



Preparing Souls To Serve The Lord

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A "CONTEMPORARY DISCUSSION" CRITIQUE

By

Brian Kenyon

On February 11, 2005, a "contemporary discussion" occurred at Freed-Hardeman University concerning the question, "Should the use of instrumental music in worship be a barrier to fellowship with others, such as Independent Christian Churches?" Defending the Scriptural position, that it should be a barrier to fellowship, was Marlin Connelly, a communications and Bible professor at David Lipscomb University for over 33 years (retiring in 2000) and former pulpit minister for the Hillsborough church of Christ in Nashville. Defending the unscriptural position, that it should not be a barrier to fellowship, was Phillip Morrison, who served on the *Wineskins* magazine staff from 1992-2001, and who is currently an elder at the Woodmont Hills church of Christ in Nashville.

Why Such A Discussion?

Moderator, Earl Edwards, publically declared in his introduction that FHU's position is that the use of "instrumental music is a fellowship issue," and that its use involves disrespecting God's word. Edwards said that this discussion came as a result of recent events. About a year ago, he and

others were interviewed by the *Christian Chronicle* concerning their opinion about churches of Christ who were introducing instrumental music in their worship. About the same time,

Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; (Eph. 5:19, KJV)

Edwards said, several from the lectureship committee, as they traveled throughout the brotherhood, "began hearing that in 2006...there would be some churches of Christ making simultaneous announcements...that we made a mistake in opposing instrumental music."

Edwards continued by saying that because of FHU's position that instrumental music is a fellowship issue, such news was "obviously disturbing to those of us here. We felt it indicated a lack of knowledge and a lack of study of the issues involved, and so we planned this particular discussion to help us to be better informed on the matter. We believe we have a responsibility to be proactive and try to help resolve such issues. We believe that the presentation of

both sides will result in a victory for the truth."

Why This Article?

It is not the purpose of this article to give a word for word description of the entire discussion. FHU did a quality job in recording the discussion in its entirety, and it is available from them in both audio and visual formats. This article will focus on the "arguments" presented by Morrison as to why he thought the use of instrumental music in worship should not be a barrier to fellowship. Unfortunately, there are many brethren who think the same as he does, even in Central Florida. It is hoped, therefore, that this article will expose the rationale that is presently being used to justify the use of instrumental music in worship, to give conscientious Christians principles to better defend the truth, and to open the eyes of the indifferent in many congregations, both within their leadership and within their general memberships. The faithful church of Christ must rise to the occasion, and turn to "flight the armies of the aliens" (Heb. 11:34)!

Who Determines The Standard of Fellowship?

The first defense of the

unscriptural position is the claim that the church of Christ has not been consistent in determining the standards of fellowship. Morrison said, "I'm puzzled about the criteria we use in determining who is in fellowship and who is not." He mentioned that while growing up he never knew of a church who made such "life and death issues" as carnal warfare, capital punishment, and abortion matters of fellowship, implying that instrumental music is not as important as those issues, yet we insist on making it a matter of fellowship. He continued, "I think we have been arbitrarily and even capricious in deciding very selectively when fellowship is to be extended. I just think it's time we look for ways to celebrate our likenesses rather than our differences." He then appealed to the church at Corinth, pointed out their many sins, and said, "yet, they were all brothers and sisters called into fellowship with God and one another." He then added, "In that [Corinth's] catalog of sins, instrumental music wouldn't even rate a mention."

This first "defense" begins and ends with error. First, "we" are not the ones who determine the "standards of fellowship." Paul called upon us to "keep [preserve, NAS] the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3). God has already given the standards of unity, summarized by the "seven ones" (Eph. 4:4-6). We must adhere to God's requirements in all matters, including fellowship. John said, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 Jn. 9). Are matters pertaining to worship part of the "doctrine of Christ"? Most certainly (Mt. 15:8-9; Jn. 4:23-24)! Concerning carnal warfare, capital

punishment, and abortion, the Bible does teach on these subjects (Rom. 13:1-7, et al.). One thing, of course, is different between two of these issues and matters of worship; namely, with carnal warfare and capital punishment, Scripture allows one to participate in just causes, but it does not force one to do so if it violates his conscience, whereas with worship, we "must worship God in spirit and in truth" (Jn. 4:24). That being said, if a person believes and/or practices an unscriptural position on these issues, it does become a matter of fellowship (cf. 2 Jn. 9-11), whether or not we viewed it that way in the past! The church at Corinth obviously did not make fornication a matter of fellowship until Paul wrote them (1 Cor. 5:1-13). Does

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. (Col. 3:16, KJV)

this mean that just because they did not make it a matter of fellowship that it was not a matter of fellowship? Certainly not! We are not the standard!

Second, if all religious people are to "celebrate our likenesses," then how would God's people be distinct from the rest of the world? Remember, the church has been "called...out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). This position falsely assumes that all religious people are God's people. Is the proponent trying to say that the Roman Catholic priest is the same as me? Are we to think that God accepts all people even though they teach diametrically opposed doctrines? "God is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor.

14:33)!

Have We Misunderstood Colossians and Ephesians?

