

Worship 6 - The Avenue of Song

(Number six in a series of ten)

What an honor and privilege to be invited by our Lord to worship! WORSHIP! Even the word brings thoughts and attitudes of reverence and awe to mind as we engage in offering spiritual sacrifices to God through Christ. This present study will help us to understand the question of worship in song and the place the use of mechanical instruments occupies in that avenue of worship.

Worship in song is not merely a matter of "music." A commonly held error is that music is desired by God in His worship. To so contend is to teach too much. TWO BASIC PRINCIPLES which must be employed in every aspect of spiritual living are these: we dare not go beyond what God has authorized in His Word (1 Corinthians 4:6); and we are to practice only that which our Lord has authorized by His Word (Colossians 3:17). If we understand these two things, it will be an easy matter to conclude what God desires/commands for worship, especially with regard to our singing.

We next must look to AUTHORITY for singing in worship. Perhaps the two most explicit statements regarding our worship in song are Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. As you read these you will see that God clearly said that for those who would worship Him in Spirit and Truth are to sing. Your Bible may read in the Ephesian passage "sing and make music" (New International Version). This is not what the Greek grammar here says nor teaches. This is an attempt by the "translators" to insert their doctrine into God's teaching. You ought to get a reliable translation of God's word (King James Version or American Standard Version, 1901). Paul did say "make melody" in this passage. Some have attempted to use the Greek language (and the ignorance of their audience) to justify the addition of mechanical instruments in these verses. We shall investigate some of their "arguments" presently.

First, let us consider some GRAMMAR. The pronouns employed in these verses indicate the reciprocal and reflexive nature of the actions of singing. This means: those present will all be singing and doing so together, to one another. No solos nor quartets are found in these passages! Search as men may, they will never find instructions in the New Testament for us to "play" in worship. The Greek language is a very precise language, and if "play" were indicated, it would have plainly stated so. What then may accompany the singing? Both of these passages tell us: the heart.

Some have attempted to force the use of a mechanical instrument by demanding the participle *psallontes* be translated "play" because the word can technically include "plucking the strings of a harp." There are some problems with this kind of "reasoning." If we may technically use this argument, we may use every technical argument.

Consider: this word also can mean to snap the carpenter's chalk line; to twang the bowstring; to pluck hair from the head or beard. Shall we then worship God by shooting bows and arrows in the church building? Or shall we sing while snapping chalk lines to the glory of God? Why not stand in single-file and pull each other's hair while we crank out "Blessed Be The Tie That Binds"? Friends, it is the context which must decide what word will best fit in translation of the Greek terms employed. Do any of the previous suggestions sound reasonable? Shall we pluck the strings of an instrument with our hearts? Shall we snap strings, pull hair or shoot arrow with our

hearts? Or, shall we make melody with (in) our hearts?

Another major difficulty that arises in this kind of thinking is this: since the grammar demands the unison of all those present, every worshipper would be obligated to play an instrument...and only a stringed one at that! What proves too much, proves to be too little to justify adding to God's word and worship!

What are some attempts to justify adding to God's Word? One common stab at justifying an unauthorized actions is the weak claim that "INSTRUMENTS ARE NOT SPECIFICALLY FORBIDDEN." This would allow any and every whim of the worshippers to enter into what God has prescribed! Think about it: neither candles, incense, animal sacrifices, instruments, dancing, or a whole host of immoral practices has not been specifically forbidden! Remember our first two principles? Let us be satisfied in doing what God has said to do.

Some claim that mechanical INSTRUMENTS ARE COMMANDED. Yet, from the giving of the Old Law to Moses (Exodus through Deuteronomy) there is not one single reference which authorizes its use under the Old Testament. Nor do we find it used nor referred to during the time of the Judges. Whence cometh it? It is first found as an addition made by King David (1 Chronicles 16:15). In every reference thereafter where mechanical instruments are mentioned, it is connected with what a King commanded, David always receiving the credit. What may have been allowed by God to take place under the Old Law does not authorize any practice for us today.

Some would allege that INSTRUMENTS ARE AIDS. An aid is an expedient. An expedient helps one to obey a command. Where there is no command, there are no expedients, only opinions. Opinions do not authorize. Mechanical instruments do not help us to sing. They may "aid" us in staying in pitch or on key while we sing, but they do not help us to sing. God did not command us to "stay on key" but to sing.

SILENCE is sometimes offered as justification for adding to God's Word. Though we do not have space just here to fully deal with this, please consider that silence does two things: it prohibits when dealing with the "what" of a command, and it permits when dealing with the "how" of a command. Mechanical instruments fail in the first place because they represent another "what" i.e., "playing" which God did not authorize. God was not silent when telling us "what" to do. He said "sing" not "play." They fail in the second place because they are not "singing" but making musical tones. They make their sounds, we make ours while singing. Thus, two different actions, one of which God did not authorize.

Some say we may add mechanical instruments since Romans 14 allows OPTIONS AND/OR OPINIONS. Those in favor of adding to God's Word allege that the "weaker brother" of this text is one who opposes the instrument. A close perusal of that chapter reveals at least these three points:

The subject is not worship.

The subject deals with things correct if done or not, i.e., things not of the kingdom.

The subject deals with private practice regulated by one's own conscience.

But, Worship is an activity which has guidelines and specifics from God.

Worship IS a matter of the kingdom.

Worship is regulated by God, not man.

Mechanical instruments miss the mark in the following areas:

They are not commanded.

They are not a part of what is done by faith (2 Corinthians 5:7; Romans 10:17).

They are not used "in the name of" or by the authority of Christ (Colossians 3:17).

They do not fit into the body of truth, the New Testament (2 John 9).

They are not a part of what Jesus commanded the apostles, nor what He told them to teach all nations (Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:42).

They were never used by the first century church.

Readers, please beware of going beyond what God has authorized by His Word. Let us as His worshippers be satisfied with "offering unto God continually a sacrifice of praise, that is THE FRUIT OF LIPS" (Hebrews 13:15). In this, we will be mutually edified, instructed, admonished, and taught as we speak to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. God will be glorified in this our worship through the avenue of song. God bless you in the study of His Word.

WORSHIP

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