

**OUR PLATFORM**

**The Bible:** God's revelation to man. It's authority and finality, man's only rule of faith and practice.

**The Christ:** The only begotten son of God. man's only Saviour and lord.

**The Church:** The true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, end not man.

**The Gospel:** The power of God unto salvation, its proclamation and defense.

**The Unity of Believers:** In the "unity of the Faith," as prescribed in the New Testament

**The Liberty of the local Church:** In Christ, and under His law as revealed In His word, the Now Testament.

**The Fellowship:** Of brethren of "like precious faith," in the furtherance of the Gospel and the building of churches of Christ according to the Bible pattern.

**From the Editorial Outlook**  
**by Harvey Bream, Editor**

An ultimate parting of the ways among brethren in Christ was becoming apparent following the Civil War. A factor involved was the attitude toward the use of a musical instrument in worship. The silence of the scriptures was one of the chief arguments used in opposition to the practice. Subsequently division came.

This matter has been the subject of many a debate. In some instances there was "more heat than light." Debaters, in their partisan zeal, became guilty of using the same tactics they condemned in others, namely, the using of proof texts. Analogy was one of the chief tools. Much of the discussion was on the periphery of the real issue.

Brother Jack Cottrell, a doctoral candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary, presents on page 6, in the first of two parts, a most sensible and scriptural approach to this question.

The application of the principle he sets forth is making possible increasingly the renewal of a splendid fellowship between those who prefer to use an instrument and those who prefer not to. When the principle is not applied there is too frequently a bitter

and factious spirit that mars fellowship. How much better the former way.

## **The Interpretation of the Scriptures' Silence Christian Worship and Instrumental Music**

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### **Part I**

A question which has long divided Christian brethren is whether it is wrong to use a musical instrument in a service of Christian worship. The purpose of his paper is to discuss this question and to show that such use is not wrong.

Two points should be noted. First, the purpose is not to show that the use of the instrument is necessary; it is simply to show that it is permissible. Second, the discussion deals with public worship rather than worship in general. An affirmative conclusion regarding the former, however, will necessarily involve the latter.

It is my judgment that much of the discussion of the instrument is either irrelevant or inconclusive, and that the only point which has any direct and decisive bearing on the problem is the Scriptures' silence on the matter. To establish the fact of this silence and to interpret it correctly is the plan of this paper.

It is necessary first of all to show that the Scriptures are silent regarding the use of the instrument. There is no positive precept or precedent which expressly commands or sanctions its use; neither is there a precise prohibition or principle which expressly forbids its use.

#### **No Requirement**

Several attempts have been made to find an express warrant for the use of the instrument. Probably the most popular of these is the argument from the word **psallo** in the New Testament, which is used, for example, in Ephesians 5:19, where it is translated

"making melody." The point of the argument is that the word means by definition "to play on an instrument" or at least "to sing while being accompanied by an instrument" There are two main objections to this argument, one of which is valid and one of which is not;

The invalid objection grants that the word means "to play on an instrument," but insists that the only legitimate instrument is the one named in the text itself (Ephesians 5:19), namely, the heart. This objection is invalid for several reasons. First of all there is a textual difference at this point. Some ancient manuscripts read "with your heart," while others read "in your heart(s)." The objection depends upon the former reading, the genuineness of which can not be established to the necessary degree of certainty. Even if it be granted that the former reading is the genuine one, this is still insufficient to demonstrate that the heart is **the** instrument which God intends for us to use with our singing. The fact that the grammatical construction involved in this reading is known as a "dative of instrument" has apparently led many to this unwarranted conclusion. They fail to see that the connotation of the term **instrument** is not the same in the field of music as it is in the field of grammar, and if it is, then 1 Corinthians 14:15 adds two other "instruments" which must accompany singing: the spirit and the understanding. By this time, however, good judgment leads us to reject the impression that Paul is prescribing a spiritual orchestra and to admit that he is simply describing in various ways the acceptable manner of our singing.

