

THINK

ON THESE THINGS

Philippians 4:8

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Why We Sing Without Instruments

By AL DIESTELKAMP

More than a century has come and gone since the issue of instrumental music in worship began to wreak havoc among the churches of our Lord. After the resulting division that took place, churches that rejected instruments in worship enjoyed a season of peace and growth before other innovations were introduced.

Even during that period of peace, Christians continued to be reminded of the principles that precluded the use of instruments in our worship of God. However, eventually brethren grew weary of hearing sermons on an issue that seemed “settled once and for all,” and the issue was put on the shelf by many preachers and elders.

As a result, a generation has arisen that is not fully prepared, or even inclined, to militantly oppose instrumental music in worship. And while we don’t yet see a strong push

for the introduction of instrumental music, we are fooling ourselves if we think it is not on the horizon. Already, among churches that have a more liberal approach to the authority of the scriptures, an increasing number are gradually trending toward acceptance of instrumental accompaniment of songs, hymns and spiritual songs.

Because our practice is so noticeably different from other religious groups, it’s understandable that people will inquire as to why we don’t sing with instruments. Some have wondered if we’re “old fashioned” and think it’s too modern. If that were the case we would have a hard time explaining a number of things we use that are much more modern than instruments of music. No, that’s not a good reason for us to refuse instrumental music.

Nor is the reason we shun instruments because we *prefer* a capella singing. If that were the case we would simply take a vote on the issue. Our personal preferences

should not even be under consideration when it comes to worship. Our aim should be to please the Lord!

Some brethren, it seems, are embarrassed about our refusal to worship with instruments. When questioned, they apologetically explain that a capella music is a long-standing part of “our religious tradition.” That’s not a good reason either! The traditions of men (religious “hand-me-downs”) are not reliable in justifying a practice (Col. 2:8), nor should they be used as an excuse to object to one.

We have an obligation to prepare future generations to be able to choose between what is right and what is wrong, not only in their personal lives, but also as members of the body of Christ. Fathers, especially, are commanded to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). This cannot be done by asking them to simply rely on “our traditions.”

However, not all long-standing practices are traditions of men. The apostles Paul urged the saints in Thessalonica to “stand fast and hold the traditions you were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thess. 2:15). In contrast to the traditions of men, these are handed down by the word of God.

Such, I believe, is the case with the rejection of instrumental music in worship. Our only objection to this practice must be due to the absence of authority from God. We sometimes are challenged to prove that instrumental music in worship is wrong. The problem with that approach is the Bible doesn’t identify everything that is wrong. Instead, it identifies *some things* which are wrong, and authorizes *everything* that is right. Therefore, if it can’t be shown that it is *right* from what is written in the New Testament, then it must be *wrong*.

There is nothing wrong with defending instrumental music in worship, if in doing so you have your finger on the New Testament passage that authorizes it.

Answering popular attempts to justify instrumental music in worship:

“*The Bible doesn’t say not to sing with instruments*” — Neither does it say that we should not have butter or jam with the bread at the Lord’s supper. What proves too much, proves nothing!

“*David praised God with instruments*”— Yes, he did (Psa. 150), and also David had more than one wife. Does that authorize polygamy today? If not, why not?

“*There will be harps in Heaven*” — In fact, there will be 24 harps and golden bowls full of incense (Rev. 5:8). There are a lot of things about Heaven that will be quite different from the way things are in the church here on earth.

“*The Greek word Psallo (translated making melody) means to pluck a stringed instrument*” — Far be it from me to try to make an argument based on the original language, but you don’t have to be a Greek scholar to see that those who translated the Bible didn’t include that in their translations. What I read from those who have studied the language is that it meant simply to “pluck or twang.” Besides, the heart is the only instrument mentioned in the text.

“*When one is asked to sing, we do not necessarily expect singing without accompaniment*” — Though words have precise meanings we take many liberties with our English language which we dare not take with the words that are inspired of God.

THINKING ABOUT OUR PROSPERITY

By RAY FERRIS

There would be few who profess to be Christians who would not be familiar with the text in 1 Corinthians 16:2 that mentions prosperity: "Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." Other versions will have some variation in the wording of the text, including the expression "as he may prosper." What all of them seem to assert is the idea that what is to be done is to avoid the need for "gathering" when Paul comes, with others, in order to obtain the collected funds that were to be delivered to saints in Jerusalem. None of them translate the thought well, but I will not discuss that problem here.

