

WORSHIPPING GOD THROUGH SONG

Sermon by Mark Aites (Special thanks to Rod Rutherford)

INTRODUCTION:

1. When studying any avenue of worship, it is important that we consider the principles which govern worship.
 - 1) We look for a pattern:
 1. *Pattern* - "a model or form to be imitated."
 2. Those who make bricks use a mold; the dressmaker a dress pattern; and the builder a blueprint.
 3. God gave Noah the pattern for the ark (**Gen. 6:14-16**); Moses the pattern for the tabernacle (**Exod. 25:9ff**); and Solomon the temple (**1 Chron. 28:11ff**).
 4. The New Testament pattern speaks of 5 avenues of worship that the early church observed: singing, praying, giving, the Lord's Supper, and preaching.
 - 2) We look for authorization: are we worshipping God according to His will, or ours?
 1. We have the Old Testament example of Cain and Abel, which illustrate that the worship that is pleasing to God is one that is offered by faith (**Gen. 4:2-5; Heb. 11:4**) -- and we know that *faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God* (**Rom. 10:17**). (The authorization comes from God's Word.)
 2. We have the Old Testament story of Nadab and Abihu, who were sons of Aaron, and priests of God, who chose to offer strange fire before the Lord, and they perished by fire from heaven (**Lev. 10**).
 3. When considering authority, we then are aware that substitutions are not acceptable.
 - 3) We must respect God's boundaries.
 1. This can be understood in light of Israel's land markers and God's strict law stating that they were not to move their neighbor's land marker.
 2. In religious or spiritual matters, God also has markers which must not be tampered with or moved.
 3. We have already learned that Nadab and Abihu died for moving God's clear marker on what He wanted in sacrifice to Him.
 4. The Bible gives explicit warnings about tampering with God's word.

Deut. 4:2 *Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.*

Prov. 30:6 *Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.*

2 John 9-11 *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.*

10 *If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:*

11 *For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.*

Rev 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:*

19 *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.*

- 4) The law of exclusion: God tells us what He wants, therefore it excludes every-thing else.
 1. For example, if I go to have my car serviced and say that I want my tires rotated, this is all that I have given authorization for them to do. To go beyond that in putting on new tires, or any other mechanical or body work, is to violate my express authorization.
 2. When you go to the fast food restaurant, if you order a hamburger and coke, do you then need to tell them everything on the menu that you don't want?
 3. God gave Noah the command to make the ark out of gopher wood; to have substituted any other type of wood would ignore that which God expressly authorized.
2. Keeping those principles in mind, people may wonder why we don't use instrumental music in our worship services?
 - 1) It is not that we don't like instruments.
 - 2) It is not that we don't have anyone who can play them.
 - 3) It is not that we cannot afford one.
 - 4) And it is not that we just want to be different.

4. There are valid, scriptural reasons why we don't use them. If you apply the principles concerning worship:
 - 1) Concerning the pattern: they are absent from the New Testament pattern and early Christian worship.
 - 2) No where in the New Testament do we find authorization to use them.
 - 3) God has said that He wants singing (**Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16**); shall we tamper with His marker?
 - 4) He has said He wants singing, and therefore it excludes everything else. (If God had said to make music, then we could use instruments; but His apostle informs us that God specified singing.)
5. When we come together to worship, our interest must be in pleasing God and not in pleasing ourselves.

Heb. 12:28 *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.*
6. If, according to the Hebrew writer, we can serve Him acceptably, then it follows that there is a possibility that our worship or even our Christian service can be unacceptable.
7. There are four points that we want to consider in this outline.

DISCUSSION:

I. THE HISTORY.

- A. In Jewish worship, in the temple, instruments were used.
 1. David had an orchestra of 4,000 (**1 Chron. 23:5**).
 2. There was a choir of 288 that accompanied the orchestra (**1 Chron. 25:7**).
 3. Upon careful examination, we learn that it was David would brought instruments into worship.

1 Chron. 23:5 *Moreover four thousand were porters; and four thousand praised the LORD with the instruments which I made, said David, to praise therewith.*

2 Chron. 29:27 *And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of*

Israel.

4. Question: Was David's action of bringing instruments into worship sanctioned by God?

- 1) There is a verse which seems to suggest this:

2 Chron. 29:25 *And he set the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the LORD by his prophets.*

- 2) In the Hebrew, the construction suggests that God commanded the installation of the Levites, and David commanded the cymbals, psaltries, and instruments.

5. There is a verse which suggests God's displeasure in David's actions. Amos records God's displeasure at His people, and in the indictment says:

Amos 6:5 *That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David.*

6. Let's just say to make a point here, that even if instruments were sanctioned by God in the Old Testament, that we are not part of that covenant.

- 1) We are reminded that the Old Covenant was between God and the children of Israel (**Deut. 5:2**).

- 2) Jeremiah prophesied that there would be a new covenant which would not be like the one of old (**Jer. 31:31-34**).

- 3) The Hebrew writer affirms that Jesus is the mediator of the New Testament (**Heb. 9:15**).

- 4) He took the old law out of the way through His death on the cross (**Col. 2:14**).

7. We live under the New Testament or Covenant of Jesus Christ today.

- 1) The Old Testament does have value:

Rom. 15:4 *For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.*

- 2) We can learn from the principles and lessons of history, but we are not

subject to the doctrines of old.