The valid objection to the argument from **psallo** disputes the actual meaning of the word. Those who argue that the word means at least "to sing while being accompanied by an instrument" present lexical evidence to show that the word was actually used in this sense before, during and after New Testament times.<sup>1</sup> Others, however, present the same kind of evidence to show that by New Testament times the word was also widely used in a weaker sense, simply "to sing."<sup>2</sup> This forces us to conclude that in New Testament times the word could have been used in either sense, and that the argument from **psallo** is therefore inconclusive.

M. B. Books<sup>3</sup> attempts to find express sanction for the use of the instrument in Psalm 87, which describes the Messianic "city of God" and declares that "as well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there." Old Testament Messianic prophecy, however, often does not distinguish between the church age and the eschatological age. One might object therefore that Psalm 87 refers to the latter and perhaps to the harpers of the Apocalypse, which would make the force of the argument from Psalm 87 depend upon the validity of the following one.

Many would find in the harpers in Revelation a positive sanction for the use of the instrument But it is objected that harps in heaven give no definite warrant for instruments during the church age. It is also pointed out that Revelation is filled with symbols and figures, the harp being allegedly a figure representing the musical organ of God's formation: the heart, larynx and articulatory faculty of man.<sup>4</sup> Despite their legalistic and arbitrary nature, these objections are valid enough to make the argument from the harpers (and therefore the one from Psalm 87 inconclusive.

## **No Prohibition**

The above arguments being fairly representative and equally inconclusive, it appears that there is no Scriptural precept which definitely sanctions the use of the instrument. On the other hand, it is just as apparent that there is no express prohibition against its use, though several are suggested. For instance, Amos 6:5 is often quoted, with complete disregard for the context as a condemnation of the instrument. Those who use this argument commit all the errors of interpretation which they denounce in arguments on the other side (e. g. the situation is not during the church age).

Some interpret the second commandment as expressly forbidding the instrument, on the grounds that it forbids the use of any human invention as an object or medium of worship, the instrument presumably being an example of the latter.<sup>5</sup> Again we must object that such exegesis is not warranted by the context The only kind of "medium of worship" which is prohibited here is the image which is used to represent the deity and to which worship is

actually offered with the hope that the worship will somehow be transferred to the deity itself.

## The Law

Several other attempts to find an express prohibition of the instrument must be dealt with at greater length. The first of these is the appeal to the abrogation of the Old Law. The argument is that the instrument was a part of the Old Testament ceremonial law; the ceremonial law has been abrogated; therefore it is wrong to use the instrument in New Testament worship.

There are two objections which nullify the force of this argument. First, granting for the moment that the instrument was an integral part of the Old Law, we must insist that the abrogation of a law governing a practice does not forbid the practice per se. The use of a house of worship is a case in point. The Old Law regulated the construction and furnishing of the house of worship in great detail, and that law has been abolished. But we do not refrain from building houses of worship simply because the Old Law governing this item is no longer in effect.

A second objection is that in Old Testament times the use of the musical instrument in worship was not something inseparably connected with the temporary temple ritual, a fact which is implicit in the Psalmists' exhortations to praise God "with the psaltery and harp." The abrogation of the Old Law simply means that the ritual use of the instrument in worship has been abolished along with the ritual itself. But this does not reflect on the inherent value and propriety of the instrument in the worship of God, something to which the Psalms give abundant testimony. We must recognize that what has been abrogated is the Old Testament Law, which is recorded in certain portions of the Old Testament revelation, and not the Old Testament revelation itself. When the instrument is therefore freed from this illegitimate bond to the ceremonial law, then one can see that the abrogation of the Old Law does not constitute a prohibition of the use of the instrument in New Testament worship.

