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Singing and Playing: *Ephesians 5:19*

We are heirs of the “Fathers,” of medieval theologians, of the Reformers, and of the Puritans. To deny such inheritance is to deny our faith. But to claim a historic faith also means to claim one that is constantly moving toward God’s future, and therefore we must learn to claim our inheritance in such a way that it is a help rather than a hindrance in our march toward the future. In other words, we must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us. To do this in the case of Scripture is the primary task of a preacher of liberation.¹

Paul exhorts Christians to *sing* and *play* to the Lord. Within many Christian fellowships, the issue of instrumental music in the so-called worship service is a source of division among equally godly men and women—some in favor, others not. This chapter is an analysis of James Burton Coffman’s² essay against instrumental music. He wrote an article entitled “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music.”³ The first part of my response focuses on the principles of interpretation, and the last part of this investigation concentrates on the arguments set forth by Coffman’s objection to instrumental music. My examination of Coffman’s composition is not to question the integrity of this godly man, but rather to scrutinize his points to see if his opinions are compelling in his rejection of instrumental music—a position that many Christians uphold. This examination will focus primarily upon the arguments presented by Coffman, not judgments expressed by others who are also in opposition to instrumental music.

¹Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 31. **Justo González** is a retired United Methodist minister and professor of historical theology. He has published more than 100 books, which have been translated into 10 languages, including the volume on Luke in the *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* series, *Heretics for Armchair* was a cleric of the Church of England (Anglican), schoolteacher and author. He was a pallbearer at the funeral of Charles Darwin in 1882. He was a member of the Cambridge Apostles secret society. *Theologians*, and the *Westminster Bible Companion: Revelation*.

²**James Burton Coffman’s** (1905-2006) was one of the most influential figures among Churches of Christ in the 20th century.

³James Burton Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music,” *Gospel Advocate* 137, no. 10 (October 1995): 20. In spite of the fact that I am dealing with his arguments, this analysis of Coffman’s article is not written to impugn his integrity or his sonship to God. Even though we disagree over the instrument, I still regard Coffman as a sincere child of God—one that has eternal life in and through Jesus the Messiah and is now with the Lord since his departure from his earthly ministry..

Two Scriptures that numerous believers, within certain fellowships, rely upon to uphold their views concerning the rejection of instrumental music are Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. These two Scriptures are cited by many well-meaning Christians to substantiate their beliefs that it is sinful for Christians to “sing and play” in the corporate Assembly of God’s people. Coffman, for example, denies the implications of the word *play*, or *make music*, as set forth in Ephesians 5:19. He writes: “It is the commandment of Christ through the sacred writers of the New Testament that commands Christians to sing, not to make music.”⁴

These two passages are frequently viewed as Scriptures to regulate singing without the use of the instrument in a so-called worship service.⁵ For Christians to praise God with instruments during the gathering of the saints on Sunday morning is tantamount to rebellion against God. In fact, to sing with the accompaniment of instrumental music is high treason against God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. God will send, according to some believers, individuals to an eternal burning hell if they dare to praise Him or Christ with instrumental accompaniment. According to Coffman, as well as many other sincere and devoted Christians, we cannot **sing and play**, but only sing (a cappella).⁶

Unfortunately, Ephesians 5:19 is generally interpreted as a “worship service” text.⁷ In other words, According to some believers, Paul wrote this text in order to regulate the kind of singing within the assembly, not outside the church. We may praise God with instruments, providing we are not worshipping God during a church service. When the church assembles between the hours of 10am and 11am for Sunday morning worship, the congregations must sing without the accompaniment of instruments, which constitutes one of the five-acts of worship.⁸

⁴James Burton Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music,” 29.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid

⁷To illustrate this mindset, the late E. H. Miller (1909-1989, my uncle) wrote an essay, in 1945, entitled, “The Establishment of the Church,” in which he enumerated the so-called five-acts of worship as the identifying marks of a true church. See “The Establishment of the Church,” in *Old Paths Advocate*, Homer L. King, ed. (Lebanon, Missouri: Old Paths Advocate, 1945), 70, where Miller expresses **the traditional concept of worship centering around five prescribed rituals**:

We cannot escape seeing that in the above **five items of worship**, simplicity is an outstanding characteristic of the church established by our Lord, just as he has shown in all his teaching and examples in his own life and work. (Emphasis mine—underlining and bold)

⁸The above citation from the late E. H. Miller is also advanced among other Church of Christ folk other than just among the one-cup and non-Sunday school movement. **It is advanced by many sincere Christians upon the presupposition that God ordained a worship service with five prescribed rituals, one of which is to sing without the accompaniment of an instrument.** It is in this vein that Curtis Cates (1941-2013), formally Director of the Memphis School of Preaching, writes about the five-acts of worship. See Curtis Cates, *Worship: Heaven’s Imperative, Or Man’s Innovations* (Memphis, Tennessee: Cates Publications, 1993), 21, where he writes: “Please be assured, dear reader, that **there are five items of worship** set forth clearly in the New Testament; there is a Divine pattern for worship. The early church engaged in those acts (Acts 2:42).” (Emphasis mine—underlining and bold)

Then on pages 42-46, he discusses the mechanical instrumental music as **a violation of one of the so-called five-acts of worship**. This view of worship is still very entrenched into the thinking of many of God’s

Why? Some Christians assert that God forbids His people to praise Him with the instrument when they assemble as a corporate body for corporate worship.

This philosophy is still alive and well on planet earth. Sixty-five years after my uncle (E. H. Miller) wrote against instrumental music in the *Old Paths Advocate*, Greg Gay, one of the members of the editorial staff for the *Old Paths Advocate*, writes in this same journal his approval of refusing fellowship with anyone who holds to the use of the instrument as well as a multitude of other things that he objects to with passion. He writes about the stance of two early leaders (Homer King [1892-1983] and Homer Gay [1894-1958]) in the one-cup and no Sunday school Movement. He expresses his disregard for those who do not agree with his particular interpretation of the Scriptures.