What I want all who read these lines to concentrate on are the various ways the scriptures indicate the concept of "prosperity." The Greek term that is involved in this text is found in two other contexts (Rom. 1:10; 3 Jn. 2). In his explanation of the word *prosper*, W.E. Vine has the following:

PROSPER

EUODOŌ (εὐδοῶ), to help on one's way (*eu*, well, *hodos*, a way or journey), is used in the passive voice signifying to have a prosperous journey, Rom. 1:10; metaphorically, to prosper, be prospered, 1 Cor. 16:2, R.V., "(as) he may prosper." A.V., "(as God) hath prospered (him)," lit., "in whatever he may be prospered," i.e., in material things; the continuous tense suggests the successive circumstances of varying prosperity as week follows week; in 3 John 2, of the prosperity of physical and spiritual health.¶

An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words
Vol. 3, p.225

From this we should readily see there are four areas of prosperity mentioned in the New Testament. I believe the only one I have ever heard discussed is the one regarding our prosperity in material things. I have personally preached two sermons in which I have

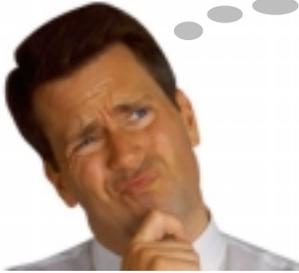
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discussed the others. We will note the usual one very briefly later in this article, but first let's think about the other three and the marvelous prosperity we have in these areas.

Prosperity in Travel

How long has it been since you, or some of your family members, has traveled on an airplane? We all make numerous long and short trips in our luxurious automobiles. We have buses, trains and taxis at our disposal in a moment's notice. If we do not know how to get to some location we get on *Mapquest* or turn on the GPS and know exactly how to go. In Romans 1:10 Paul is praying God will help him "have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you" that he might visit his brethren in Rome, "that I might impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye might be established." As you recall the details we have of Paul's "missionary journeys," imagine if he could have had the "prosperity" of travel we take for granted with no thought. And I presume you will remember from the record of when he finally made that trip to Rome (Ac. 27:1-28:16), that God truly prospered him even in that hazardous journey, and that he thanked God for it (Ac. 28:15). Truly *our travel* is by a prosperity that is amazing! We ought to thank God regularly for it.

Prosperity in Health

In 3 John 2 we read, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth." It may well be true that John's desire for Gaius to have prosperity, would include material things, especially when we realize he is being commended for his "charity" as he brought "forward on their journey after a godly sort" both brethren and strangers (vv.5-6). However, there seems to me (and to W.E. Vine), little question that John is wishing for Gaius prosperity in health.

How long has it been since you marveled at some of the incredulous things the medical profession has accomplished for someone in the field of physical health? The artificial limbs we see used with amazing dexterity are astonishing. Physicians transplant body organs from one person to another constantly, and if they can't find a transplant they may well make one that works quite well. It is routine for us to visit the doctor for any lack of prosperity in our health situation. Do you thank God regularly for the prosperity of your health, and perhaps what

is even more significant in some ways, for the amazing help you can get if there is any problem that is of real concern? I never dreamed when I was young that I would live to my current age. Not even when I was "three score and ten." But now it astonishes me what they have done to "fix" my problems: stints in my heart about eight years ago, help with my mini-stroke in January of this year, and a pacemaker one month later in February! Thank God for prosperity in the area of health.

Spiritual Prosperity

There can be absolutely no question that John regards Gaius to be blessed with great spiritual prosperity. Gaius had received the blessing of remission of his sins when he had "obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin," he had become a servant of righteousness (Rom. 6:17-18). All who obey from the heart the simple gospel plan for salvation have a soul that prospers at that point of obedience. They are then free from sin, but John expresses confidence that the soul of Gaius was continuing to prosper, and hoped he would do as well physically. Now ask yourself: Am I prospering as well spiritually as I am in health? If there is a problem, it is easier to get help, and more certain the problem can be "fixed," than going to your medical doctor. The Great Physician is never far from any one of us (Ac. 17:27-28; Phil. 4:4-5), and His remedy is more certain than that of any of those in the medical profession. There is a spiritual examination each of us needs to make regularly: "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Cor. 13:5a).

Conclusion

My first sermon that stressed the concepts of prosperity, was preached in Normal Illinois. I had asked brethren there to consider the subject of their prosperity in preparation for a sermon I planned to preach to challenge them to think about what Paul had said to the brethren in Corinth (1 Cor. 16:1-2) as he "ordered" them to give regularly for a special cause (saints in Jerusalem were in physical need) because God had prospered them in Corinth. In a later article I will plan to challenge all of you to think about your *real prosperity* in the material realm. Thanks for your consideration of these other matters of prosperity, and think very seriously about your material prosperity in the meantime. I think that next article will cause most of you to do some special thinking about that subject; thinking that you have not considered seriously before.

