

# One Hundred Years of Division

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## INTRODUCTION

- A. The Constitution of the United States requires a census be taken every ten years to determine each state's representation in Congress.
  - 1. However, Congress began around 1850 to include more than just the number of people in each census - they began to collect social data, including religious data.
  - 2. The Census Bureau became a permanent agency in 1902, and they then became able to do specialized accounts among the population.
- B. In 1906, one hundred years ago, the Census Bureau began its first of four stand-alone religious censuses.
  - 1. Statistician Simon Newton Dexter North was the first director of the permanent bureau, and he developed a process for gathering information on religious bodies which worked quite well for about two-thirds of American churches.
  - 2. For bodies with little organization, however, the Bureau employed "special agents" to gather statistics.
    - a. The annual meeting of many of the churches of the Stone-Campbell Movement had established a yearbook committee to gather and publish data in the late 1880's.
    - b. In 1895 the committee appointed Gustavus Adolphus Hoffman to the position of Statistical Secretary.
      - 1) Hoffman had helped gather data on the Movement for the 1890 census and was a logical person to help with the 1906 Census of Religious Bodies.
      - 2) The Bureau employed him as a special agent to gather data for the "disciples or churches of Christ."
  - 3. Census officials had noticed in monitoring Movement journals that the Gospel Advocate, which they assumed was a Disciples paper based on 1890 data, seemed at times to distance itself from that body.
    - a. In a letter to David Lipscomb published in the July 18, 1907 Gospel Advocate, Census Director North told of receiving a letter from William J. Campbell of Marshalltown, Iowa, asserting that three thousand "churches of Christ" formerly connected with the Disciples no longer were.
    - b. An accompanying list of preachers included the names of the Gospel Advocate editors. Yet when North checked the Disciples Yearbook, he found Lipscomb and E. A. Elam in that list, too.
      - 1) North asked, "Is (there) a religious body called 'church of Christ,' not identified with the Disciples of Christ?"
      - 2) Lipscomb's reply was: "There is a distinct people taking the word of God as their only and sufficient rule of faith, calling their churches 'churches of Christ' or 'churches of God,' distinct and separate in name, work and rule of faith from all other bodies of people."
  - 4. When the data were published, the number of congregations listed for churches of Christ was 2,642 with 159,123 members.
    - a. Disciples of Christ reported 7,799 congregations with 923,698 members.
    - b. Listed second in a chart of 17 "New Denominations and Denominational Families" was churches of Christ, noted as formerly included with Disciples of Christ.
- B. That division, which occurred long before the 1906 Census of Religious Bodies, stemmed over the practice of instrumental music - the Disciples used instrumental music in their worship, while churches of Christ did not.
- C. Now, one hundred years later, many are calling for reconciliation with congregations which believe

quite similarly as we but use instrumental music in their worship.

1. A month or two ago, the instrumental Christian Churches/churches of Christ held their annual convention in Louisville Kentucky.
2. The convention's theme was "Together in Christ" and sought for foster better relations between instrumental and a cappella churches.
  - a. Several ministers from a cappella and instrumental congregations exchanged Bibles to show acceptance and unity.
  - b. The keynote speaker happened to come from the a cappella congregations, and according to newspaper accounts, he said that for years he believed a cappella singing was the only way to worship, but God helped him grow to understand that grace, not perfect doctrine, saves Christians. He concluded by saying, "The time for being nice is over. It's time to be family . Nice is easy. Family is a mess. Family is loving and sacrificing. Family is trying to compromise without being compromised."
3. Is it time for unity with instrumental congregations? Is it time to put the divisions of the past century behind us? We want to explore those questions this morning.

## **WE MUST WORK FOR UNITY**

- A. I'm convinced that we must work earnestly for unity among those who claim to be Christians.
  1. Prov. 6:16-19.
  2. "My prayer is not for them [the disciples] alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (Jn. 17:20-21).
  3. "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united In mind and thought" (1 Cor. 1:10).
  4. "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit - just as you were called to one hope when you were called - one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph. 4:3-6).
  5. We cannot view unity as an optional matter, but we must make firm and constant appeals and work for the unity of believers.
- B. Killer bees are no more venomous than other bees, and their stings are no more dangerous than other bees.
  1. What makes the bees so dangerous is that when one of the Americanized - killer - bees stings, she releases pheromones that tell the other bees in the hive where the enemy is located.
  2. Other bees come from the hive to attack the victim, he is overwhelmed with hundreds of stings, and he dies.
  3. If we want to destroy the forces of Satan in this world, we need to work together like killer bees, overcome our differences, and accomplish much for the cause of Christ!
- C. However, as you examine the Scriptures you see that God doesn't want unity for unity's sake; in other words, God doesn't want us just to get along with various religious groups so that we can claim we have unity. The only type of unity God desires is unity based upon truth
  1. You read nothing of a "Let's just get along" or "Let's agree to disagreed philosophy."
    - a. Notice again Paul's words to the Corinthians - "I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly unity in mind and thought" (1 Cor. 1: 10).
    - b. "If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God" (1 Pet. 4:11).
  2. While we need to seek unity with those in instrumental congregations and indeed with all who profess faith in Christ, we cannot do so at the expense of the Word of God. Not at all.
    - a. When the issue of instrumental music came to a head in 1906, James Harvey Garrison, a member of the instrumental group, wrote David Lipscomb a letter and said in that letter, "that the spirit of sectarianism . . . is alive and active in some who are seeking a following at the

- expense of the unity for which Christ prayed.”
- b. Lipscomb wrote back and said, “We have done nothing save try to be true to God and his Word.”
  - c. Lipscomb also wrote to Garrison in January 1908 and said, “If you will be true to (God), you shall not separate from me. If you are not faithful and true to him, you will separate from all that are true to God.”
    - 1) Lipscomb was exactly right.
    - 2) The fault for the division does not rest upon those who attempt to follow the Word of God, but upon those who have brought unauthorized and unneeded inventions into the worship of God.