## The Question of Types

A similar argument against the instrument involves the question of types. It is argued that the instrument was merely a typical and thus temporary part of Old Testament worship, having its fulfilment in New Testament worship and thus becoming unlawful for use therein. In answer to this we note first that the Bible itself never refers to the instrument as a type of anything; and only God, not man, can make types. Secondly we suggest that the lack of agreement concerning the New Testament antitype clearly shows that the typical character of the instrument is a product of human invention and not divine appointment. Miller says the antitype is singing; Glasgow says it is "sanctified hearts"; Girardeau says it is "the joy and triumph of God's believing people to result from the plentiful effusion of the Holy Ghost in New Testament times."<sup>6</sup>

## Spiritual vs. Material?

We must now consider one other principle which is said to constitute an express prohibition against the use of the instrument. It is the idea that the instrument is contrary to the spiritual nature of New Testament worship and is therefore wrong. John 4:24 is cited as teaching that material objects can no longer be used in worshipping the Spiritual God. One or two observations concerning this argument are in point first of all. It should be noted that this is an argument against the use of the instrument in New Testament worship per se; therefore if one uses this argument, he must be consistent in accepting all its implications. Also, we must insist that the opposite of spiritual is material, and not mechanical. Loud polemics against a mechanical instrument are wholly irrelevant.

Now, we do not deny that there has been a notable advance in the character of worship in New Testament times, nor do we deny that New Testament worship is "worship in spirit" in a peculiar way. But we do deny that the principle of spiritual worship excludes the use of material objects, including the instrument, in a worship service. The primary meaning of John 4:24 is that God is

not limited by physical space, and that true worship cannot therefore be limited to any one physical place. It is obvious that this passage was not meant to exclude entirely the physical element from true New Testament worship, because the New Testament itself includes the physical in its worship services. The bread and the fruit of the vine are necessary for the Lord's Supper; physical objects such as money are necessary for the offertory. Every act of worship involves the physical insofar as the human body is required to accomplish it. Furthermore, most acts of worship may and usually do employ other physical objects such as trays, cups, baskets or books. Thus it appears evident that the principle of spiritual worship does not exclude the use of material objects.

The objection to the line of thought just presented is that the physical objects such as trays and song books are simply circumstances which serve to expedite worship and are not part of the worship itself, which comes from the heart. But the instrument, so it is contended, is more than a circumstance to aid worship; it is supposedly a means of worship, and those who use it are said to be worshiping with it or through it<sup>7</sup>. In answer to this we must insist that singing with an instrument can not be considered as worshiping with it or through it, any more than taking the Lord's Supper can be considered as worshiping through the loaf and the cup, or giving our offerings can be considered as worshiping with the coins and bills. In other words, all outward acts of worship, including all the physical movements and objects which accompany them, must be distinguished from the attitude of worship itself. True worship is always-spiritual worship, no matter how many physical objects are employed in the outward expression of that worship. One can no more worship with an instrument than he can worship with a piece of money; yet both may be used as a part of the act of worship. R. M. Bell states this point well when he distinguishes between subjective worship and the objective things we do when we worship:<sup>8</sup>

". . . People may do certain things when they worship, but the things which they do are not worship; because they can do those same things without worship. For example, we may worship God when we sin& but we can

worship without singing, and we can sing without worshipping. Therefore, singing is not worship . . . Worship is not objective, but subjective. It is not to be seen, but felt. True worship takes place on the inside.

"... Worship is not something you 'conduct.' You conduct a service (a ritualistic program) and call it 'the worship service'; but it can easily happen that not a person in the audience is worshipping God 'in spirit and in truth.' Yet this is the one 'must' It has nothing to do with the place, the furniture or the 'order of service.' These things may help to create an atmosphere of worship, but they are not worship."

Finally we would note that the degrading of the material element in acts of worship is dangerously akin to Manichean dualism, and its logical outcome ought to be something resembling a Quaker worship service. The New Testament does not so degrade material objects, which have been shown to have their place in New Testament worship. The use of physical objects, therefore, is not outside the compass of the principle of spiritual worship.