B. Information from extra biblical history:

1. Synagogue worship was the chief center of worship for the Jews after the Babylonian captivity.
 - 1) This was the result of captivity, and not being in their homeland, or having the temple for worship.
 - 2) Instruments were not used in such worship.
2. In fact, no instruments were used even in early Christian worship until several hundred years after the establishment of the church.
3. The early church fathers opposed it. The only exception was Clement of Alexandria, who felt that it could be used in the social activities of the church.
4. The first usage of the instrument in a worship service was during the time of Pope Vitalian in 660-670 A.D. Although Vitalian is credited with introducing it, it was not generally used until a much later date.
5. In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas wrote: "Our church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize."
6. Even in the 16th century, Erasmus lamented its use.
7. During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther referred to it as, "An ensign of Baal and a sign of the devil."
8. In 1864, Churches of Christ were in unanimous rejection of the instrument; however, that soon changed, and eventually the church split in 1906 over two primary issues: (1) The use of instruments in the worship service; and (2) the missionary society.
 - 1) This split led to the emergence of the Disciples of Christ; and out of that grew the Christian Church.
 - 2) The Disciples of Christ are a much more liberal group in nature.
9. The point we can draw from this, is that the use of instruments in worship historically have not been sanctioned by God, and have long been opposed.

II. THE WORDS.

A. In the Greek, there are four primary words for consideration:

1. One is a general term for a song, and it is clear that the idea of an instrument does not adhere in the word.
2. There is another which means to sing praises, but again, the instrument does not adhere in the word.
3. Third, is the word *psallo*, which at one time meant “to twitch, to twang, to play a stringed instrument.”

- 1) In ancient classical Greek it was used to refer to the playing of a harp.
- 2) However in the New Testament context, the plucking was not of an instrument of man’s devising, but of the heart.

Eph. 5:19 *Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.*

- 3) Words can and do change in their meanings. For example: (1) Lyrics once meant a song sung to a lyre; and, (2) an idiot once meant a public spirit citizen.
- 4) We must understand the use of the word in its context, and how it was used in the first century.
- 5) Even if *psallo*, and some believe it does, still convey the idea of the plucking of an instrument, we can easily apply that to the heart, which is the instrument by which we make melody.
4. The fourth word is actually a form of *psallo*, which is translated “psalm” or “psalms.”

- 1) In times prior to the first century, some songs were sung without accompaniment.
- 2) Because of this, some say that **Eph. 5:19** and **Col. 3:16** use this word and therefore instruments are permitted. However, instruments do not adhere in the word *psalm*.
- 3) Jewish historians tells us that psalms were sung unaccompanied in the synagogues.
- 4) Further, there is no evidence of anyone in the church using the instrument to sing psalms.

5. In truth, there is nothing in the original language to justify the use of an instrument.

III. THE ARGUMENTS.

A. "It was used in the Old Testament."

1. So were animal sacrifices and the burning of incense.
2. We remind ourselves that we are not under the Old Covenant as that contract or agreement was solely between God and the Jews.

B. "The Bible doesn't say you can't use instrumental music."

1. The Bible doesn't say "don't sprinkle," yet we know that sprinkling is not proper baptism (baptism is a burial, **cf. Col. 2:12**).
2. The Bible doesn't say hamburgers and coke can't be used at the Lord's table, yet we know that is wrong because the Bible tells us what God has authorized (unleavened bread, and the fruit of the vine).
3. Again, when I go to a restaurant, I don't have to tell the waitress or waiter everything I don't want. The point is that God specifies *singing!*

C. "There is instrumental music in heaven."

1. Remember, this isn't heaven!
2. The passages which are often looked to are in the book of Revelation; a high figurative book.

Rev. 5:8 *And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.*

- 1) We recognize this to be symbolic.
- 2) If the bowls are not literal, then neither are the harps!
3. Again we note **Rev. 14:2-3**:

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:

14:3 *And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the*

hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

- 1) John heard a voice as of many waters, a voice a great thunder, and a voice of harpers harping on their harps.
- 2) It is not to be understood as being literal harps.

D. "Instrumental music is only an aid like a songbook."

1. It is not an aid, for scripture has shown it to have been involved in an act of worship (**cf. Psa. 150**).
2. The Lord has commanded us to sing.
 - 1) What are we doing when we use songbooks? We are singing, and nothing is being added to that singing.
 - 2) But the instrument constitutes an addition to what we do and to what is heard.
3. The songbook is a tool.
 - 1) God told Noah to build an ark of gopher wood. In so doing, tools were required to build the ark.
 - 2) But to have added pine, or oak, or another kind of wood, would have constituted disobedience.
4. And what of the pitch pipe: it does not accompany the singing, but allows the song leader to lead songs on key.
 - 1) It is a tool, but not an addition.
 - 2) It is not blown, nor continuing to be blown during the singing of praises to God.

E. "Instrumental music is mentioned in **Luke 15:25**."

1. In the story of the prodigal son, we read: *Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.*
2. Be sure to note the context, as this was not worship but a party.
3. If this text justifies the use of the instrument, then it would have to also justify dancing, which goes against what God says elsewhere concerning lasciviousness (**Gal. 5:19-21**).

CONCLUSION:

1. There is no Scripture which authorizes us to use an instrument of music in a worship service to God.
2. The lesson of history clearly demonstrates that it was not well received when it was introduced, and did not become a part of modern worship services for many denominations until the 19th century.
3. If we choose to use the instrument, then we choose to go beyond what God has written, and to do so is to be *without God* (**2 John 9-11**).