

## Is it Sinful or Inappropriate to Include Instruments in Worship?

The Old Testament abounds with explicit instructions for worship. God was quite adamant about the manner in which He desired to be worshiped. In addition to the directions for sacrifices, offerings, attire, and attitudes of the worshippers, the Lord commanded praise from a plethora of musical instruments: trumpet, lute, harp, tambourine, strings, pipe, and cymbals to name a few specified in Psalm 150.

The New Testament contains much less specific instructions for outward appearance and regulations for worship. Instead, the focus is much more oriented toward the spiritual condition of the worshipper. Not much is normalized in regards to method and means for a proper response to God's revelation. This lack of explicit instruction has led some to conclude that the use of instruments is therefore inappropriate or even sinful today. In making this argument, many point to two passages in particular:

- *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

**Colossians 3:16**

- *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart...*

**Ephesians 5:18-19**

These passages say nothing about instruments in worship and thus some conclude that instruments are forbidden in the church. This is called the "regulative principle" or the idea that only what is explicitly commanded in the Scriptures is acceptable. In addition, it is noted that instruments can engage emotions and lead people away from the truths which should be expressed within the lyrics of song or that those on stage with instruments could potentially exalt their own talents rather than their Savior.

While these dangers are certainly possible, an attractive or talented singer with no accompaniment could distract just as easily. There is a Latin phrase that states, *abusus usum non tollit*. It means "abuse does not take away proper use," and I think this is a good starting approach to issues of potential dangers.

In attempting to engage this position I have two initial thoughts. First, arguments from silence are notoriously weak. The New

Testament also does not mention cars or computers, but most evangelicals are not crusading for their prohibition. A truly consistent application of the "regulative principle" would demand that one not do anything which is not explicitly commended in the Scriptures. Is this really what Paul intended?

Second, if you really want to be strict in interpreting the passage in this way, then you would need to also restrict vocals as the texts do not explicitly mention the mouth, but rather, the heart. It says to make melody "with all your heart." Does God intend for stirred souls to silently sing?

In the end, a better method of interpretation is that anything which the Scriptures do not explicitly or implicitly condemn is acceptable. Neither these nor any other passages in the New Testament are intended to prohibit the use of instruments. If you have an instrument, play it to the Lord and from your heart. That is the point of the text. The author exalts the role of the heart to show that authentic worship should be affectionate, not that it must be *a cappella*.

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