

Part II: on the question of instrumental accompaniment (IA)

Introduction

At first glance, this may seem like an unusual question: “Should we have instrumental accompaniment as part of singing in worship in the gathered church?”

A. Why might it seem unusual to question the legitimacy of IA? [*we have it*]

1) It may seem odd to ask this question because we have instrumental accompaniment.

It is part of our practice. Does not this fact already answer the question and thereby render it mute and irrelevant? Answer: no, it is not a mute question because the command to test all things and hold fast to the good involves testing things we have in place (not just new things that come up) in an open & hearty process of critical self-examination (as part of our regular diet on the word as we grow into maturity in righteous living personally and corporately).

[*Why do you think this is not a mute and irrelevant Q? cf. OMH and growth by critical self-examination*]

2) It may seem odd because instrumental accompaniment is almost universal.

Probably, most of us came to Christian faith in a context where worship on Sunday included instrumental accompaniment. Thus, it seems out of place, even quirky, to question the legitimacy of something so entrenched in the churches whether Catholic, Protestant, or Reformed (K. Stewart of the SFPC notes that this may make one feel like you are “defending a novel absurdity”). Does not this fact already answer the question as well, and thereby render the question mute and irrelevant? Answer: no, it is not a mute question in this light because the command to test all things must surely have the goal of testing our traditions no matter how widespread they may be. Tradition may violate Scripture; therefore, we must be particularly diligent to engage in an open and hearty process of critical self-examination of tradition.

[*To what principle does this necessity of diligence point us like an arrow to its target? It points us to the RP; we need God’s commands not men’s traditions*]

B. Why does church history make it odd if we do *not* question the legitimacy of IA?

Here is a rough and ready perspective on church history regarding IA. It is reasonable to conclude that in the years before and during the time of Christ and the apostles there was no use of instruments in the synagogue, which paved the way for NT churches in contrast to the temple. There was no unchallenged use of instruments in worship in Christian churches for twelve centuries until Rome introduced it (IA appears in the 8th century but with challenge). From Calvin forward almost all the reformers opposed the use of IA in worship (except Luther) as did the Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians, though it spread from Luther throughout Protestantism. It appears to be historically true that Churches of the Reformation adopted IA gradually due to the influence of the revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries more by concession to the growing practice and less by considerations of Scriptural warrant. Accordingly, it is a fact that most Christians today experience IA as part of worship by an inheritance of tradition. Therefore, it is odd if people of reformed persuasion do not question the legitimacy of IA as part of Sunday worship (odd because churches of the reformation promote sola Scriptura in earnest).

[*Does church history make a claim on us since we live in the present not in the past? Yes, it gives us perspectives so we can see things more clearly; it records the working of the Spirit in gradual steps that we must humbly appreciate.*]

C. Why does the NT regarding IA make it odd if we do *not* question IA?

Perhaps, we can make the point with power if we ask another Q: where do you find evidence for the use of IA in worship in the NT? Once you get past the harps of the book of Revelation (noting that they do not govern local church worship on earth), what passage would you cite to show that singing was accompanied by instruments? One passage that may help us along these lines is Ephesians 5.19, but how it may help is not initially obvious. Would you find IA there if left to your own study (addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart)? We will consider this passage more fully later; for now we need to note that the NT is 99%, if not 100%, silent on IA.

[Why does this silence make it odd if we do not question the legitimacy of IA given that arguments from silence are usually weak arguments? Why is silence extremely important in this discussion of the 2nd commandment and the regulative principle?

Because we need God's word on how we are to worship Him; what He says; when there is silence, we have no word from Him, which we need.

What does this test? It tests our adherence to RP, to sola Scriptura, and to the spirit and intent of the 2nd commandment, namely, that God is jealous as to how He is worshipped; so, we take that jealousy to heart when we wait on His command; if x is not commanded for worship then x is forbidden.]