Once these brave brethren made the decision to take a stand of fellowship against those things that violate the pattern of the scriptures they also found it necessary to reject those who disagreed with them. As a result, within the Restoration Movement they rejected fellowship with the Disciples of Christ, the Christian church, and what we today call the digressive Church of Christ.

They drew lines of fellowship against innovations like missionary societies, multiple cups, multiple loaves, instrumental music in worship, women speakers, and Sunday Schools. That means they believed the brethren who practiced or countenanced these things need to be converted because they are lost. This is in keeping with the Scripture: “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple” (Rom 16:17-18).⁹

Worship: One’s Way of Life

The above citation is cited by many Christians within the Churches of Christ to justify their separation from believers who “sing” and “play” music in celebration to God for His grace. For an examination of how this Scripture is misapplied, see footnote below (# 9). Just a perusal of the Book of Ephesians reveals that Ephesians 5:19 deals with our way of life twenty-four hours a day, not just Sunday morning or evening worship service. If we are to identify with this particular verse (5:19), we must first learn to read the whole book in context before

people, even though we never read of five-acts of worship in the New Testament. In fact, the New Testament writers never tell Christians to gather for a worship service in order to perform five prescribed rituals, rituals that constitute a “Divine pattern for worship.” My comments are not intended to malign the authors cited. For example, E. H. Miller was one of the most devoted persons that I have ever known. He was a child of his religious heritage and culture. My objective in this analysis is to bring about unity among God’s people. I, too, misapplied these Scriptures for the first seventeen years of my ministry, which was under the guidance of my uncle.

⁹Greg Gay, “Pals, One Hundred Years Ago,” in *Old Paths Advocate* LXXXII, No. 5 (May 2010): 1. Unfortunately, Greg Gay misapplies Romans 16:17-18. I can sympathize with this brother’s misapplication. As stated above, I, too, misunderstood this particular text for the first seventeen years of my ministry. For an examination of this Scripture in its **immediate** and **remote** context, see Dallas Burdette, “Watch Out for Those Who Cause Division,” in Dallas Burdette, *Old Texts Through New Eyes: Reexamination of Misunderstood Scriptures* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 274-305. This examination is in no way to malign Greg Gay whom I consider to be a sincere and devout child of God.

postulating our interpretation of 5:19. If we fail to read this book as a book, we can draw conclusions that are not sound, in spite of our sincerity. An understanding of the whole helps us to be aware of the part. **The task of every interpreter is to seek to know the one specific meaning intended by the author.** An author helps his readers to recognize his meaning through its context. Francis W. Beare (b. 1902) correctly calls attention to the context in his exegesis of this passage:

19-20. Spiritual fullness comes to expression in joyful fellowship, in song, in perpetual thanksgiving. The Christian's whole life, when it is given its true direction, moves in the atmosphere of worship. In the context the words cannot refer to the meetings for public worship alone or even primarily, but to everyday social intercourse. The whole expression is modeled on Col. 3:16-17; but **addressing one another** suggests the general relationships of life over a broader area than the "teaching and admonishing" of the Colossians passage.¹⁰ (Emphasis mine)

Also, Theodore O. Wedel, co-author with Beare, draws attention to the error of limiting this text to the "architectural" building and "Sunday worship":

But here, as so often, we make the mistake of limiting the concept of church and religion to their architectural expression in a house of God or to our Sunday worship. Have we not also parish halls and cottage parlors and a common life of Christian fellowship on weekdays? Must Christian **singing and making melody** be restricted to our rightly decorous worship hours? And as for **giving thanks always for all things unto God**—this can surely find social expression in games and picnics and singing around a campfire.¹¹

Wedel also bemoans the travesty of limiting Ephesians 5:19 to special hours. He seeks to call attention to the deception of limiting worship to special hours:

Is it not a tragic misreading of the Christian faith that all of us are inclined to relegate "religion" to special hours or seasons and to appointed pieties? Churchgoing and prayer hours are a necessity for the Christian life. Woe unto us if we neglect them. They are the time for listening to the word of God which will clarify for us his will. But the doing of his will is both costing and rewarding in the *now* of every day.¹²

INTERPRETATION: CONCEPTUAL GRIDS

Before we embark upon an analysis of Coffman's essay against instrumental music and an interpretation of Ephesians 5:19, a word of caution is given in order to help us approach the text without colored glasses—consciousness of our traditions as we approach the text. It is not uncommon for us to impose our own conceptual grids on a text without due reflection. When we approach the Word of God, we should come within reach of every text with a hermeneutics

¹⁰Francis W. Beare, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: Introduction and Exegesis*, The Interpreter's Bible (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), 10:714.

¹¹Theodore O. Wedel, *The Epistle to the Ephesians: Exposition*, The Interpreter's Bible, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), 10:715.

¹²*Ibid.*, 713, 714.

of suspicion. In other words, we should be conscious of our own fallibility in interpreting Scriptures. Our interpretation should always remain the object of suspicion and of critical evaluation. We must have a self-critical stance toward the tendency to impose our own agenda upon the exposition of Scripture. This is especially true in the interpretation of Ephesians 5:19.

