

The word "INTRODUCTION" is written in a bold, green, serif font. It is flanked by four black musical notes (treble clef, eighth notes, and a quarter note) that appear to be floating around the text.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is He who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him...” (John 14:21). He also said, “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love...” (John 15:10). Plain talk. Hard to swallow, maybe, but not hard to understand. Put simply, love and obedience are inextricably linked, each following on the heels of the other. According to Jesus, to love Him is to obey Him, and to obey Him is to be loved by Him.

But one cannot begin to experience the above without knowledge of the commandments.

The commandments of Jesus exist throughout the pages of the New Testament, from Matthew to Revelation, not just in the “gospels” (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) as some have supposed. For Jesus made His commands not only verbally, but vicariously; He spoke not only by His own mouth, but by the mouths of His apostles (Matthew 28:20). Their commands (with rare exception, e.g. 1 Corinthians 7:12) are His commands. The apostle Paul may have been appealing to this very truth when he wrote: “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37).

Jesus never gave a command concerning music in the Christian assembly--the time for such instruction had apparently not yet come. His apostle, however, did speak on the subject. In his writings we find Jesus' will on the subject.

THE APOSTLE'S TEACHING

Paul wrote: “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:18-19). He also wrote: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Colossians 3:16). Still again, he wrote: “I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding” (1 Corinthians 14:15). What was Paul's continual instruction to the church concerning their music? Sing!

“Sing,” he says...not play. And with this instruction the whole of the New Testament agrees. Search the New Testament for all passages relating to music in the Lord's church, and no references to instrumental music will be found (what a stark contrast to the Old Testament! Surely such a shift in God's revelation should be given careful consideration). The only New Testament appearances of instruments in non-secular music are to be found in Revelation (5:8; 14:2; 15:2), a book

featuring apocalyptic symbolism clearly not to be taken literally (and even if it were to be taken literally, there would still be no mandate for instruments in the church, since all the passages describe events in heaven).

So what does this all mean? Some would say it means nothing. They would argue that since the use of instruments was commanded by God for the Jews under the law of Moses, instruments in corporate worship are acceptable for the church in the Christian era—never mind their absence in New Testament Scripture. But this is dangerous reasoning. Would we be willing to bring incense-burning into our assemblies? Would we view with appreciation the stoning of a rebellious son? Likely not, yet both were commanded under the Old Covenant just like instrumental music. It is apparent that the law of Moses was for a different time, the New Testament for ours. What's more, the New Testament says concerning the law of Moses that Jesus “has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Colossians 2:14).

THE TESTIMONY OF HISTORY

Church history acknowledges the absence of instruments in Christian assemblies until the seventh century A.D., some six hundred years after the death of the apostles! The writings of men living during those intervening centuries are instructive:

Clement of Alexandria (d. cir. 215 A.D.) wrote:

“Let the pipe be resigned to The shepherds, and the flute to the superstitious who are engrossed in idolatry. For, in truth, such instruments are to be banished from the temperate banquet being more suitable to beasts than men, and the more irrational portion of mankind... [W]e must be on guard against whatever titillates eye and ear...”

“The one instrument of peace, the word alone by which we honor God, is what we employ. We no longer employ the ancient psaltery and trumpet, and timbrel, and flute...”

(Paedagogos/The Instructor, ch. 5, bk 2).

John Chrysostom (347?-407) wrote:

“...[T]he church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre with a different tone indeed but much more in accordance with piety. Here there is no need for the cithara, or for stretched strings, or for the plectrum, or for art, or for any instrument; but, if you like, you may yourself become a cithara...”
(Exposition of Psalm 41).

Eusebius, father of church history, wrote:

“Of old at the time of the circumcisions... it was not inappropriate to send up hymns to God with the psalterion and cithara and to do this on Sabbath days...We render our hymn with a living psalterion and a living cithara with spiritual songs. The

unison voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument”

(commentary on Psalm 92:2-3).



Employing instrumental music in the assembly puts a congregation in the precarious position of practicing something foreign to the New Testament and to its earliest followers. However, by practicing unaccompanied (a cappella) singing, a group of believers can rest assured that it is obeying the Lord's commands, neither adding to nor taking away from New Testament teaching. Such obedience comes with a promise: "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love..." (John 15:10).

Church of Christ
Lawrence, KS

201 North Michigan
Lawrence, KS 66044
(785) 838-9795
<http://www.lawrencecoc.org>



Music Matters

by
John
Morris

The text "by John Morris" is surrounded by several musical notes in green and black, including a quarter note, a half note, and a eighth note.