

Why Aren't Instruments Part of the Pattern

Sometimes I fear we have become a people of rules for rules' sake. No doubt, God has given us a law (**I Corinthians 9:21**). Certainly there are rules we should follow. But our God is not a capricious and arbitrary God. He has not established a pattern simply to see how well we can follow a pattern. He is not simply testing our ability to follow directions. God has a reason for His pattern. I believe **Colossians 2:20-23** demonstrates this. There are no rules just for rules' sake. God is interested in helping us overcome the indulgences of the flesh. If God were actually telling us not to touch, taste, or handle something, He would have a reason for it.

So, why aren't instruments of music part of God's pattern? I fear sometimes we today treat this in a vacuum. We have come up with our means of establishing authority and simply have determined that instruments are against the rules. So, we shouldn't have them. Is that why they aren't part of the pattern? Simply to see if we can follow some instructions? I don't think so.

First, we do recognize that instruments are not part of the New Testament pattern. All we ever see in the New Testament is singing. In **Ephesians 5:19** we are commanded to sing. In **Colossians 3:16**, we are commanded to sing. We see examples of singing (e.g. **Acts 16:25**). But we never once see examples of playing instruments to worship God or edify one another.

But is the point simply to figure out a rule and see how well we can follow it? Or is there a deeper purpose behind this pattern?

I can't help but notice when we go into the second century of Christianity and see the arguments made by those Christians against instrumental music as worship and edification, they actually put forth a reason, not just a rule.

Clement of Alexandria, who lived from 153 A.D. to 217 A.D. wrote on the subject of instruments. In one place, he wrote:

Therefore He cried to humanity, "Let every breath praise the Lord," because He cares for every breathing thing which He hath made. For man is truly a pacific instrument; while other instruments, if you investigate, you will find to be warlike, inflaming to lusts, or kindling up amours, or rousing wrath.

In their wars, therefore, the Etruscans use the trumpet, the Arcadians the pipe, the Sicilians the pectides, the Cretans the lyre, the Lacedaemonians the flute, the Thracians the horn, the Egyptians the drum, and the Arabians the cymbal. The one instrument of peace, the Word alone by which we honour God, is what we employ. We no longer employ the ancient psaltery, and trumpet, and timbrel, and flute, which those expert in war and contemners of the fear of God were wont to make use of also in the choruses at their festive assemblies; that by such strains they might raise their dejected minds (Ante-Nicene Fathers, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995, pp 248-249).

Now, I admit that I don't agree with Clement's approach on the instrument question in every point. Further, Clement's writings are not our authority and guide. But I thought Clement's reason for no instruments was profound. Did you see it? The instruments are means of arousing the flesh. They are "warlike, inflaming to lusts, or kindling up amours, or rousing wrath." The pagans used them in their festive assemblies so that "they might raise their dejected minds." For Clement the lack of instruments was not just a matter of keeping some rules. There was a real reason. We are spiritual people. Our worship is spiritual. Those who worship God are to worship Him in spirit and truth (**John 4:24**). Worshipping God and edifying one another is not to be about our flesh. It is not about making us feel good, arousing our passions, satisfying our flesh. It is about connecting our spirits to God. So, Clement explained, we don't use instruments in our assemblies like the pagans do because what we are doing is not about the fleshly passions.

Go back to **Colossians 2:20-23**. Paul didn't want us simply submitting to rules for the sake of rules that had nothing to do with protecting against the indulgences of the flesh. But Clement argues this issue of God's pattern for New Testament worship very much has to do with protecting against the flesh.

God doesn't have to always spell out His reasons behind His pattern. But we can rest assured there are reasons. Why aren't instruments part of the pattern? Because we worship in spirit, not in the flesh.