For many devout and committed believers, this Scripture is a verse that regulates corporate singing in an assembly on Sunday morning during a so-called worship service. Through a sleight of hand, though not intentionally, this passage is cited in such a way that instrumental music is eliminated from the believer's life of worship or praise, except when it is outside the church building. In the nineteenth century, Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) originated the idea of the **hermeneutic circle**. The **hermeneutic circle philosophy** simply means: "Each part of a text must be interpreted with reference to the whole; yet the meaning of the whole cannot be grasped without considering the parts."¹³

Interpretation is an attempt to understand the work as a whole by an analysis of its elements.¹⁴ Hermeneutics¹⁵ ordinarily covers the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis.¹⁶ Nevertheless, hermeneutics is often used in a much narrower sense to grasp the relevance of ancient works. In other words, it is concerned about the "here" and "now."¹⁷ John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay define **exegesis** as an attempt "to reach an informed understanding of the text."¹⁸ **This in-depth study of instrumental music is an attempt to reach an informed understanding of the text by looking at the whole and then the particular.**

The traditional interpretation, among many Christians within the Churches of Christ, as well as other fellowships, is so entrenched in the thinking of men and women that many can no longer distinguish between their tradition and the Word of God itself. We should weigh

¹³See Kathleen Morner and Ralph Rausch, "Hermeneutics," *NTC's Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Illinois: NTC Publishing Group, 1991), 97.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵See Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 17, where Stein writes: "The term 'hermeneutics,' ... simply describes the practice or discipline of interpretation"; see also Thomas H. Olbright, *Hearing God's Voice* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1996), 185, where he says, "In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another." **Robert H. Stein** was senior professor of New Testament interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He previously taught at Bethel Seminary. A world-renowned scholar of the Synoptic Gospels, he is the author of several books, including *Jesus the Messiah*, *Mark in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series*, and *Luke in the New American Commentary series*.

¹⁶See Morner and Rausch, "Exegesis," Ibid., 72, 73, where they say, "Originally, the detailed analysis, explanation, and INTERPRETATION of passages in the Bible, or, by extension, of any literary or intellectual text. The term carries with it a sense of digging out the meaning of a difficult passage."

¹⁷See Gordon D. Fee & Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (Rand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 25.

¹⁸John H. Hayes and Carl R. Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook, revised edition* (Atlanta, Georgia: John Knox Press, 1987), 23.

carefully our traditions in the light of God’s Word. Jaroslav Pelikan¹⁹ calls attention to the **necessity of rethinking cherished traditions:**

Like any growth, development may be healthy or it may be malignant; discerning the difference between these two kinds of growth requires constant research into the pathology of traditions. But it is healthy development that keeps a tradition both out of the cancer ward and out of the fossil museum.²⁰

It is possible for us, as interpreters, to miss the point of the text if we do not consider the “linguistic, cultural, and historical background to the inspired writings,” writes Cedric Johnson.²¹ It is also in this same vein that Louis Berkhof²² cautions Christians not to fall into the same trap that many fell into during the Reformation. Berkhof again sharpens the focus of caution when he writes:

The militant spirit of the age found expression in hundreds of polemical writings. Each one sought to defend his own opinion with an appeal to Scripture. *Exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and degenerated into a mere search for proof-texts.* The Scriptures were studied in order to find there the truths that were embodied in the Confessions.²³

EXAMINATION OF JAMES BURTON COFFMAN’S ESSAY

As stated above, this examination of Coffman’s article is not to question the sincerity of this man of God. The primary purpose is to help individuals who are struggling with this issue, to make a more accurate interpretation of Ephesians 5:19 in order to bring about more unity among God’s people. To set the tone for a clearer understanding of Ephesians 5:19, I have chosen to review Coffman’s article written against the use of the instrument in praise to God.²⁴ His essay is chosen as an example to illustrate the lengths that individuals will resort to in order to uphold one’s own “interpretative community.”

¹⁹ **Jaroslav Pelikan** (1923-2006), a scholar in the history of Christianity—Christian theology and Medieval intellectual history. Also, Pelikan was a historian of Christianity, theology, and medieval intellectualism. He received his PhD from the University of Chicago. Throughout his life he held numerous intellectual leadership positions. He was dean of Yale Graduate School from 1973 to 1978, president of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, editor of the religious section of Encyclopedia Britannica, a member of the President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, and founder of the Council of Scholars at the Library of Congress. He was Sterling Professor Emeritus of History at Yale University, where he served on the faculty from 1962 to 1996. Pelikan wrote over 30 books, including *Mary Through the Centuries*, *Jesus Through the Centuries*, *Whose Bible Is It?*, and *The Vindication of Tradition*.

²⁰Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 60.

²¹Cedric B. Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 20.

²² **Louis Berkhof** (1873–1957) was a Reformed theologian whose works remain highly influential. He taught at Calvin Theological Seminary from 1906 and served as its president from 1931–1944.

²³L. Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1962), 28-29.

²⁴See James Burton Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music, *Gospel Advocate* 137, no. 10 (October 1995): 20-22. **James Burton Coffman** (1905-2006): This saintly man was ninety years old at the time of this writing. Eleven years later he went to be with the Lord at the age of one-hundred and one.

It is obvious that Coffman allowed his traditions to stand in the way of listening anew to the biblical texts. Every interpreter must exercise caution that he or she does not prune or crop the text to fit one's theological presuppositions. Every believer must learn to reinterpret and to reevaluate the customs handed down through the centuries. It is not uncommon for Christians to identify the traditions of their "interpretative community" with the Word of God itself. It is in this regard that Cedric Johnson²⁵ expresses the basic problem well in his discussion of presuppositions:

Generations of scholars in the field of hermeneutics have recognized the influence of preunderstanding on interpretation. C. S. Lewis [1898-1963] observed "What we learn from experience depends on the kind of philosophy we bring to experience."²⁶

We, as Christians, often accept what we were taught without question. It is in this sense that our interpretation(s) is neither subjective nor objective. In other words, we have never taken the time to employ our minds subjectively in analyzing the Scriptures for ourselves, nor have we looked at the Scriptures objectively. Our interpretations are "ready-made or prefabricated meanings."²⁷ Our interpretations are hand-me-downs from our own unique interpretative community. It is in this same vein that Stanley Fish (b. 1938, American literary theorist and legal scholar) rightly says, "In other words, interpretive communities²⁸ are no more stable than texts because interpretive strategies are not natural or universal, but learned."²⁹ In spite of Fish's deconstruction philosophy, nevertheless, he is correct when he writes:

And, moreover, the way of seeing, whatever it was, would never be individual or idiosyncratic, since its source would always be the institutional structure of which the "see-er" was an extending agent. This is what Sacks means when he says that a culture fills brains "so that they are alike in fine detail"; it fills them so that one's interpretive acts are exclusively his own but fall to him by virtue of his position in some socially organized environment and are therefore always shared and public.³⁰

²⁵ **Cedric B. Johnson**, is, at the time of this book, a licensed Clinical Psychologist in private practice. He has taught at Western Conservative Seminary in Portland, Oregon, holds degrees from the University of South Africa, Fuller Theological Seminary, and Fuller Graduate School of Psychology.

