

MUSIC IN THE CHURCH

It is not at all unusual, when one with whom I am having a discussion discovers that I am a member of the church of Christ, for him to respond with something like, "Oh, you are the people who don't use music." This response is likely not meant in disrespect, but it rather indicates an image which we have in the eyes of those who do not understand.

Yes, we do use music. In fact, the majority of us enjoy very much the pleasure, contentment, and joy resulting from wholesome music. Many of us have learned to skillfully play a variety of musical instruments. We also feel that the human voice is capable of singing in a way far superior to any man-made instrument, and we thrill to the beauty and harmony of voices blended in praise to our God.

But the proper understanding is that we do not employ use of mechanical instruments of music in our assemblies of the church. It might be of interest to note that several other religious groups also share our views about praising God with only the human voice. Among these are Greek Orthodox churches (among the largest in number) and Primitive Baptist churches (among the more conservative of the Baptists).

Singing plays a most important role in assemblies of the Lord's church. With it God is praised and we are uplifted. Perhaps singing might be likened in a service of the church to flowers in the field or forest. It beautifies and makes pleasant the atmosphere which prevails when Christians assemble. Our hearts rejoice when thus prompted to reflect upon our heavenly Father and His abundant blessings. Our voices gladly proclaim His presence in our lives and our thanksgiving for it.

While some of these same qualities can also be found in playing musical instruments, we find no example in the Scriptures that early Christians ever engaged in playing instruments in their assemblies. It was not a matter of such instruments not being available, for instruments had for centuries been very common. Reference is made to the harp and organ in verse 21 of the fourth chapter of Genesis. Timbrels and dances were used by Miriam and other Israelite women in Exodus 15 (about 1496 B.C.), and David used a harp to refresh Saul in 1 Samuel 16:23 (around 1060 B.C.). In 2 Samuel 6:5 we are informed, "*And David After Judah's return from Babylonian captivity (517 B.C.),* Nehemiah

mentions certain men following Ezra *"with the musical instruments of David the man of God"* (Neh. 12:36).

But the Old Testament is not a pattern for the Christian age. During the periods which it records, especially the era of Israel which preceded the establishment of Christianity, God's people known as Israel constituted a nation which was both civil and spiritual. They acknowledged God and recognized His direction in spiritual matters. But being also a civil nation among other civil nations, they occupied a position not in harmony with what was later to be the spirit of Christianity. During that period the Israelites offered animal sacrifices, burned incense, could have more than one wife, executed criminals, exacted physical punishment, and observed national boundaries. It was during that period that instruments of music were used. None of those practices were observed by the church of the first century, for such practices belonged to an earlier, incomplete era designed to prepare for a more perfect one to follow (Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:1-9).

The Lord's church is a spiritual kingdom existing within and among civil nations throughout the world, but it has no authority to function in a civil capacity as did old Israel. It has a different relationship and a different purpose. It is noteworthy, then, that practices such as those just mentioned were never recorded among early Christians. It is also noteworthy that instruments of music were never mentioned as part of the assemblies of the early church.

But music is mentioned as part of the early Christians' lives. Paul wrote, *"I will ...SING unto thy name"* (Rom. 15:9), *"I will SING with the spirit, and I will SING with the understanding also"* (1 Cor. 14:15), *"In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, SINGING and making melody in your heart to the Lord"* (Eph. 5:19), and *"In psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, SINGING with grace in your hearts to the Lord"* (Col. 3:16). The writer of Hebrews quoted Psalms 22:22 in saying, *"In the midst of the church will I SING praise unto thee"* (2:12). In James 5:13 disciples are exhorted, *"Is any merry? let him SING psalms."* It will be evident, of course, that each passage refers to SINGING, not use of instruments.

The striking fact is that even though instruments of music were available and could have been used -- they weren't. It is our purpose to constitute in this century a church identical to that of the first century. This is accomplished by following their

God-approved practices and by avoiding that which God has not authorized.

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HEAVEN OR HELL?

Where do you want to spend eternity? You have a choice of heaven or hell and you will spend eternity in one of these places. Since we will be in one of these places forever, we should know something about them in order to make our choice. To receive the reward of a home in heaven there are things you have to do to earn it. To go to hell, you do nothing. But do you want an eternal resting place of happiness or one of punishment?

1. Heaven is the dwelling place of God and the heavenly host. Acts 7:49-- *"Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: What house will ye build me? saith the Lord. Or what is the place of my rest?"*

2. Heaven is a place of happiness. Rev. 24:4-- *"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."*

3. Who will enter heaven? Matt. 7:21-- *"Not everyone that saith unto me Lord, Lord shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven."*

4. Hell is the dwelling place of the devil and his angels and a place of punishment. Matt. 25:41-- *"Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."* Rev. 20:10-- *"And the devil that deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night, for ever and ever."*

5. Who will have a place in hell? Rev. 21:8-- *"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."*

What is your answer to the question of where you want to spend eternity? I believe every honest and sincere person would say Heaven. To receive the reward of a home in heaven, you must hear the Word of God, believe, repent, be baptized and live a faithful Christian life.

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SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

1. What king was the last of the giants?
2. According to 2 John, whom does the person who abides in Christ's teaching have?
3. How long did Jesus tarry before leaving to go to Lazarus?
4. To which of the following does the Psalmist compare youth: a young lamb, new grass, or dew?
5. What did David do with Goliath's weapons after killing him?

ANSWERS NEXT MONTH . . .

and remember last month's questions?

1. What was the only city in the northern promised land that Joshua burned? HAZOR (Josh. 11:13)
2. What kind of seed is the kingdom of heaven like, according to Matthew 13? MUSTARD SEED (Matt. 13:31)
3. What was the occupation of Aquila and Priscilla? TENT MAKERS (Acts 18:2,3)
4. According to Psalm 4, the Lord has set apart the godly for whom? HIMSELF (Psa. 4:3)
5. What type of metal was used to overlay the ark of the covenant? GOLD (Exo. 25:11)

In the workplace people are always cross-training in order to advance their careers. Similarly, everyone one of us should do some "cross" training in order to advance our spiritual career. *"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."* (Matt. 16:24)

If the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, you can bet the water bill is higher.

[Editor's Note: With every issue I feel the need to give thanks to so many people but space usually limits me. Since I am not aware of any meetings this month, let me use this section to again express my gratitude to those congregations who help support this work financially. There are also several individuals who make contributions, both small and large, which are much appreciated. Thanks to our many writers too. If anyone would like to donate an article (and the need is always great), please send it to me and I will try to feasibly work it in. So far I have received many compliments on this paper and the uplifting it brings to several of our readers. In fact, recently a sister sent five extra names to be added to our mailing list because she wanted to share the gospel with them! It is acts like these that make this work worthwhile. Please continue to pray for me and for all those (too many to name!) who have a part in publishing The Harvester.]