Our conclusion is that there is no commandment or principle which either expressly requires or expressly forbids the use of the instrument in a New Testament worship service.

In other words, the Scriptures are silent concerning the matter. Our next task is to determine the correct meaning of this silence.

### **Footnotes: Part I**

1. Cf. O. E. Payne, *Instrumental Music is Scriptural* (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1920).
2. Cf. James Glasgow, *Heart and Voice: Instrumental Music in Christian Worship Not Divinely Authorised* (Belfast: C. Aitchison; J. Cleeland, n. d.).
3. Morris Butler Book and James P. Miller, *Book-Miller Debate* (Gainesville, Florida: Phillips Publications, 1955), pp. 96ff.
4. Glasgow, *op. cit.*-, pp. 23ff.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 174ff.
6. Book and Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 41; Glasgow, *op. cit.*, p. 57; John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the*

Church (Richmond, Virginia: Whittet & Shepperson, Printers, 1888), p. 60.

7. Book and Miller, op. cit., p. 88.

8. R. M. Bell, Blue and White (Johnson Bible College, Knoxville: Vol. XXXV, January-February 1963), p. 2.

## Part II

The Scriptures are silent regarding the use of a musical instrument in a New Testament worship service. There is no express precept or principle either requiring or forbidding it. Now we would ask, what are the implications of this absence of definite regulations regarding the instrument? What is the meaning of the silence?

Even if those who oppose the instrument should grant that the Scriptures are silent at this point, this would not harm their cause; for in their view the absence of an express command to use the instrument in worship is equivalent to an express command not to use it. In other words, what is not commanded is forbidden.

### The Unalterable Pattern

A specific form of the general argument from silence is that the New Testament gives an unalterable pattern for the church worship service, and this pattern does not include the instrument. Therefore it is wrong to use the instrument in worship. The silence is interpreted as a prohibition. According to Girardeau, instrumental music "is prohibited by the fact that it is not included in the inspired enumeration. of the elements of public worship."<sup>1</sup>

This argument requires us to inquire into the nature of the pattern of worship contained in the New Testament. Those who oppose the instrument, among others, give the impression that the New Testament contains a complete and separate listing of all the items both necessary and allowable in a worship service, and that this list is prefaced by a statement such as "Thus saith the Lord: the

Christian worship service shall consist in these five items and no more . . ." Such is the implication of Girardeau's reference to an "inspired enumeration." It is assumed that the New Testament pattern of worship is of the same nature as that given in the Old Testament, and Hebrews 8:5 is often quoted (wrongly) with regard to the New Testament: "See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern." We are led to expect to find a list of items of worship somewhat akin to the form of the ten commandments or the list of prohibitions in Acts 15:29.

## **The Type of Pattern**

But this is not the type of pattern we actually find in the New Testament. To compare the New Testament with the Old Testament in this matter is to distort the whole spirit of the former. The nature of the regulations governing the Old Testament ritual worship is entirely different from that which governs New Testament worship. Under the Old Law the service was prescribed in detail by God's express decrees. Not only the acts of worship, but also the circumstances of worship (e. g. the building, the furniture, the garments) were regulated by the law. Under such an arrangement where every detail was prescribed, it is obvious that no new thing could have been introduced without an express command. Truly all things had to be done according to the pattern where such a complete pattern existed. But is it not evident that in the New Testament the nature of the regulations is quite different? There is no detailed list of New Testament acts of worship, much less of the circumstances of worship. We have several commandments regarding worship, which are authoritative to be sure; but most of them are general rather than specific. In many cases there is no command at all, but simply a casual reference to an apostolic practice (which is nonetheless binding). One can see how different it is to speak of a "pattern" for New Testament worship in comparison with the detailed regulations of the Old Law.

## **How Unalterable?**

This leads us to ask a final question regarding the pattern of worship: just how unalterable is the "unalterable pattern"? Is there a clear-cut, unambiguous list of acts of worship in the New Testament to which no one can add or take away?