²⁶ Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation*, 45.

²⁷ See Stanley Fish, *Is There A Text in This Class?* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1980), 172, for an excellent presentation of subjective and objective interpretation.

²⁸ Fish does not use "interpretative community" but "interpretive community."

²⁹ Ibid. I disagree with Fish's philosophy of the text being unstable. If I understand Fish correctly, he is a **deconstructionist** in his philosophy. See Morner and Rausch, "Deconstructive Criticism," *NTC's Dictionary*, 50-51, where they explain "deconstruction":

An approach to LITERARY CRITICISM based on the views and procedures of the French thinker Jacques Derrida [1930-2004, French Philosopher]. **Deconstructive criticism** utilizes reader-centered theories of meaning that ignore reference to the author's intention and deny the possibility of a terminate meaning or "correct" interpretation for any text. Deconstructive criticism makes possible innumerable contradictory but "undecidable" meanings. First becoming prominent in the 1970s deconstructive criticism is central to POST-STRUCTURALISM.

³⁰ Fish, *Is There A Text*, 335.

Leaders, especially ministers, often memorize verses from the Bible by the hundreds. But frequently their interpretation is not so much theirs, as it is the interpretation of a social structure to which they belong; that is to say, their interpretative community. Traditions still stand in the way of listening anew to the biblical text.³¹ Once more, the Gonzalezs³² caution: “We must learn to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been handed down to us.”³³ It is still very difficult for individuals to conceive that one might cite Scripture and, at the same time, fail to apply the text correctly in light of its historical background. It is also in this vein that O. E. Payne writes about the acceptance of arguments against instrumental music without regard to an examination of long-held traditions:

Most men in like positions, instead of dismissing prejudice and divesting themselves of the warp and woof of long years of custom and environment, preparatory to open-minded research, have passionately rushed to the defense of that to which they have been accustomed, resorting to the Scriptures with no loftier purpose than to search for proof or pretext with which to bolster the doctrine or practice which is questioned.³⁴

Some religious writers suppose they have all the answers, especially within their own interpretative community of saints. As a result of this kind of intellectualization, the so-called intellectually correct party ostracizes those who go against the grain with their particular interpretative community. We must be careful that we do not go to the Scriptures to prove what we already believe, but rather to see what they say. Many Christians are so accustomed to reading the Bible as previously taught by generations of interpreters that they cannot distinguish between one’s interpretation and God’s Revelation. In other words, for one to question the traditional interpretations is tantamount to questioning the Word of God itself.³⁵

This failure to discriminate between one’s explanation of God’s written Revelation and one’s interpretation is one of the main obstacles that believers encounter in their efforts to liberate the Bible from its culture and to maintain unity among God’s people. The heritage of explaining is confused with the text itself. The faith of the fathers becomes the watchword for orthodoxy; the interpretation of the fathers becomes normative and is passed on as authoritative. One of the most difficult obstacles for any Christian is to approach the text without any strong

³¹See Justo L. Gonzalez and Catherine G. Gonzalez, *Liberation Preaching: The Pulpit and the Oppressed* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 48-68.

³²**Catherine G. Gonzalez** is Professor of Church History at Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia. **Justo González** is a retired United Methodist minister and professor of historical theology. He has published more than 100 books, which have been translated into 10 languages, including the volume on Luke in the *Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* series, *Heretics for Armchair Theologians*, and the *Westminster Bible Companion: Revelation*.

³³*Ibid.*, 31.

³⁴O. E. Payne, *Instrumental Music Is Scriptural* (Alberta: Canada, 1920), 17.

³⁵For an insightful article on the differentiation between Revelation and interpretation, see Leroy Garrett (1918-2014), “It Means What It Says,” *Restoration Review* 17, no. 4 (April 1975): 68-71. See also *The Works of Leroy Garrett* (1918-2014) on line, www.leroygarrett.org.

personal biases. Studying the Bible with colored glasses ultimately leads to distortion of the text.³⁶

People often tend to give preconceived beliefs the same authority as they give to the Bible. In other words, one's preconceived political power is equal to that of the Scriptures. One's own personal journey of faith, with the ghosts of the past, makes it very difficult for one to view the Scriptures without prejudice. One's prior understanding and interpretation makes it difficult to sift out the truths of God in dealing with the text. The culture of one's heritage often controls the text of the Bible. We should never forget that our own journey occurs within a vast architecture of preunderstanding—no thinking takes place in a vacuum. Frederic W. Farrar³⁷ draws attention to the religious hatred that generates from this know-it-all attitude:

My opinions are founded on interpretations of Scripture. Scripture is infallible. My views of its meaning are infallible too. Your opinions and inferences differ from mine; therefore you must be in the wrong. All wrong opinions are capable of so many ramifications that any one who differs from me in minor points must be unsound in vital matters also. Therefore all who differ from me and my clique are "heretics." All heresy is wicked; all heretics are necessarily wicked men. It is my religious duty to hate, calumniate and abuse you.³⁸

ANALYSIS OF JAMES BURTON COFFMAN'S "THE SINFUL USE OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC"

Pagan Society: First and Fourth Arguments

Coffman's first and fourth arguments against instrumental music surround paganism. Since the pagans used instruments in their gatherings, therefore, God and Christ do not approve instruments in either the Old Testament or New Testament, according to Coffman.³⁹ Having set forth the basic principles of how to interpret the Word of God, as discussed above, it is now appropriate to examine Coffman's essay to see if he followed the fundamental principles of

³⁶See Johnson, *The Psychology of Biblical Interpretation*, 42, where he captures, in concise language, the subjective biases of all interpreters:

My contention is that conflicting theological positions are in part due to the fact that we all approach a text, sacred or secular, with our strong subjective biases. Even though we have a commitment to read the Bible on its own terms: and even though we want the Divine and human authors to speak for themselves, somehow we still come up with contradictory views on some issues.

