

INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN THE NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH

The question that meets us at the very outset is this: "Has God given in His Word any rule or guiding principle whereby the worship of His house is to be regulated, or has He left a matter of such vital importance to the changing opinions of men?" Needless to say, the whole testimony of inspired Scripture goes to show that He has not left men to act at random in this matter. If he has given a rule or revealed some guiding principle, then the question arises, "What is this rule?" To this, two answers have been given, viz., "Whatsoever God has **not commanded** in His Word is not allowable in His worship," and "Whatsoever is **not condemned** in His Word is allowable in His worship." These two principles, seemingly so like in appearance, are, on a closer examination, found to be wide as the poles asunder. The former has been recognised as the great guiding principle in regulating the worship of Presbyterianism the wide world over, while the latter has been adopted by the Church of England, much to her own confusion.

The Presbyterian Principle

is admirably stated by the Westminster divines in the Confession of Faith, a document signed by every office-bearer in the Presbyterian Churches in England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, etc.: "The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture; unto which nothing is at any time to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men. Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word; and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God and government of the Church common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed." (Chapter I, section vi). This principle acted upon would enable all churches to receive, observe, and keep pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in His Word.

I.—That this principle is strictly in accordance with the teaching of Scripture can be seen at once from the following:—

(1) **Old Testament.**—"Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you." (Deut. iv. 2).

(2) **New Testament.**—"Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe **all things whatsoever I have commanded you.**" (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). Christ's words, in giving the great apostolic commission, ought to be an end of all controversy in this matter: "**All things whatsoever I have commanded you,**" is to be the great principle recognised by the Apostles in evangelising the nations, and likewise the principle to be observed by these nations on receiving the faith.

II.—Then we have many illustrations from Scripture showing how jealously God guarded the rule He laid down for the regulation of the worship of His own house.

(1) **Old Testament.**—(a) Nadab and Abihu (Lev. x. 1-3) had daringly infringed the law regulating the service in the Tabernacle by putting strange fire in their censers, and in punishment "there went out fire from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord." Notwithstanding the favoured position occupied by them as sons of Aaron, the High Priest, they had presumed to add to God's com-

mandments, and God taught them, and all Israel, that it was a perilous thing to interfere with what some might be too ready to think was not of very much importance. And when the heavy judgment of heaven fell upon them "Aaron held his peace." Another illustration from the Old Testament will suffice, though many more might be given, viz., King Uzziah's attempt to officiate as a priest in the Temple (2 Chron. xxvi. 16-21). For this daring attempt of intruding into the priest's office, which was reserved alone for the descendants of Aaron's house, he was smitten with leprosy. (Also Numbers xvi. and 1 Sam. xiii). These illustrations from the Old Testament go to conclusively prove that God set a defence about the order He had set up in His own house, and that any infringement, however insignificant it might appear, or however exalted the person might be who was guilty of the infringement, was regarded by heaven as a daring interference not to be tolerated with impunity.

(2) **New Testament.**— In the New Testament it may be said that owing to the spirituality of the new dispensation, as distinguished from the old, that we need not look in the same way for such outward, visible manifestations of God's displeasure; its judgments are spiritual—not less real and awful on that account. But there are not wanting instances of God's displeasure manifested in such a way that the world might look on and tremble. Perhaps the most awful of these is the overthrow of the Temple and its service at Jerusalem. That service, with all that it typified, had been fulfilled, and the old dispensation, by the decree of heaven, was forever at an end. The Jews thought otherwise, and daringly persisted in the continuance of a worship which the work and the word of the Messiah proclaimed to be finished. Apparently unconscious of their sin, God sent the proud, avenging armies of Rome to Jerusalem to punish the Jews, and when the terrible work of the Roman army was done, the Temple, with all the services associated with it, became only a memory to the Jews; and to this day they have neither Temple service, nor sacrifices, though still tenaciously clinging to many of the customs and laws of their forefathers. This is a matter often overlooked in connection with the Jews, but it is one that ought never to be forgotten by those who may be tempted in any way to introduce into Christian worship anything that has forever been abrogated by Christ.