The second defense of the unscriptural position is the claim that the church of Christ over all these years has misunderstood Ephesians 5:18-19 and Colossians 3:16. Morrison said, "In Ephesians, Paul said that music is an appropriate expression of an exuberant, spirit-filled heart that cannot refrain from proclaiming its joyful adoration for the most high God. But there isn't anything in that text or the Colossians text that regulates the kind of musical worship that one offers." He continued, "I think we have concluded that the early church did not use instrumental music and then

we have gone back to look for a way to make *psallo* fit that definition, that conclusion. If that is what we have done, that's not exegesis, that's eisegesis, and it's not a fair treatment of Scripture." He then, unbelievably, said, "It's disingenuous [hypocritical] to stand in a church building not authorized by Scripture, behind a

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podium not authorized by Scripture, to use a microphone not authorized by Scripture, to use a hymn book not authorized by Scripture, to use a tuning fork not authorized by Scripture, and argue that you can't use a piano because it's not authorized by Scripture."

This shows a glaring misunderstanding of authority, exegesis, and expediency. While it may be true that the only imperatives (commands) in the passages cited above are "be [not] filled [with wine]" and "be filled [with the Spirit]" (Eph. 5:18) and "Let [the word of Christ] dwell" (Col. 3:16), the participles in the passages—"speaking," "singing," and "making melody" (Eph. 5:19) and "teaching," "admonishing," and "singing" (Col. 3:16)—like the imperatives, are present tense and show continuous action in fulfilling the imperatives. The statement that there is nothing in these texts that "regulates the kind of musical worship" is indeed an example of "eisegesis" (reading into the text something that is not there). The text plainly declares what kind of music is authorized—singing! As M. C.

Kurfees, in his book, *Instrumental Music in Worship*, proved almost a hundred years ago, the Greek verb *psallo* meant "singing" when the New Testament was written, and gives no support to the theory that mechanical instruments could be included.

Not only does Morrison not understand expediency, but he plainly declares that we do not need Bible authority. He said that we use church buildings, podiums, microphones, hymn books, and tuning forks "not authorized by Scripture." Yet, he uses church buildings, podiums, microphones, and song books. By the practice of his belief, he is preaching that we do

not need authority. God, however, says we do need authority for all we say and do (Col. 3:17)! The truth is that church buildings, podiums, hymnals, microphones, and tuning forks are matters of expediency. They do not change singing, but give advantage to singing. Instruments of music, however, add something unauthorized to singing.

Are We Being Divisive?

The third defense of the unscriptural position is the claim that those in the church of Christ who insist that the use of instrumental music in worship is a fellowship issue are being divisive. Morrison said, "We cannot afford

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. (2 John 1:9-11, KJV)

further fractioning of Christianity." By "Christianity," he clearly included denominationalism—all groups represented by "the multiplicity of church buildings that we've grown accustomed to seeing." He continued, "I'm afraid that the unity plea championed by people like Stone and Campbell has little credibility these days, seeing that their followers have fractured into at least twenty-four different, definable groups." He concluded this by saying, "Over a period of years I began to understand a great truth: I won't, and I can't, ever get everything just right. None of us individually, nor we as a body of believers, ever get it all just right."

In answer to this, God's plan for unity requires that we "all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10 cf. Jn. 17:20-21). We have Bible authority for a capella singing. Where is the authority to add mechanical instruments of music? Authority in worship does matter—just ask Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2). While it is nothing new for those practicing truth to be accused of being "troublers" (1 Kgs. 18:17), the real "troublers" are those who insist on bringing unauthorized practices into worship. They are the ones dividing the church. Members of the church of Christ are not followers of Stone or Campbell, but are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in His light are we to walk (1 Jn. 1:7).

That we may not "ever get everything just right" does not mean there is not a correct pattern to which we must adhere. Jesus said that we must keep even the "least commandments (Mt. 5:19).

Conclusion

Much more could be said in refutation of these justifications for instrumental music in worship, but space simply will not allow it. However, what has been said should motivate all who care about truth to study their Bibles, Scripturally know why they believe and practice what they do, and defend the truth!

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. (Col. 3:17, KJV)

Gene Burgett Report

Lectureship time is the busiest time of the year for us associated with the Florida School of Preaching. A successful lectureship is hard work, and I am sure it crosses the minds of some that a few days off to rest at the close of the lectureship would be a welcome event. However, no such break is possible, instead we all immediately plunge into the work of training men to preach.

Brian Kenyon and I attended the Freed-Hardeman lectures the first week of February. Our display always receives a good deal of attention from those seeking sound Bible material. Once again our books, CD's and study notes were a popular item. Brian's wife, Amber, also took time off from her job to accompany us and man (or woman) the Florida School of Preaching display. She does a great job of selling our materials.

Regarding the Freed-Hardeman trip there are also several people who deserve our thanks. Every year Amber's parents, Jim and Karen Davis, provide us a place to stay for the week. They are hospitable people and we owe them a great debt. Also, lectureship attendees have come to look forward to the citrus provided at our booth

free of charge. We appreciate Larry Lloyd and Charles Thornhill allowing us to liberate some of their grapefruit to take on the trip.

God willing, by the time you read this report I will have already spoken at New Port Richey, Florida, Savannah, Georgia, and Gainesville, Florida. My schedule for 2005 is filling up faster than any previous year. I already have events scheduled for the months of March, April, May, June, July, August, and October. If you have been planning to have me come and speak with you or your congregation about the work of the Florida School of Preaching, please do not wait until the last minute.

If you know anyone interested in preaching the gospel but in need of further training, do not hesitate to provide me a way to get in touch with him. If you are interested in supporting the work of the Florida School of Preaching, give me a call.

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