³⁷ **Frederic W. Farrar** (1831-1903), was a cleric of the Church of England (Anglican), schoolteacher and author. He was a pallbearer at the funeral of Charles Darwin in 1882. He was a member of the Cambridge Apostles secret society.

³⁸Frederick W. Farrar, "Religious Hatred," quoted in Carl Ketcherside, *Mission Messenger* 27, no. 6 (June 1965): 92. See also the works of Ketcherside online, www.unity-in-diversity.org.

³⁹James Burton Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," *Gospel Advocate* 137, no. 10 (October 1995): 20, 21.

interpretation or if he allowed his prejudices to blind his eyes to a careful reading of Ephesians 5:19.

Since his arguments are presented in written form in the *Gospel Advocate*, it is appropriate to deal with his views in order to see if his arguments are sound logically and biblically. Many Christians do not have the background of knowing how to deal with his outlook. Since I, too, taught many of these same views for over seventeen years in the early part of my ministry among the one-cup and non-Sunday School movement, I am qualified to examine the arguments—positive or negative. On the surface, his points of view may seem sound, but, at the same time, a closer examination reveals carelessness on his part in the handling of several texts to support his presuppositions.

As stated above, these analyses of Coffman’s article in no way questions his integrity and his sonship to God, but a perusal of his essay does illustrate the scale to which Christians will violate the text, even though not intentionally, in order to uphold tradition. His approach against instrumental music is extremely weak—even to the point of denying that God commanded musical instruments in 2 Chronicles 29:25.⁴⁰ He begins his tirade against “mechanical musical instruments in the worship of God” by calling attention to its use in a pagan society. He states rather boldly his opposition: “Is the use of instrumental music in Christian worship sinful? Certainly! There is not the slightest doubt of this.”⁴¹ **How does he conclude that instrumental music is sinful?** He states categorically his objection with absolute certainty of its sinfulness. Listen to him as he prepares his readers for his examination, “Let us examine a few of the basic facts that underlie such a certainty.”⁴²

How does he know for certain that his views are correct? Pay attention to him as he seeks to justify his negative reaction to the use of instruments. **His first argument** almost causes one to just stand in shock as he or she inspects his reasoning—**pagans used instruments**. This argument almost shocks the imagination. This argument is one of the weakest arguments against instrumental music that has ever come to my attention. In the development of this argument, he calls attention to the use of mechanical instruments of music in pagan temples and Nebuchdnezzar’s employment of musical instruments (Daniel 3:5). From this he assumes that Jesus forbids the “worship of God with mechanical instruments of music.”⁴³

Response to Coffman’s Pagan Society Argument

Is the use of instruments sinful simply because we find the employment of mechanical instruments in a secular society? Coffman advances the notion that since instrumental music is utilized in a pagan society, then, based upon this reasoning, God condemns the use of the instrument in praise to Him. This kind of thinking is extremely fragile in the light of God’s Word. For instance, we cannot help but wonder about David and his instruments of music utilized in the Temple to praise God. Toward the end of David’s life, he called in the leaders of

⁴⁰Ibid., 21

⁴¹Ibid., 20

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

Israel, the priests, and the Levites—a total of thirty-eight thousand men (1 Chronicles 23:1-2). Of this number called in by David, four thousand were chosen to “praise the Lord with the musical instruments” that David had “provided for that purpose” (23:5).

The Chronicler also reveals that David, together with some of the commanders of the army, set apart “some of the sons of Asaph (ā’sāf), Heman (hē’mān) and Jeduthun (jě-dū’tūn) for the ministry of prophesying accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals. Here is the list of the men who performed this service” (25:1). The sons of Asaph, the sons of Jeduthun, and the sons of Heman were assigned the task of “thanking and praising the Lord” with the “harp” (25:2-4). After the enumeration of the sons of Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman, the Chronicler writes:

All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the LORD, with **cymbals, lyres and harps**, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king. Along with their relatives—all of them **trained** and **skilled in music** for the LORD—they numbered 288. Young and old alike, teacher as well as student, cast lots for their duties. (25:6-9)

If we think, for one moment, that God was not behind this use of musical instruments to praise Him, then we only have to read 2 Chronicles 29:25 to quickly see that it was God who instructed David, not a fertile imagination of David’s own devising. This chapter records the purification of the Temple by Hezekiah (hěz’ē-kī’ā, 716-687 BC—reign). The Chronicler clearly states: “He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD just as his father David had done” (29:2). In the recounting of the events that occurred in the purification of the Temple, the author of Second Chronicles reveals the use of instruments in praise to God. Listen as he calls attention to the ultimate source of the authority for this action of the introduction of musical instruments:

He stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by **David** and **Gad** the king’s seer and **Nathan** the prophet; this was **commanded by the LORD through his prophets**. So the Levites stood ready with **David’s instruments**, and the priests with their trumpets. Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the LORD began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel. The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the **singers sang and the trumpeters played**. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed. (2 Chronicles 29:25-29)

Contrary to the thinking of Coffman,⁴⁴ the Chronicler says that the source of authority behind the use of the instruments was God Himself: “commanded by the LORD” (29:25). How did God command the employment of instruments? Again, the Chronicler says, “through his prophets” (29:25). Who were His prophets? The record says that they were **David, Gad, and Nathan**. Does this sound as if instruments were a stench in the nostrils of God because pagans also employed instruments in their everyday life? In Coffman’s efforts to nullify the force of 2

⁴⁴Ibid., 21, where he says, “In all probability, this verse is a mistranslation because it is not found in the Syriac or Arabic versions.”