Having thus stated the great guiding principle by which we are to be ruled, we now proceed to the main theme of this paper, and for the more orderly discussion of the subject, the question of instrumental music under the Old Testament and New Testament Churches will be discussed in succession.

Instrumental Music in the Old Testament Church

I. The Tabernacle.— It is to be carefully observed that in the Tabernacle service, until the time of David, there was no instrumental music. Moses received the minutest instructions from God as to the furniture and order of service in the Tabernacle, but there is no hint as to instrumental music. The two silver trumpets, it is scarcely necessary to say, were not instruments of music, in the ordinary sense of the term. They were used for sounding alarms, gathering the congregation, etc., but not for accompanying the praises of the Lord. When instrumental music was at length introduced into the Tabernacle services, it is important to observe that it was by God's commandment. The Old Testament Church could therefore say, "We have this part of the service through the direct command of God given to David." (1 Chron. xxviii. 11-13, 19) and also (2 Chron. xxix. 25, 26) which proves conclusively that instrumental music was not introduced into the Old Testament Church without God's command. They further prove that it was in the transition period, when the Tabernacle and its service were about to give place to the Temple and its service, that we have the first notice of instrumental music in divine worship.

Objections.— It has been urged that we have a number of instances in the Old Testament Scriptures, during the period of the Tabernacle service, illustrative of the fact that instrumental music was used in divine worship. There are the cases, it is said, of Miriam playing upon the timbrel at the Red Sea; the singing and dancing, accompanied with instrumental music, of the women meeting Saul and David after the slaying of Goliath; the like welcome of Jephthah's daughter; the accompanying of the ark by David and Israel, with bands of music; and the minstrelsy of the prophets to whom Saul joined himself. In the instances where women are mentioned, it is evident that it could not be the public worship of the Tabernacle that is meant, for women had no part in those services. The illustrations quoted prove nothing more than that instrumental music was used on occasions of public rejoicing. In the case of the prophets and Saul, there is not the slightest evidence to show that their playing on instruments had anything to do with the public instituted worship of the Lord's house.

2. **The Synagogue.**—It is so universally admitted that there was no instrumental music in the synagogue-worship that no detailed proof is necessary.

3. **The Temple.**—It is acknowledged that instrumental music was used in the Temple service by God's commandment; a fact that should carefully guard us against asserting that instrumental music is sinful in itself. It may be abused and become a snare, but to light-heartedly maintain that God introduced anything that is sinful in itself into His worship is a daring arraignment of the divine procedure. It is not on this ground we object to instrumental music in the worship of the New Testament Church, but for the simple reason that it belonged to a dispensation that has passed away. The question arises, What did it typify? Does it not prefigure that joy unspeakable and full of glory which believers of the New Testament dispensation were to realise in the rich effusion of the Holy Spirit?

In conclusion, it has been shown that instrumental music was only used in the Temple service and not in the synagogue-worship. The Temple service was typical, and instrumental music had its place in that system of types and shadows which, in the very nature of things, was transitory. The glory of the ministration of death passed away forever when Christ said "**It is finished.**" It is unnecessary to spend time proving this fact — the whole New Testament is its proof.

New Testament Church and Instrumental Music

Instrumental music passed away with the Temple service, and if it is to be used in New Testament worship, then a commandment of God—such as we have in the Old Testament—must be shown for its introduction. Needless to say, there is no such commandment to be found in the whole New Testament. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, that deals so largely with questions bearing on the two dispensations, there is no indication of the retention of instrumental music. This is all the more remarkable, because in the thirteenth chapter, while the Hebrews are reminded that, notwithstanding the passing away of the old dispensation, brotherly love, hospitality, contentment, chastity, etc., and the sacrifice of praise, which is "the fruit of the lips," are to remain, but there is not a word about instrumental music. To those who advocate the use of instrumental music in the public worship of the New Testament Church, we ask this question: **On what ground is a part of the typical ritual of a vanished and abrogated dispensation introduced into the worship of the new dispensation?** Once admit the principle, and does it not follow, as a necessary consequence, that the whole burdensome ritual—with its sacrifices, its feast days, its Sabbaths and its new moons—must be introduced? It is to be feared that the whole explanation of the desire for instrumental music is to be found in the tide of spiritual declension that is spreading over professing Christians.