Such an assumption is at least shaken by the fact that all groups do not see the "unalterable pattern" a-like. James Begg, a Presbyterian, lists these five acts of worship as the primitive model: prayer, reading of the Scriptures, preaching, singing, and the dispensation of the sacraments.<sup>2</sup> Miller's list, representing the church of Christ, is slightly different, consisting in teaching, giving, praying, partaking of the Lord's Supper, and singing.<sup>3</sup> Other groups add or subtract from the list still further. If the list or pattern is so obvious, why are there so many versions of it? The only answer is that the pattern is not as clear-cut and objective as many would like to believe.

## **Scriptural Authority Considered**

It is enlightening to examine the Scriptural authority for some of the acts of worship included in the "unalterable pattern." For instance, where is the command or precedent for taking an offering during a worship service? The "fellowship" of Acts 2:42 may possibly refer to giving, but there is no reference to a worship service. Neither is there any suggestion that the offering in Acts 2:44ff; 4:34-5:11 took place during a worship service. The offering mentioned in 1 Cor. 16:1ff; 2 Cor. 8, 9 was a special collection for the poor saints at Jerusalem. 1 Corinthians 16:2, a favorite proof-text, refers to this special offering, and the whole collection was to be sent away for use outside the local congregation. How many congregations today would be willing to conform to the latter characteristic of the "pattern"?

Now we would ask, what is the Scriptural authority for the very act of congregational singing as a part of worship? Matthew 26:30 does not describe a New Testament worship service. Romans 15:9 and Hebrews 2:12 are quotations from the Psalms and refer to individual praise. James 5:13; Ephesians 5:19; and

Colossians 3:16 do not refer to a worship service but to everyday Christian living, as a careful study of the context will show.

As a matter of fact, the authority for singing as an item of the New Testament worship service is found only in a single passage: 1 Corinthians 14:15, 26. Since the content of the "pattern" must be filled from these two verses, we now ask, what information do they yield about congregational singing? Absolutely none. The context reveals that Paul is not talking here about congregational singing or congregational anything, but about a spontaneous individual outpouring of praise and instruction which is spoken to, not with, the whole congregation for the purpose of edifying them. All that remains for the pattern, then, is individual praise—a solo by each member.

Again we ask, what is left of the "unalterable pattern"? Are the advocates of a legalistic list willing to send all collections to the poor saints in other areas? Are they willing to substitute individual psalm-singing for congregational singing? or to include the congregational amen after every audible prayer (1 Corinthians 14:16)? Certainly these questions and their obvious answers illustrate the great freedom left to us in these matters. O. E. Payne states it thus:<sup>4</sup>

". . . If we are to be slaves to alleged apostolic pattern, let's go the full length, and vie with each other, striving to see how abject we can be—no hymn-books, no tuning-forks or pipes, no instruments, no tunes, no part-singing, no meter, and only monophonic or antiphonic songs. But if we are freemen in Christ, let us 'stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,' cultivate our God-given musical faculties, dedicate them to the worship of the adorable Giver, and thus demonstrate the highest quality of loyalty."

Again we must protest that we are not denying the existence of a pattern of worship in the New Testament. We believe that there is a pattern, but not the legalistic kind demanded by those who object to the instrument. The pattern is very general and leaves much room for freedom with regard to details. To say that use of the instrument in worship is wrong because it is not included in the

"inspired enumeration" is not a valid interpretation of the New Testament's silence on the instrument.

## **"Where the Scriptures Are Silent"**

"Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where the Scriptures are silent we are silent." In an attempt to construe the Bible's silence in terms of prohibition, this time-honored Restoration slogan is often interpreted to mean "What is not commanded is forbidden." In other words, if the Bible has given express directions about a particular subject, then we can echo these directions; but if the Bible has not given any directions, then we must assume that God has intended for us to exclude that particular item from our life and practice. Therefore since the New Testament is silent about the instrument, it is wrong to use it; and such use would be adding to the Scriptures.