Chronicles 29:25, he develops two arguments under the caption: “Crooked Efforts to Justify Their Use.” He writes,

‘But they did it in the Old Testament.’ All advocates of the use of such instruments in Christian worship invariably quote 2 Chronicles 29:25, which in the common versions does indicate that God commanded their use. In all probability, this verse is a mistranslation because it is not found in the Syriac or Arabic version. (Emphasis mine)

He wants to deny this passage since it does not fit his theology. Should we also discount where the Chronicler says, “The Levites and priests sang to the Lord every day, accompanied by the Lord’s instruments of praise” (2 Chronicles 30:21). The instruments in 29:25 are called the “Lord’s instruments” in 30:21. Earlier this same Chronicler wrote: “The priests took their positions, as did the Levites with the Lord’s musical instruments, which King David had made for praising the Lord and which were used when he gave thanks, saying, ‘His love endures forever’” (7:6). Should this verse, too, be eliminated from the Scriptures in order to fit one’s objection to instrumental music? 2 Chronicles 7:6 is associated with the dedication of the Temple built by Solomon. Should this Scripture, too, be eliminated from the Bible?

As we examine Coffman’s arguments, we quickly observe that this kind of **illogical reasoning is the same irrational way of thinking that Jesus experienced with the religious leaders in His day over traditions**, which ultimately ended in the crucifixion of Jesus. Traditions took precedence over what God had said. Today, traditions still takes precedence over the Word of God. Coffman cannot distinguish, so it seems, between his customs and the Word of God. In fact, he nullifies the Word of God through his inherited traditions from the Stone/Campbell Movement. When he writes: “Is the use of instrumental music in Christian worship sinful? Certainly! Let us examine a few of the basic facts that underlie such a certainty.”⁴⁵ Once more, how does he prove that instruments of music are sinful?

His first and fourth arguments are, as stated above, one and the same, focus on the pagan use of instruments. He states his opposition in clear terms: “The whole world in Bible times was full of mechanical instruments of music, and the pagan temples were loaded with their orchestras.”⁴⁶ **He thus reasons that God was not behind the use of instruments. Further more, he indicates that God condemned David for the use of instruments—he then based his arguments upon a misapplication of Amos 5:23 and 6:5.**⁴⁷ Is David condemned because He commanded instruments in the Temple? Is God condemned because He commanded David, along with some other prophets, to institute musical instruments in praise to Himself? We wonder if God knew that the pagans were using instruments. Well, perhaps God was sleeping when all this took place! Perhaps, God had not reasoned this issue out very carefully.

⁴⁵Ibid., 20.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., 21.

The Pattern Concept for a Worship Service: Singing Excludes Instruments

Pattern Theology: Second Argument

His second argument hinges on pattern theology.⁴⁸ In other words, “pattern theology” is the belief that God has ordained a worship service with five acts to be performed in a prescribed manner in order for worship to be true worship. **For Coffman, worship is “prescriptive,” not “descriptive.”** He views any passage that describes activities in the assembly as prescriptive—five unalterable rituals. For one to deviate from his supposed rituals (acts or elements), one faces the fires of hell (God’s so-called torture chamber). He labored under the impression that objection to the use of instrumental music in the assembly is based on the New Testament, not tradition as some say. He then sought to answer the argument that “The banning of mechanical instruments is more of a tradition than something based on Scripture.”⁴⁹ To refute the argument that the rejection of instrumental music is based on tradition, not Scripture, **Coffman then relies upon Hebrews 8:5** to prove that mechanical instruments are not in harmony with the divine pattern for a worship service: **“It is the New Testament, not tradition, that prescribes a pattern for Christian worship (Hebrews 8:5).”**⁵⁰

There is not one word in Hebrews 8:5 about five acts of worship for a Christian assembly. This deduction is a figment of a very fertile imagination. There is not one Scripture found in the New Testament that speaks of “Christian meetings” as a worship service. The Christian assemblies appear to be based on the synagogue meetings—meetings in the synagogue were not prescriptive, but descriptive. In other words, they were left open as to the elements/acts of the gatherings. This was not true of the Temple. This passage in Hebrews 8:5 had to do with the Tabernacle—later Solomon’s Temple. On Mount Sinai (sī’ nī), God gave Moses the instructions to construct the physical sanctuary made by hands—a sanctuary representative, or copy, of what was in heaven—prescriptive.

Coffman assumes that God has prescribed a worship service with five acts to be performed in a prescribed manner, but he cites no Scripture in context that supports his conclusions. He refers to Hebrews 8:5 out of context in order to prove his presupposition that God has ordained a pattern for a worship service in the New Testament.⁵¹ After misapplying

⁴⁸Ibid., 20. See Dallas Burdette, “Oddities in Pattern Theology,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 55-86, for a detailed study of the so-called patterns in the church. The Churches of Christ, as a whole, base their theology on what they call “pattern theology.” Yet, there is not one shred of evidence for any such teaching in the New Testament about a pattern for a worship service with five acts of worship.

⁴⁹Ibid., 86

⁵⁰Ibid. See also Dallas Burdette, “Congregational Worship and Division” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 171-180. Our next chapter will be an update of this chapter found in *From Legalism to Freedom*.