Objections: We have no intention of meeting those who can give no higher reason for their attitude in favour of the use of instrumental music in divine worship than their own taste. This is trifling with the gravity of the question, and an appeal is made to a standard that has absolutely no authority in a matter that concerns the public worship of God.

(1) The great majority of those who object to the use of instrumental music in public worship have no objections to use the psalms in praise in which there are many references to instruments of music. The same argument, if carried through would make us not only use instrumental music, but sacrifices, etc., which are as frequently mentioned. And when we endeavour to sing with David,

"Do thou with hyssop sprinkle me,
I shall be cleansed so."

then, if we would carry through the above argument, it would be necessary to have a basin of sacrificial blood and hyssop to give effect to his prayer. Needless to say, such an argument leads to endless absurdities.

(2) God Himself sanctioned the use of instrumental music, therefore we ought not to condemn what He ordered. He also commanded the Jews to offer sacrifices but a sacrifice offered now would be a very sinful proceeding. Under the Old Testament economy the male children were to be circumcised, but we are not commanded to do so now.

(3) The use of instrumental music in divine worship is nowhere condemned in the New Testament. This line of argument we have already shown is unscriptural. The law, as expressed in the Word of God, is whatsoever is not commanded is prohibited.

(4) Instrumental music is used in heaven, and what is good enough for the redeemed saints ought to be good enough for us. This is an argument often used by thoughtless people as if it admitted of no answer. Apart altogether from the extremely carnal view that these entertain of the nature of heaven, of the saints spending their time playing upon material harps, there is this further to be said about their argument. We have it on the authority of the highest that the saints in heaven neither marry nor are given in marriage. Will those who use the above argument say, what is good enough for them ought to be good enough for us? Then the saints in heaven are represented as wearing white robes and having palms in their hands. Shall we argue therefrom that our congregations here below should be dressed in white and carry palms in their hands?

(5) Some say we are too narrow-minded in this matter; we ought to enlarge our outlook by a study of the attitude of Paul to such-like questions. He was no narrow-minded bigot, it is said; he became all things to all men. So ought we to use those means which will most readily influence people, to bring them under the hearing of the Gospel. Now, it is still true, as it was in the days of Peter, that the "unlearned and unstable" wrest the words of the Apostle, though it can scarcely be said in the above instance that the Apostle's words contain "some things hard to be understood." When Paul said he became a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks, it must appear to every intelligent reader that he did not mean that he renounced his Christianity and became a Jew again, nor that he became a heathen in order that he might win the Greeks to Christ. What he did is intelligible enough. In his anxiety to bring them to Christ, he endeavoured to put himself in their place, to feel their prejudices, and to realise their difficulties.

—Rev. Donald Beaton.

Justin Martyr, who lived in the second century: Plain singing is not childish, but only the singing with lifeless organs, with dancing and symbols. Whence the use of such instruments, and other things fit for children, is laid aside, and plain singing only retained.

Martin Luther maintained that they were the ensigns of Baal.

John Calvin: In Popery there was a ridiculous imitation of the Jews. While they adorned their temples, and valued themselves as having made the worship of God more splendid and inviting, they employed organs and many other such ludicrous things, by which the Word and worship of God are exceedingly profaned, the people being much more attached to those rites than to the understanding of the Divine Word.—Calvin on 1 Sam. xviii, 1-9.

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q.50: What is required in the second commandment.

A.: The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing and keeping pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in His Word. (Proof text: Math. 28, 20).