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Developing A Positive Mindset

By NATHAN COMBS

Are you a depressed person? Several years ago, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention announced in a study that approximately 1 in 10 Americans suffer from some degree of depression. While there are many legitimately depressed people who suffer from chemical imbalances, I believe that an inadequate (or non-existent) spiritual life is the root cause of most depression. As we learn from scripture, the only way to have a truly joyful life is in properly understanding God and seeing our lives through His eyes.

Although many passages can be used to illustrate joyful living, the letter to the Philippians best describes the mechanics of how a person can be joyful despite adverse conditions. As Paul dictated his letter to the Philippians, he was being held as a Roman prisoner. Since Paul was not a stationary preacher (he went on at least three missionary journeys around the Mediterranean), from a reader's perspective, he was in a frustrating situation. He was not at liberty to go to and fro teaching people; he had to wait for them to come to him. He was compelled to write four letters during this imprisonment (Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon) instead of visiting his brethren personally. Yet, despite his seemingly forlorn circumstances, Paul maintained his godly attitude, and gave us many hints throughout the letter on how to develop our own positive mindset.

Carefully notice how Paul began Philippians. In the introductory verses of greetings and thanksgiving, he didn't even mention his imprisonment until verse 7. When he finally did allude to his personal discomfort, it is only to further accentuate shared spiritual blessings. Instead of griping and complaining about his current situation, he chose to highlight the "good work" that was currently alive in the congregation, the "partnership in the gospel" that he enjoyed with them, and the fact that the Philippians were "partakers with me of grace" (ESV). Nothing was mentioned about the food, the room service (or lack thereof), the abuse he might have suffered from those imprisoning him, or the inconvenience of being shackled to

one locality. Wouldn't it have been excusable to seek commiseration and pity while going through the trials he faced? Evidently not. He deftly side stepped his woes and rejoiced.

In 1:12-18, Paul shed even more light on why he didn't give in to despondency. He concentrated on the unstoppable aspects of his life, namely, the things which had to do with God's overall plan for the world. Instead of complaining about his guards, he told the brethren about how the "whole imperial guard" knew about Christ.

The apostle also pointed out that although the brethren in Rome had apparently struggled with fear before, they were encouraged to speak more boldly because of Paul. Of those who taught, some did it because they evidently envied Paul's success and fame, but others preached Christ because they genuinely loved the Lord. In either case, however, the message of good news was marching on. The progress of the gospel could not be stopped, as history continued to demonstrate.

For example, in A.D. 303, the Roman emperor Diocletian issued an edict throughout his empire ordering the destruction of every Christian document within Rome's dominion. Yet, today, the New Testament is still preserved as part of the Bible (ironically the best-selling book of all time). In Acts 5, the apostles were arrested by the Jewish leadership and ordered to never again preach in the name of Christ. Yet, today, approximately one third of the world's population (2.2 billion people) claims to believe in Jesus and His teachings. Over and over again, history has proven the accuracy of Paul's indomitable attitude, that the progress of the gospel cannot be halted.

Yet how does this knowledge help us with bouts of cancer, the loss of a loved one, worldly families, or (in Paul's case) imprisonment for the faith? Even in the most extreme circumstances, how can we maintain the proper positive attitude God wants every Christian to have? Paul reveals that we can accomplish that by looking at God's big picture. In God's plan, the tool that He is using to change this world of sin and physical hurting is the power of the good news of Jesus. While Christ was on the earth, He did

heal certain individuals of physical diseases, but His primary mission was to save men's souls. He would not settle for temporarily patching us up; He died so that eternally we can be made complete with God. Often, when we become discouraged and depressed, it is because of personal problems in our individual lives. God's solution for personal depression is for us to look above our personal problems at the unstoppable plan God is bringing to fruition!

Only by viewing our lives through the lens of God can we achieve a positive attitude in the face of personal discomfort or pain. Paul's absorption of the mind of God is clearly seen in his oft-quoted lines, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Paul said that because it was precisely how God thought of Paul's life—he would be a useful Christian in life and united with his Lord in death. Wherever Paul was and in whatever circumstances he was in, God viewed him as an effective servant in the kingdom!