⁵¹See Dallas Burdette, “True Worship” in Dallas Burdette, *Biblical Preaching and Teaching: Jesus and Our Privileges*, Volume 1 [(Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 359-376. Also, for an excellent analysis of

Hebrews 8:5, he then asserts: “Singing is a special kind of music. That special kind of music was only **prescribed** and allowed by the holy Apostles (emphasis mine).”⁵² He discounts Ephesians 5:19 in which Paul explicitly tells the Ephesians to “sing” and “make music,” or “play.” He says, “Thus, when the Scriptures say, ‘Sing,’ it was not necessary to add, ‘but don’t play musical instruments.’”⁵³ In this second argument against instrumental music, he drops in this unbelievable statement that demands a response. We stand stunned as we read his words:

It is the commandment of Christ through the sacred writers of the New Testament that commands Christians to sing, not make music. **Only ignorance can confuse these terms**. Singing is a special kind of music. That special kind of music only was prescribed and allowed by the holy apostles.⁵⁴ (Emphasis mine—underlining and bold)

Yes, he is correct in saying that “**only ignorance can confuse these terms**.” Did Paul exclude the instrument in praise to God? Did he say that the Christians in Ephesus were to sing and **not** to play instruments? Perhaps, a study of The Greek word *ψαλμός* (*psalmós*) will clarify the confusion. The verb *ψάλλω* (*psállō*) is employed in the New Testament as expressing praise. “The verb *psállō*, which denotes the act of playing a (normally) stringed instrument,” has its primary meaning “‘to sing’ with at least the possible nuance of ‘to sing’ with instrumental accompaniment.”⁵⁵ The New Testament writers employ the word *psalmós* in two senses: (1) the Old Testament psalms, and (2) songs of praise and joy.⁵⁶ For example, Paul in writing to the Romans declares:

For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: “**Therefore I will praise** (*ψαλῶ psalō*, I will sing praise⁵⁷) **you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.**” (Romans 15:8-9; Psalm 18:49)

By the use of the word *psalmós*, Paul is not excluding or rejecting instruments, even though the singing may be without musical accompaniment. The citation, in Romans 15:9, is from Psalm 18:49, which appears to be a psalm sung with instruments. This statement of Paul is about Christ’s ministry to the Jews to confirm God’s mercy to the Gentiles. Just as David praised God for his victory over the surrounding nations, so Christ celebrates His victory over satanic powers that brings about redemption for the Gentiles. **How did Christ view instruments of music in praise to God?** For us to grasp the significance of instrumental music within the Christian community, we turn to the author of the Book of Hebrews with his citation

rethinking the worship concept of five acts, see Mike Root, *Split Grape Juice: Rethinking the Worship Tradition* (Joplin, Missouri: College Press, 1992).

⁵²Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music,” 21.

⁵³Ibid., 22.

⁵⁴Ibid., 20, 21.

⁵⁵Ralph W. Harris, Executive Editor, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary: Sigma—Omega, Word Numbers 4375—5457*, vol., 16 (Springfield, Missouri: The Complete Biblical Library, 1986), 541.

⁵⁶See Ibid., 542.

⁵⁷The verb is first person, singular, future, active, indicative and means “to pull, twitch, twang, or play.”

from Psalm 45:6-8. The author of Hebrews defends the Deity of Christ with a citation from Psalm 45. Listen to him as he cites:

But about the Son he says, “**Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.**” (Hebrews 1:8-9)

The writer of Hebrews did not cite the full context since his purpose was to demonstrate from Scripture that Jesus is God. Psalm 45:6-8 is a psalm about the Messiah, the Son of God. **The full context addresses Christ’s view of instrumental music.** Pay attention to the psalmist as he predicts Christ’s deity:

Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. ⁷You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy. ⁸All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory **the music of the strings makes you glad.** (Psalm 45:6-8)

The psalmist says concerning Christ, “**The music of the strings make you glad.**” Because of God’s mercy, Jesus is saying, “I will praise (*ψαλῶ psalō*) you among the Gentiles,” and “I will sing hymns to your name.” **This is not related just to the congregational gathering of the corporate body of believers, but also to individuals in their every day walk with God.** This perception of God’s mercy is one of the reasons that Christians sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. This outburst of joy, assembled or not assembled, is to praise God for His mercy. Paul’s and Silas’ singing in prison is an example of this explosion of joy in song to God (Acts 16:25). Prior to Paul calling upon the Ephesians to “**sing and make music,**” he burst forth in rapturous language to capture the hearts of men and women in gratitude.

Praise (*εὐλογητός*, *eulogētos*, “blessed”) be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:3-14)

Ephesians 5:19 is reminiscent of the praise in Ephesians 1:3-14. Again, we also find the word *psallō* employed by Paul in his First Epistle to the Corinthians:

So what shall I do? I will pray with my spirit, but I also will pray with my mind; I will sing (*ψαλῶ psalō*, I will sing praise) with my spirit, but I will also sing (*ψαλῶ, psalō*, I will sing praise) with my mind. (1 Corinthians 14:15)

As we reflect upon this verse, we are conscience that the word *ψάλλω (psállō*, to pluck, pull) is employed in the Septuagint (LXX, the Greek translation of the Old Testament—translated between 285-250 BC) to translate the Hebrew word *נָגַן* (*năg·gēn*, to play a stringed instrument) and *זָמַר* (*zā·măr* to make music in praise to God).⁵⁸ The usage of *psállō* in the Septuagint is used to translate the Hebrew word *năg·gēn* (to play a stringed instrument) twelve times. On the other hand, the word *psállō* in the Septuagint is used to translate the Hebrew word *זָמַר* (to make music in praise to God) forty times.⁵⁹

Did Paul exclude the use of instruments in his use of the word *psállō*? There is no evidence from the context that Paul excluded instrumental accompaniment, but rather the reverse is obvious. Every Christian’s life should be one of praise. Every believer’s life should be one of praising God in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for God’s unsearchable love. In Paul’s letters to the Christians in Ephesus and Colossae, he compares the behavior of the unbeliever with the believer. Toward the close of the Ephesian Epistle, he writes that they were to “**sing and make music**”:

Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit. Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. **Sing (ᾄδοντες, *adontes*) and make music (Ψάλλοντες, *psállontes*)** in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:15-21)

As stated above, many Christians still associate Ephesians 5:19 with public worship, but there is nothing, as stated above, in the context to identify this as an act that only takes place on Sunday morning between 9am and 10am. While this verse, no doubt, includes activities that take place in the corporate assembly, the text does not suggest such a restriction.⁶⁰ Believers are to instruct one another through psalms (*ψαλμοῖς, psalmois*), hymns (*ᾠμοῖς, humnois*) and spiritual songs (*ὕδαῖς, odais*). Paul encouraged them to “sing and make music.”