## **IS IT WRONG TO WORSHIP WITH THE INSTRUMENT?**

- A. That question implies in part, that God doesn't really care how we worship.
  1. We worship without the instrument, many groups worship with it - But, does it made any difference how we worship?
  2. Before looking specifically at what the Scriptures say about instrumental music, let's look at worship in general.
  3. God cares greatly how we worship.
    - a. Gen. 4:2b-5.
      - 1) I don't know why God looked upon Cain's offering with displeasure; I think it had to do with the fact that Abel brought the best to God, while Cain did not, but I cannot be certain.
      - 2) What this text does demonstrate beyond conjecture is that there is a way to worship God which honors him and a way to worship God which dishonors him.
    - b. Lev.10:1-3.
      - 1) Nadab and Abihu offered incense before the Lord “contrary to his command.”
      - 2) We do not know for a fact what Nadab and Abihu did which differed from God's command, but the way they offered the incense was a manner for which they did not have authority from God.
        - a) Fire devoured Nadab and Abihu because they failed to honor God when they came before him.
        - b) Notice the words of God Moses spoke to Aaron: “Among those who approach me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honored” (v. 3).
          - i. In other words, God says, “I'm holy; you cannot come before me however you please. You must come before me on my terms.”
          - ii. There is a veiled threat here of retribution on those who come before God how they chose, a threat which wasn't so veiled in the deaths of Nadab and Abihu.
    - c. You recall Jesus' words to the scribes and Pharisees: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men” (Mt. 15:8-9) Not every way man worships the Lord Jesus honors him as Lord.
    - d. Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well, “A time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (Jn. 4:23-24).
      - 1) God doesn't want people to worship him however they choose, but he wants people to worship him in spirit and truth.
      - 2) If we are to please God, we must worship in “spirit” (with the right motives) and in “truth” (in the manner God has directed).
- B. When it comes to the use of instrumental music in worship, the NT is completely silent.
  1. Mt. 26:30 - “When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”
  2. Acts 16:25 - “About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the

other prisoners were listening to them.”

3. Rom. 15:9 - “I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.”
  4. 1 Cor. 14:15 - “So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will also pray with my mind. I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind.”
  5. Eph. 5:19 - “Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord.”
  6. Col. 3:16 - “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”
  7. Heb 2:12 - “I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises.”
  8. Heb. 13:15 - “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess his name.”
  9. Js. 5:13 - “Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.”
- C. Where is the authority for instrumental music? On what basis could one justify using instrumental music in worship?
- D. Notice also that vocal music, not instrumental music, accomplishes the purposes for which Christians are required to sing.
1. Eph. 5: 19 tells us to “speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.”
  2. Col. 3:16 tells us to teach and admonish one another through our song service.
  3. Js. 5:13 tells us to praise God by singing; that requires words.
  4. Heb. 13:15 speaks of our offering “To God a sacrifice of praise - the fruit of lips that confess name.”
  5. How can an instrument aid in these commands? Where does an instrument fit in with these purposes?

## **BIBLICAL SILENCE IS PROHIBITIVE**

- A. This is an important principle throughout Scripture.
1. “See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it” (Deut. 12:32).
  2. “Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar” (Prov. 30:6).
  3. Rev. 22:18-19.
- B. Some claim that the instrument is like a pulpit, like individual communion cups, an aid.
1. Yet this is not so.
  2. Vocal and instrumental music are two different kinds of music.
    - a. Had God simply said, “Make music,” we could have any kind of music we wanted to have.
    - b. But, God said, “Sing,” and that’s exactly what he wants us to do.
- C. When a restaurant has a sign in front which says open 6-10 daily, do you really think I could go get dinner at 10:30?
1. People would think I was crazy if I went to get something to eat at 10:30 and said, “Well, the sign doesn’t say I can’t get something to eat after 10.”
  2. Yet when it comes to worship people want to say, “It doesn’t say I can’t use the instrument.” Why do people understand that principle in daily life but fail to grasp it when it comes to worship?
- D. “He of whom these things are said belonged to a different tribe, and no one from that tribe has ever served at the altar. For it is clear that our Lord descended from Judah, and in regard to that tribe Moses said nothing about priests” (Heb. 7:13-14).
1. Note:
    - a. Specific authority was for a man of the tribe of Levi.
    - b. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah; concerning this tribe “Moses said nothing.”
    - c. Thus, Jesus could not be a priest without a change in the law.
  2. God didn’t have to say that a man from the tribe of Judah could not be a priest, for -- he specified

Levi, and that excluded all the other tribes.

E. When the Bible says “sing,” it excludes everything except vocal music.

## **CONCLUSION**

A. The time has come for us to work for unity among believers.

1. This centennial since the division between us and our instrumental brethren became manifest is an excellent time to work with unity with those who use the instrument.
2. We dare not, however, achieve unity at the expense of Scripture.
3. Paul did not seek unity with those who claimed Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved at the expense of truth.
  - a. He wanted unity with those brethren, and he sought such unity.
  - b. But, at the same time, he upheld what he knew was true and called others to what he knew was true.

B. Can we do anything less than follow the example of Paul, to plead for and work for unity among those who use the instrument, but to appeal for a unity based upon the truth of Scripture?

C. Do you need to come this morning and be unified with Jesus in baptism?