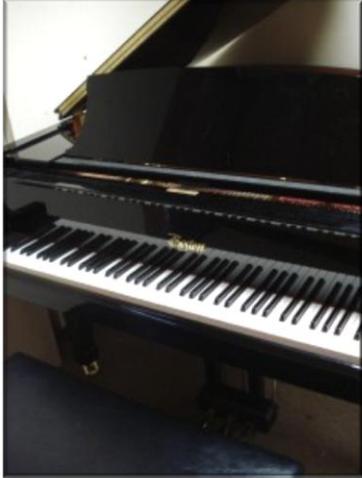


Eastern Shore Church of Christ

Church of Christ Music

What's the Big Deal About A Piano Anyway?

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"Why don't the churches of Christ use musical instruments?"

"The Church of Christ doesn't have music. Why not?"

These are excellent and fair questions which deserve an answer. One of the things many people know about the churches of Christ is our insistence on Acapella music, that is, simple vocal music without a mechanical instrument.ⁱ

Now I know that some of you reading this will be surprised to learn that there is a church which does not use instruments in worship. You may be tempted to roll your eyes and think "that's crazy." Can I just ask for your open minded reading for a few

minutes?

I am only talking about music in the worship to God. This isn't about any other kind of music. Just music in the Christian worship. Most everyone I know enjoys music of some kind, from country to opera. It's not about music generally but just about worship music.

Church of Christ Music: The Principle of Bible Authority

The churches of Christ strive to follow a Biblical model for worship. In other words, we look to the Scriptures to try and understand how God wants us to worship him. Jesus said that God wants people to worship him in "*in truth*" (John 4:23).ⁱⁱ Our desire is to do just that. Since God's word is truth (John 17:17) it makes sense to look to his word for any direction or guidance on how God desires to be worshiped.

That's an easy concept to state but quite difficult to put into practice sometimes. We tend to want to do things our way and chaff against authority. But if we are going to worship God we should worship him in a way that he desires, not what we desire.

In the 18th century a religious movement began to coalesce around the churches of Christ. Men and women began to leave denominations and sought to be added, by God only, to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). This movement, known as the American Restoration Movement, developed an informal slogan that we should "speak where the Bible speaks and be silent where the Bible is silent." This is still an excellent foundation.

So, as it relates to music in worship, we ask, "what does the Bible say?"

The Old Testament and Church Music

Mechanical music is found throughout the Old Testament. It's on page, after page, after page. Trumpets. Cymbals. Harps. Lyres. The worship of God in the Tabernacle and Temple was full of instruments. They were there because God ordered their use.

"And David and all the house of Israel were making merry before the Lord with songs and lyres and harps and tambourines and castanets and cymbals."(2 Samuel 6:5)

*"Sing unto him a new song;
Play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts." (Psalm 33:3)
"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" (Psalm 150:3-5)*

There is no question that instruments were used, to worship God, in the Old Testament. They were used with the approval of God. Temple worship in Jesus' time used instruments. Edershem speaks of the Temple services,

"It was the duty of the priests, who stood on the right and the left of the marble table on which the fat of the sacrifices was laid, at the proper time, to blow the blasts on their silver trumpets...On a signal given by the president, the priests moved forward to each side of him who struck the cymbals. Immediately the choir of the Levites, accompanied by instrumental music, began the Psalm of the day."ⁱⁱⁱ

Any Jewish person, from youth to old age, was accustomed to seeing and hearing the playing of instrumental music in service to God. Despite all these mentions we no longer live under the law of Moses or Old Testament.

The New Testament and Church Music

Despite the many Old Testament references to worship music, there are precious few mentions in the New Testament and none of them mention instruments. There are some references in Revelation but these are clearly not references to the church but to Heaven and these are obviously not material, physical instruments.

*"and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,
"Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles,
and sing to your name." (Romans 15:9)*

"What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. " (1 Corinthians 14:14)

"addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart..." (Ephesians 5:19)

"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)

"I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."(Hebrews 2:12)

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise." (James 5:13)

That's it. Again, there are a few verses in Revelation which speak of music but not in the church. The Revelation passages are of a new place and new time far different from the world and covenant under which we live now.

Notice that every occurrence of music is of singing, not playing. Just make that note for now, I will come back to it shortly.

Church of Christ Music & Worship

Remember, our purpose is to stimulate your thinking and Bible study.

Consider our worship. The target or object is God. God has always told people how he desires to be worshiped. Even as early as Cain and Abel (Genesis 4) God had specified what he expected. When men went their own way they were punished (Genesis 4:5; Leviticus 10:1-3).

When the worship services in Corinth became self-centered and chaotic Paul rebuked them (1 Corinthians 11:17-33; 1 Corinthians 14:26, 40). My point is that we should worship according to God's plan. God seeks those who worship in truth (John 4:23-24).

Likewise, we want to worship God *His way*.

Church of Christ Music & Silence

We conclude that there is no example of the New Testament church worshiping with an instrument. There is no command to do so nor is there any inference that such was used. But is that sufficient to say that we should not use the instrument?

At the very least, if there is no authorization to use instrumental music then it must be affirmed that we must *presume* that it is acceptable if we wish to play. Presumptuousness is not good (2 Peter 2:10; Psalm 19:13; Nehemiah 9:16, 29). It puts us in the position of assuming a thing is good even though we have no such word from God.

The lack of any endorsement of instrumental music in the church is a deafening silence. Many would say that an argument from silence is weak. But if we expect some comment or endorsement and yet do not find it that silence becomes very loud. Dozens and dozens of times we read of the instrument in worship in the Old Testament but not one single occasion in the New. Doesn't that strike you as strange? If we open our worship to anything not specifically prohibited then we have services that serve the creature and not the Creator.

Personally, I love music. Music has been a major part of my life from a very young age. I have studied trombone, baritone, piano and guitar and I am an excellent "shower singer." Music is a gift from God. It was God who created the laws of physics which govern things like frequency waveforms which give us music. I cannot imagine what life would be like without it. But worship to God is not about what I like it is about what God desires.

The Old Testament was about things. The Temple/Tabernacle, sacrifices, altars and such. But in Christ it is about the inner man. It is about the heart. And it is with the heart that we make our music (Ephesians 5:19, *et al*).

Conclusion

I am certainly not your judge. But I would ask you to consider prayerfully what the Scriptures say and what they do not say. As for me, the lack of any mention or authority in the New Testament, even though expected, is enough for me to sing only with my mouth and heart.

As I mentioned at the very beginning, this is new to some people. I suspect that many readers will disagree or have questions. I certainly welcome those questions. I would ask that you make your comments here on the blog itself so that all people can read and evaluate our thinking.

Endnotes

ⁱ I am being very broad in describing what the churches of Christ do. I am well aware that some do in fact use the instrument. I disagree with them but am nonetheless aware of their thinking. While the churches of Christ do not have any earthly headquarters and there is no official book of doctrine other than the Bible, I do think I am making case that those within the "mainline" churches of Christ would agree.

ⁱⁱ All passages are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

ⁱⁱⁱ Alfred Edershem, The Temple: It's Ministry and Services, Hendrickson, 1994, pg. 131