## **Implications of Slogan**

But, we ask, is this the real implication of the Bible's silence regarding the instrument or anything else? Does the absence of a command to use the instrument constitute per se a command not to use it? Is this the reasonable interpretation of "Where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent"? The answer is an emphatic no. The only implication we may draw from the lack of any command for or against the instrument is that God did not intend for us to be bound by any command at all in relation to it. The only rational interpretation of "Where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent" is that where God's word has laid down no law on a subject, neither can we presume to lay down a law. Where God's word has neither required nor forbidden, we neither require nor forbid. Where there is no command in the Bible, no command may be added. The true implication of the absence of an express directive is therefore not prohibition but rather freedom to use common sense and sanctified judgment. In other words, the principle which governs the use of the instrument is the principle of expediency. This is the only logical meaning of "Where the Scriptures are silent, we are silent."

## **The Principle of Expediency**

The principle of expediency is simply a way of recognizing the distinction between things about which the Bible speaks and things about which the Bible is silent. It distinguishes between matters of faith and matters of opinion, between things commanded and things left to human judgment. In the realm of worship the principle makes clear the distinction between acts of worship which are commanded by God and the enabling means or details which are left to human judgment.<sup>5</sup> Regarding anything about which God's word is silent, the question which we must ask is whether it is expedient or not, whether it is useful as a means of accomplishing the things commanded. Whatever our answer may be, the important thing to remember is that the answer has been determined not by the infallible word of God but by the fallible but necessary judgment of man. Whenever a thing is not governed by a command of God, then it must be subjected to human judgment. And the decision reached by man's wisdom cannot be bound upon men as if it were the word of God. The very essence of expediency is freedom from a binding law.

Use of the musical instrument in Christian worship is an item which falls under the principle of expediency. It is one of the means which enable us to sing "decently and in order," just as a song leader is.<sup>6</sup> Whether the command to sing can best be obeyed decently and orderly by means of a song leader or by means of a piano or by means of both is a matter which must be decided by human judgment. God's word is silent on this matter and has not bound us to either.

## **No Law, No Transgression**

Since the instrument is a matter of expediency, no one has the right to say that either its use or its non-use is wrong. Where there is no law, there can be no transgression. If the advocates of the instrument should say that it is wrong not to use it, this would be an attempt to make a regulation where God has made none.

Likewise, when the opponents of the instrument say that it is wrong to use it, they are making a law where God has made none; they are speaking where the Bible is silent; they are binding where God has left us free. Advocates of the instrument are accused of adding to the word of God, but we ask, who has done the adding? He who forbids what the word of God has not forbidden! This is the very essence of "adding to"! The adding of a commandment where God has given none is the most serious addition of all. It adds a condition of salvation and a test of fellowship which God did not see fit to ordain in his word. Surely this is just the opposite of being silent where the Bible is silent; surely this is what Christ had in mind when he condemned those who teach for doctrine the commandments of men.

We must conclude that since the Bible gives no command regarding the instrument, it is left to human judgment as to whether it shall be used. That is to say, it is a matter of expediency; and therefore no one can say "It is wrong to use the instrument" without adding to the word of God by binding a law upon men which is not in the Bible. In other words, it is not wrong to use the instrument; what is wrong is to say that it is wrong to use it.

### **Footnotes: Part II**

1. John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Richmond, Virginia; Whittet & Shepperson, Printers, 1888), p. 184.
2. James Begg, *Purity of Worship* (Edinburgh: Lyon & Gemmell, 1876), p. 8.
3. Morris Butler Book and James P. Miller, *Book-Miller Debate* (Gainesville, Florida: Phillips Publications, 1955).
4. O. E. Payne, *Instrumental Music Is Scriptural* (Cincinnati: The Standard Publishing Company, 1920), p. 264.
5. Ernest Beam, *Christian Forum Reprints* (Long Beach: Lakewood Church of Christ, n. d.), P. 7.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 18.