Taking on the mind of Christ and thinking as God would is an integral step of spiritual maturity. For example, in 1 Tim. 1:8-9, Paul writes that "the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient..." What did Paul mean? Are righteous people above the law? Certainly not! Paul's point is that righteous people don't have to be explicitly told not to "strike their fathers and mothers" because such a dishonorable thing does not even occur to them. When God strongly rebuked the Israelites for burning their children for Molech, he told them in Jeremiah 32:35 that such things did not "enter into My mind." Law is for people who don't have the mind of God.

Likewise, in Philippians 2:2-5, we get a sense of Paul's positive vision. Contained in these verses are several behavioral do's and don'ts. For example, Paul commands them to "do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." The climax of the section, however, is found in verse 5 when Paul says "have this mind among yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus." Why does God give us commands and instruction? To help us take on the mind of Jesus.

So how is a positive mindset truly attained? Is it through practicing yoga, sipping cups of special herbal tea, or inspirational pop culture books? On the contrary, a positive mindset is gained by taking on the mind of Jesus Christ and thinking like our Creator. If we view the world and our own personal lives through the lens of God's plan and His character, we will be emboldened to live our lives with a mindset that will give glory to our God and peace to ourselves.

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Does your wife ever get in your way? BY STEVE FONTENOT

You know...like when you both want to brush your teeth...or use the mirror? Well, mine does. And I sure am glad! I don't know what it would be like to do everything alone, never see anyone but self in the mirror...that sounds lonely, and I'm not into lonely. "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him.'...And the Lord God fashioned into a woman the rib which He had taken from the man, and brought her to the man" (Gen. 2:18-24). "In everything give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:17). Thank you, Lord, for a loving companion to be "in the way"!

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BOTTOM-LINE PREACHING

By **ANDY DIESTELKAMP**

One of the things in math that students tend to balk at is the requirement to “show their work.” Sometimes the work that is to be shown seems so menial that they just don’t understand why they can’t skip that step. As one who has struggled mightily in math, I can certainly sympathize with the desire to get it over with as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, from a more mature perspective, I can now see the value of not just having the right answer but knowing how one arrives at that answer.

Similarly, many of us have felt our eyes glaze over during some sales presentation, legal fine print, or some other prolonged and detailed explanation. As we tire of the details, we are wont to say, “Just give me the bottom-line!” No doubt, this phrase derives from itemized estimates, receipts, or other accountings. The “bottom line” is the answer after all the numbers have been crunched through whatever formulas. Many people do not want to sift through all the data to arrive at an answer. They just want the answer.

I am convinced that it is this way for many when it comes to the study, teaching, and application of God’s word. We like to have ready answers (nothing wrong with that - 1 Pet. 3:15), but sometimes we are not as con-

cerned with how we arrive at those answers. Some people just want bottom-line answers to spiritual questions instead of answers that show their work.

It is one thing if after adequate study we come to answers that we will use as beginning points in future studies. However, when we are preaching to groups of people from all walks of life and at various ages and stages of spiritual growth, we have to take care to “show our work” so they know how we come to our conclusions.

For example, some children are raised believing that dancing is wrong. After 50 years of teaching simply that dancing is wrong without “showing our work,” it is inevitable that there will be all kinds of misunderstandings. The failure to show *how* we came to the conclusion that dancing is wrong may seem unimportant to some as long as we are “toeing the line” on dancing (whatever that is). A steady diet of bottom-line preaching may involve the next generation in condemning the guiltless (Matt. 12:7).

However, bottom-line preaching is not unique to those who bind where they should not. It also inhibits the growth and development of those who imagine for themselves liberties that are actually occasions for the

flesh (Gal. 5:13). Most children are raised believing that dancing is alright. It is encouraged socially from grade school age up. After 50 years of simply affirming that dancing is a liberty (and that those who oppose it are legalistic prudes) without “showing their work,” it is inevitable that there will be gross misapplications. The failure to show *how* they came to that conclusion may seem unimportant to some as long as their imagined liberty remains intact. In this case, a steady diet of bottom-line preaching often sees the next generation involved in lasciviousness and unable to discern both good and evil (Heb. 5:14).

This article is not about dancing! It is about the need to “show our work,” or, as Paul put it, “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil” (1 Thes. 5:21,22). Too often we assume what needs to be proven. If we are concerned about our children and their children standing fast in the truth and making proper application of it in their daily lives, it is imperative that we not only supply them with the right answers, but the know-how to test all things and arrive at those answers.

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I have had reports that some who have tried to send email messages to me have received a message that my mailbox is full.

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~Al Diestelkamp



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