

The Wisdom of God: Instrumental Music in Worship

“When you come to a fork in the road, take it.” Yogi Berra

“We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. ²For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him. ⁴God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.” **Hebrews 2:1-4**

Jesus Christ is the author of salvation (Hebrews 2:10). He is the mediator of the New Covenant (Hebrews 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). He has all authority in matters relating to salvation (Matthew 9:1-8; 28:18; John 5:26-27; 10:18 17:1-2; Romans 13:1; Ephesians 1:17-21; Colossians 1:9-10; Revelation 2:26-28; 12:10). His New Covenant is superior to the Old Covenant (Galatians 4:21-31; Hebrews 7:22; 8:6-13; 9:1-15).

Jesus, the Word, had at His disposal, the authority to establish the New Testament. He *could have* required a temple made with hands. He didn't. He *could have* required trumpets, incense, and a special group of individuals to take care of His house of worship. He didn't. He could have required anything He wanted... And He had the power to make His will known.

Jesus selected and communicated through His servants the apostles. By observing their work with the early church, we deduce a pattern of worship and practice that we as Christians try to imitate. It is my contention that Jesus selected exactly what He wanted His followers to do in worship... and the wisdom of God was behind those selections.

It is my opinion that the argument of silence used in conjunction with the authority principle concerning the worship of the early church is misnamed... or at least poorly thought out. It seems to me that *the force* of the argument should focus on the *intentionality* of the selections of Jesus... not on what he did not select.

For instance, when God told Noah to build the ark, He specified a specific type of wood. He specified the length and the width and other details. God had at his disposal all the wisdom to choose any of the woods of the earth... But in His wisdom, He chose gopher wood (cypress). Let's think about that. Obviously, God needed to select a wood that was available and in enough quantity so Noah could complete the work. He needed to select the wood that Noah could cut and shape and join together. He needed a wood that would resist becoming water-logged. The wisdom of God selected cypress wood based on the needs of the times. Why didn't God select oak, or pine or olive wood? I've always wondered about that. Now I think I know. God selected cypress because it was the only wood available that would survive the length of time it took to build the ark! Termites can easily destroy pine, oak, or olive wood within a few years of contact with the ground. It took Noah 120 years to build the ark! I never thought about that before I started working with wood in a southern state. Noah did not need to calculate his needs through trial and error; it was the wisdom of God that guided the process.

In the same way I suggest that a cappella singing was Jesus' *selection* for his New Covenant. Jesus was aware of the music played in the Temple area. Trumpet blasts were commanded by God to assemble the Israelites (Numbers 10:1-10) and other instruments were used by David to honor the Lord (1 Chronicles 16:4; 23:5; 2 Chronicles 29:20-36). He was aware of other occasions when the Jews used instrumental music (Matthew 11:16-19). He knew of these rituals yet said nothing about them to his disciples. He could have required similar instruments in the New Covenant worship, but they were *not selected*. He could have selected them, but he did not.

Since Jesus was ushering in a New Covenant for all peoples of the earth, why would he select instruments that may not be available to all people at all times? Would He force the Gentiles to worship with Jewish instruments? Would He force Jews to use instruments used by the Gentiles in the pagan temples? I believe it was the wisdom of God. Every person, with very few exceptions, can use their voice to praise God. Singing in some form is universal. Nearly all can sing; fewer are skilled enough to play instruments of music. It is abundantly clear from the New Testament that singing is commanded and encouraged among those who honor and obey Jesus. It is also clear that although many other methods of making music were known to Jesus, he instructed his disciples through the Holy Spirit to command

singing in worship. This is not an argument from silence... **This is an argument based upon selection.**

Jesus selected from a wide variety of forms and instruments and settled upon a form available to all men in every age. We should respect the wisdom and authority of Jesus in this matter.

Look at all the confusion and disharmony that is being caused over this issue. In a similar way, *clapping along was singing* was practiced in free will worship under the direction of David. Clapping was not selected as part of New Testament worship. There is no instruction or praise for such demonstrations.

Congregations have debated these problems for years now and there seems no end in sight. Why can't we accept the wisdom of God and the authority of Jesus in His selection of vocal music? ***The power of the argument is in His selection not in His silence.***