

It Is Written

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The Music of the Early Church

By Greg Gwin

Many people assume that the use of mechanical instruments in worship has always been a part of Christianity. After all, instruments are common in much of the religious world today. But when we examine the historical record, we learn that this was not the practice of the early church. In fact, respected historians and scholars widely acknowledge that the earliest Christians worshiped with vocal music only.

For example:

- Music historian Edward Dickinson, in his work *Music in the History of the Western Church*, explains that the music of the early church was exclusively vocal and that instruments were generally not used in worship, in part because of their associations with pagan practices.
- Church historian Everett Ferguson, in *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church*, documents that both the New Testament and the writings of early Christian authors point to vocal music alone being used in Christian worship for several centuries.
- Historian W. D. Killen, in *The Ancient Church*, describes early congregational worship as involving the whole assembly joining together in song, without the accompaniment of mechanical instruments.
- Music scholar Frank Landon Humphreys, in *Evolution of Church Music*, likewise concludes that the music used in the earliest Christian services was entirely vocal.

These observations are not coming from individuals trying to defend a particular doctrinal position. Rather, they are the conclusions of historians who have carefully studied the worship practices of early Christianity. Their findings consistently point in the same direction: instrumental music was not a part of the worship of the early church.

The reason becomes even clearer when we open the New Testament itself. Every passage that instructs Christians about music in worship speaks about singing:

- Ephesians 5:19: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."
- Colossians 3:16: "Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."
- Hebrews 13:15: "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name."
- James 5:13: "Is any merry? let him sing psalms."

Notice the emphasis. Christians were instructed to sing. The melody was to come from the heart, and the praise was described as the fruit of our lips.

When congregations today lift their voices together in simple, heartfelt singing, they are doing exactly what the earliest Christians did. More importantly, they are following the pattern and authority given by the Lord in His word.

Know Nothing But Christ

By James P. Miller

We can remember the statements of the older preachers, and they will always ring in our ears because they repeated them time and time again. In the beginning of almost every sermon before they took up the message proper, they would make these two declarations. "It will be my purpose to hide behind the cross and to preach nothing save Christ and him crucified," and then, "I am here to please God, not men, if men are pleased, I shall rejoice but my principle concern is that every word I shall speak will be pleasing to my God." Now many great truths are embodied in these words. If preachers today have lost the power of their message, perhaps it is because they are failing to hide behind the cross. Regardless of how old the saying may be, it is a part of the truth of the Master. Paul said in Galatians 6:14, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." No room here for a show of scholarship, a demonstration of dramatic art, or a collection of flowery phrases. Place cannot be found for stories of personal success or experiences. Little use of the pronoun "I". The need today is for preachers who, with Jeremiah of old, have the word of the Lord in them like a burning fire. Who by their concern for the lost men and women in their audiences will forget the personal glory, and pour out the story of the cross, as though it were their last sermon on this earth. The message rings out from the pioneers of yesterday, when you preach hide behind the cross.

Now let us consider the last part of the familiar saying, "And I know nothing save Christ and him crucified." Paul sounded that great cry nearly two thousand years ago in I Corinthians 2:2, and it needs to be read over and over. There would never be a theory preached in the pulpits of the churches of America if this old rule were observed. There would never be a division over the idea of some preacher who wants to write it into the faith delivered to the saints. Little sermonettes would not be the order of the day, while the masses are starving for spiritual bread. The story of the cross on Pentecost, which converted men to Christ in the first century, will convict and convince men of sin today if we will give it the opportunity.

When these older preachers stated that they wanted to please God, they were restating the principle of Paul. He looked down the avenue of time to tell Timothy, his son in the gospel, as recorded in II Tim. 4:3, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves teachers having itching ears." The tendency for soft and still softer preaching is sweeping over the land like the tides of the sea. Let us in answer sound again from the walls of spiritual Jerusalem the trumpet of truth, and say with Paul, "It is a small thing with me that I be judged of you."