that a cappella music, as practiced here in all of our assemblies is distinct in its quality and in its power.”¹¹

- Brethren and friends, we don’t just do something because it is different. Our five acts or avenues of worship are God commanded. What makes them different is the source – God.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

- The prophet of old said in Isaiah 55:8-9, *For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thought than your thoughts.*

The author of this paper, presents these final thoughts or comments:

- "A cappella music is a part of our heritage and we can offer good historical, theological, and pragmatic justification for continuing this practice."¹²
 - Sadly, our heritage, history, theology nor pragmatic justification matters, when it comes to the word of God.
 - Consider the teaching found in Proverbs 14:12, *There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.*
- "We have a right to hold to this understanding, choice, and practice, but we do not have the right to judge others on this matter (Matthew 7:1-5; Romans 2:1-29; Romans 14:1-23; I Corinthians 4:1-5; and James 4:10-17)."¹³
 - The writer and the elder both at this point have allocated an aspect of worship, to a matter of an opinion by man. In doing so, they have misused and misapplied each verse presented above.
 - II Peter 3:16, *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*
- "We hold to the practice of a cappella music in all of our assemblies and gatherings. We do not seek, nor do we have the right, to determine what individuals might do in their homes, what music folks might chose for their listening pleasure or non-worship activities."¹⁴
 - There is forgetfulness on who our Judge is – God.
 - John 12:48, *He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.*
 - In addition, God's truth transcends all boundaries. Our Lord's teachings apply wherever we may worship or praise the Lord.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

What we have read, is a current argument given by those who intend on using mechanical instruments of music.

Finally, the prophets of God speak to such waywardness in doctrine.

The prophet Amos:

- *Thus saith the Lord: For three transgressions of Judah, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because they have despised the law of the Lord, and have not kept his commandments, and their lies caused them to err, after the which their father's have walked (2:4).*
- Those who follow after the use of the mechanical instrumental music (whether in teaching or in practice) *have despised the law of the Lord.* In this practice and doctrine, they *have not kept his commandments.* Their liberal and progressive doctrine have *caused them to err.* Unfortunately, their practice of adding to the Lord's commands, are no different than those by people in times past who have erred.
- *Come to Beth-el, and transgress: at Gilgal multiply transgression; and bring your sacrifices every morning, and your tithes after three years: And offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving with leaven, and proclaim and publish the free offerings: for this liketh you, O ye children of Israel, saith the Lord God (4:4-5).*
- It like those in error to continue to deceive themselves in worshipping God, with the mechanical instrument of music.
- *Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel (4:12).*
- Those in error and who promote the use or the teaching that it is not wrong to use the mechanical instrument of music need to *prepare to meet thy God.*
- *They hate him that rebuketh in the gate, and they adhor him that speaketh uprightly (5:10).*
- Those who are caught up in the teaching or practice of such evil doctrine, do not like the messenger who quotes the scriptures and states that God's people must only sing unto the Lord in worship or praise. They hate the one *that speaketh uprightly.*

The prophet Hosea:

- *Then said God, Call his name Lo-ammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God (1:9).*

- Those who depart in word or deed are not God's people.
- *My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shall be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (4:6).*
- Some will always find those who will give answer to their opinion and in doing so, they are destroyed for **not knowing** the word of God. Sadly, some just do not care.

The prophet Jeremiah:

- *Behold, ye trust in lying words, that cannot profit (7:8).*
- Some will be convinced that there is nothing wrong with the use of mechanical instruments music in the worship and praise of God. This teaching is nothing more than *lying words*.
- *The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? (17:9).*
- Truly, there are some people whose heart is filled with deceitful doctrine and desperately wicked. But, most certainly those who promote, teach, practice and enable those in use of mechanical instruments of music are filled with deceit and wickedness.

The apostle Paul:

- *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (II Timothy 4:3-4).*
- It is unsound doctrine to use mechanical instruments of music. It is a lustful doctrine, that tickles the itching ear and brings pleasure to the flesh. It is a doctrine based on fables and not Biblical study.

Waywardness in doctrine is of no avail and the use of mechanical instruments of music in the worship and praise of God will lead all those who use it, in the direction of Baal.

Conclusion

As God's people, we need live and walk by faith (Romans 1:17 and II Corinthians 5:7). God's word is our guide in this world (Psalm 119:105), not our conscience or our feelings or personal beliefs. Our diet is every word of God (Matthew 4:4). May it be our will, to do the will of God (John 7:17).

- In this lesson we have learned several truths, regarding the use of mechanical instruments of music. We have learned that God has commanded the church, His people to sing. Furthermore, we have seen the feeble attempt by man's wisdom to try and justify the use of mechanical instruments of music, in the worship and praise of God. Finally, we read those scriptures where the prophets of God have given warning unto all, who would walk in the wayward path of man.