

# **Musical Instruments In Worship**

## **By Elder David Pyles**

Any Bible-based Christian is apt to be very unhappy about the direction our country is headed, but one thing all Christians need to seriously consider is that we are ourselves partly responsible for the trends we are observing. We have not been nearly as effective as we should have been in teaching the citizens of our nation the principles of the word of God. The forces opposing Christianity are now formidable, and it would be naïve to suppose that we can counter their corrupting influences on all men, but we can surely do better than we have done.

This is proven simply by considering our failings even with respect to our own youth. There has likely never been a time in history when churches have poured more money into youth programs than over the last few decades, yet judging from the results, one could scarcely call these efforts a success, and by some metrics, one would be constrained to say they have been an abysmal failure. It is time to consider the possibility that there is something fundamentally wrong about what modern Christianity is doing.

I believe some of the error is rooted in a misuse of music. It has become a dominant part of many worship services, displacing former focus upon Bible instruction. Also, old hymns that were well-designed to teach have been displaced by modern music that is notoriously shallow in the content of its lyrics, and even if there were something of substance in those lyrics, none would be able to hear it over the roar of the musical instruments. One of the most important verses in the New Testament addressing music is Colossians 3:16. The emphasis of this verse is upon instructional value, not on appeal to the natural ear.

Most today would be surprised to know that Christians in former times had a very different attitude about music than what we observe today. They absolutely would have rejected what is now commonplace in nearly all denominations. The following list of quotes will show this. As one reads these, they should bear in mind that all of the men being quoted were leaders in some of the greatest religious revivals of all time. Unlike what we are today, they were men who reshaped the world in which they lived:

**Martin Luther (Lutheran):** "The organ in the worship is the insignia of Baal. " – McClintock & Strong's Encyclopedia, Volume VI, page 762.

**John Calvin (Presbyterian):** "Musical instruments in celebrating the praise of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews." – John Calvin's Commentary on Ps. 33.

**John Wesley (Methodist/Anglican):** "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen." – Clarke's Commentary, Vol. 4, page 684.

**Adam Clarke (Methodist):** "I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them (musical instruments) productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire; but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity." – Clarke's Commentary, Vol. 4, page 684.

**Charles Spurgeon (Baptist):** "David appears to have had a peculiarly tender remembrance of the singing of the pilgrims, and assuredly it is the most delightful part of worship and that which comes nearest to the adoration of heaven. What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettiness of a quartet, bellows, and pipes. We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it." – Spurgeon's Commentary on Psalm 42.

**Andrew Fuller (Baptists):** "The history of the church during the first three centuries affords many instances of primitive Christians engaging in singing, but no mention, (that I recollect) is made of instruments. (If my memory does not deceive me) it originated in the dark ages of popery,

when almost every other superstition was introduced. At present, it is most used where the least regard is paid to primitive simplicity.” – Complete works of Andrew Fuller, Vol 3, page 520.

**David Benedict (Baptist):** “In my earliest intercourse among this people, congregational singing generally prevailed among them... This instrument (i.e. the organ), which from time immemorial has been associated with cathedral pomp and prelatical power, and has always been the peculiar favorite of great national churches, at length found its way into Baptist sanctuaries, and the first one ever employed by the denomination in this country, and probably in any other, might have been standing in the singing gallery of the Old Baptist meeting house in Pawtucket, about forty years ago, where I then officiated as pastor (1840)... Staunch old Baptists in former times would as soon tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries, and yet the instrument has gradually found its way among them... How far this modern organ fever will extend among our people, and whether it will on the whole work a RE-formation or DE-formation in their singing service, time will more fully develop.” – Fifty Years Among the Baptists, pages 204-207.