

## Musical Instruments In The Psalms

Lots of people want to know why churches of Christ do not use instrumental music in their worship. Before we consider the psalms, I would like to say that we do not object to instrumental music to be peculiar. We do not object to instrumental music because we cannot afford the instruments. Neither do we object to instrumental music because we necessarily dislike it. We have convictions concerning our worship which cannot be shaken by derision or making fun. With us, matters of religion are not settled by appeals to prejudice, nor by taking a vote. Popularity has nothing to do with the matter. The question is settled not by what we like or dislike, but rather by what God requires in worship.

Colossians 3:17 says, *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."* All that we do in worship is based upon the authority of the Lord Jesus. We must always speak as the oracles of God (1 Peter 4:11). We must always respect His authority in all matters (Matthew 28:18; Ephesians 1:22-23).

A popular argument for the use of instrumental music goes like this: "God approved its use in the worship of the Jews under the Old Law, and therefore there is divine approval for its use today." As far as the Old Law is concerned, the argument is correct. Psalm 150:3-5 says, *"Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals."* It is obvious that God approved of the use of instrumental music in the Old Testament. Musical instruments are mentioned in the Old Testament about seventy-five times, many times in connection with singing and worship. If you notice carefully, the psalm also commands God to be praised with dance. So in the Old Testament, God approved of singing, playing musical instruments and dancing as acceptable forms of worship.

But it is not a question of what God did approve under the Old Testament, but what He now approves under the New Testament. The New Testament replaced the Law of Moses, including the Psalms (Hebrews 8:8-13; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:14-16). Jesus came to fulfill the Law and when He did, it was taken away (Matthew 5:17-18). This included the psalms along with all other commandments that relate to instrumental music.

So the fact that instrumental music is mentioned in the Old Testament does not automatically authorize us to use such in our worship under the New Testament which is silent about the use of instrumental music in the worship

services. The use of incense is mentioned about fifty times in the Old Testament, but it does not authorize us to use it in our worship services today. In fact, I do not know of anyone who even tries to press that point.

As far as I am concerned, that puts instrumental music, burning incense, and offering sacrifices in the same class as far as Christian worship is concerned. If we can go back to the Old Testament to use instrumental music, may we not also go back to the Old Testament for authority to burn incense and offer sacrifices in the worship service?

Surely anyone can see the fallacy of going back to the Old Testament to just to "pick up" actions we like. One group goes back to the Old Testament for their authority to burn incense in the worship, not finding authority under the New Testament. Another goes back for instrumental music in worship, but rejects the incense in worship. Another group goes back for the sabbath observance, but rejects things like the Passover, circumcision, animal sacrifices, etc., and so on.

The New Testament mentions some form of singing by command or example nine times (Matthew 26:30; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13; Hebrews 2:12; 13:15). God was perfectly capable of being precise in the Old Testament when He mentioned instrumental music, dancing and singing as acceptable forms of praise. Is He not just as capable of being precise in the New Testament when it comes to acceptable forms of praise? Surely so!

In this psalm, David used instrumental music, but he also burned incense, offered animal sacrifices, circumcised his sons, observed the sabbath, ate the Passover, and did a lot of other actions back there which would be wrong now under the New Testament. Why take David as an example for using instrumental music in worship while rejecting him as an example of authority for burning incense, keeping the Passover, etc.? Is that being truly consistent? Is that the way to intelligently study the Bible? Is that "*rightly diving the word of truth*" (2 Timothy 2:15)?

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