Genesis - Commentaries by Clifford Henry Brown

Instrumental Music in Christian Worship and Testimony: Has It a Scriptural Sanction?, Appendix

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To those who may desire a brief summary of the foregoing views as to the use of musical instruments in Christian worship and testimony, we here reproduce a short article which appeared in The Young Christian magazine under the caption, “A Young People’s Meeting—The Question Box.”

Question: Why are musical instruments not used in the meetings of those gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Answer: True Christian worship is “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). It is “with the Spirit” and “by the Spirit” (1 Cor. 14:15-16; Phil. 3:3 JND) and needs no fleshly aids. The Holy Spirit, indwelling the believer individually and the assembly collectively (John 14:17) is the power of Christian worship. Anything else ministers only to the flesh and, distracting the heart from the true Object of worship, is only a hindrance. It is a safe thing to say that anything that mere man in the flesh can enjoy is not suitable in the things of God. We may pray and sing and bless God in the Spirit, but has an organ a spirit? Musical instruments would no doubt aid the accuracy and the time of our singing but would hinder the spiritual character of worship, and this alone is what is acceptable to God.

No heart but of the Spirit taught,Makes melody to Thee.

When we note the origin of musical instruments (Gen. 4:21), we learn that, like other things not wrong themselves, they were first used by the family of Cain to help them forget God.

This is still the use to which they are put by the world. In Daniel 3:5,7,10,15, instruments of music were used in connection with idolatrous worship. Appealing to the religious sense of the flesh, they produce a false sense of worship.

Musical instruments had their place in the Old Testament and will again be used in the Millennium (2 Chron. 5:11-13; Psa. 150). They, like priestly garments and sacrifices, are connected with an earthly sanctuary. But Christian worship is of faith, not by sight; heavenly, not earthly.

Again, Matthew 9:15 contains an important principle relating to this subject. The Lord Jesus, despised and rejected by this world, is absent, and this should in large measure characterize our worship. The church feels the absence of the Bridegroom! The blare of trumpets is surely not consistent with our relation to the Lord as the Absent One! How can we worship Him, whom the world has put to death, with the very same instruments which they employ to put Him out of their thoughts? Is not our position in this respect that of Israel in Babylon (Psa. 137:14)? Their harps hung on the willows. “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” Subduedness should characterize our worship, while we think of our Lord as the Rejected One and mourn His absence.

How about musical instruments in connection with the gospel? Here, again, the appeal would be to what the flesh enjoys and would have no power over the conscience. The large place given to elaborate musical services in the camp is, no doubt, an attraction to many, and that God in His sovereignty could use the playing of a hymn, even by an unsaved musician, to the saving of a soul, we do not question. But could we who are gathered to the name of the Lord Jesus, outside the camp (Heb. 13:13), consistently with our heavenly calling, use in our service in the gospel what God has left out as unsuited to Him in worship in His presence and think it suited to Him in His service in the gospel, either to children or adults? Rather, may we ever seek, through grace, what is suited to His presence and pleasing to Him.

Does the Word of God forbid us to possess musical instruments and use them in our homes? No. Christians are left free to be led by the grace of God which has saved them and to be constrained by the love of Christ, to live, not to themselves, but to Him who died for them and rose again (Rom. 12:12).

In conclusion, while singing has a recognized place in Christian service (Acts 16:25; Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19), musical instruments are never once mentioned in connection with it.