If Ephesians 5:19 is limited to a so-called worship service, we wonder about the previous verse in which Paul admonished: “Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.” Is this passage limited to the church gathering or is it

⁵⁸Harris, *The New Testament Greek-English Dictionary: Sigma—Omega, Word Numbers 4375—5457*, vol., 16, 541.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰See Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 394.

applicable to one's way of life twenty-four hours a day? As Christians, we are not to lead a life of sin, whether in the assembly or out of the assembly. Once more, the words *sing and make music* are from the Greek words ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες (*adontes kai psallontes*), which is translated by R. C. H. Lenski (1864-1936) as “singing and playing.”⁶¹ Lenski further develops the implication of singing and playing in Ephesians 5:19:

Singing is done by the voice; playing by means of an instrument. Yavllw means to let a string twang and thus to play a lyre or a harp, and then to play any instrument as an accompaniment to the voice.⁶²

In other words, the Christians at Ephesus were to “sing and make music.”⁶³ This would be applicable not just to formal (corporate) worship, but also on other occasions. Paul's use of the word *psalms* appears to refer to the Old Testament psalms.⁶⁴ This analysis of the Greek and Hebrew words sets forth the argument that this line of reasoning is the most logical conclusion since this book (Psalms), as well as the other thirty-eight books, was looked upon as the Word of God (see 2 Timothy 3:14-17).⁶⁵ The writers of the New Testament cite the Psalms frequently. For example, Luke records a conversation between Jesus and the religious leaders in which Jesus cited from Psalm 110 (Luke 20:41-44). Also, Jesus, before His ascension, called attention to the Psalms in His farewell instructions to the disciples (Luke 24:44). Prior to the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood before a group numbering about one hundred and twenty and cited from two psalms (Acts 1:20-21): “For,” said Peter, “it is written in the Book of Psalms, ‘**May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it,**’” [Psalm 69:25] and again he pens: ‘**May another take his place of leadership**’” [Psalm 109:8]

⁶¹R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians*, Commentary on the New Testament (St. Paul Minnesota: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937; reprint Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1998), 620 [page references are to reprint edition].

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³See James Moffatt, *The New Testament: A New Translation* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1950), where he translates Ephesians 5:19-20:

Converse with one another in the music of psalms, in hymns, and in songs of the spiritual life, praise the Lord heartily with words and music, and render thanks to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ at all times and for all things.

⁶⁴ See Murray J. Harris, *Colossians & Philemon: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 169, where he says,

Ψαλμοῖς (*psalmoîs*) may refer to OT psalms or songs, ὕμνοις (*húmnōis*) to NT hymns about Christ or Christian canticles, and ᾠδαῖς (*ōdaîs*) to spontaneous hymnody—songs from Scripture, songs about Christ, and songs from the Spirit. Also, since (ψάλλω *psállō*) originally meant “pluck a stringed instrument,” ψαλμός (*psalmós*) could allude to musical accompaniment (cf. Moffatt, “with the music of psalms”; Turner, Words 353).

⁶⁵For a more detailed study of the relevance of the Law to the believer, see Dallas Burdette, “Relevance of the Old Testament,” in Dallas Burdette, *Old Texts Through New Eyes: Reexamination of Misunderstood Scriptures* (Longwood: FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 1-25.

Yet again, when Paul proclaimed the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in the finished work of Christ upon Calvary to those in Pisidian Antioch, he called attention to Psalm 2:7: “**You are my Son; today I have become your Father**” (Acts 13:33). The Book of Psalms is one of the most frequently quoted books in the New Testament. Paul not only instructed the Ephesians to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, but he added the phrase, “sing and make music” (ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες (*adontes kai psallontes*), contrary to Coffman’s views.

To cite James Burton Coffman, once more, “Only ignorance can confuse these terms.”⁶⁶ He admits that singing is not the same as to “make music,” which is correct. As noted above, a well-known Lutheran scholar and clergyman, Richard Charles Henry Lenski, translates *psallontes* as “playing.” Why did Lenski translate the word *psallontes* (ψάλλοντες) as “playing”? Before responding to this question, perhaps it would be helpful to observe what Charles Hodge (1797-1878), principal of Princeton Theological Seminary during the years 1851-1878, has written:

ᾄδοντες καὶ ψάλλοντες (*adontes kai psallontes*), singing and making melody, are two forms of expressing the same thing. The latter term is the more comprehensive; as αἰδεῖν (*aidein*, “to sing”) is to make music with the voice; ψάλλειν [*psallein*, “to play”], to make music in any way; literally, to play on a stringed instrument; then, to sing in concert with such an instrument; then, to sing or chant. See 1 Cor. 14, 15; James, 5, 13; Rom. 15, 9.⁶⁷

Is there any evidence for translating the word *psallontes* as “playing”? To help solve the problem of translation, it would be helpful to examine a passage in First Samuel in which David was summoned to comfort Saul:

Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil^a spirit from the LORD tormented him. ¹⁵ Saul’s attendants said to him, “See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶ Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can **play the harp** [רַב־כִּנֹּרִים יִנְנֶה, *m^enăg·gēn bāk·kin·nôr*, “playing stringed instruments”]. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes upon you, and you will feel better.” ¹⁷ So Saul said to his attendants, “Find someone who plays well and bring him to me.” ¹⁸ One of the servants answered, “I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who **knows how to play the harp** [יָדָע לַעֲשׂוֹת חַרְשֵׁי, *yō·dē^a năg·gnē*, “one who knows how to play a stringed instrument”]. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him.” (1 Samuel 16:14-18)

The Hebrew words in First Samuel: “can play the harp” is translated into the Greek text as εἰδότα ψάλλειν ἐν κινύρα⁶⁸ (*eidota psalleinē en kinyra*, “to play on the harp”). The Greek word ψάλλειν (*psallein*, “to play”) is equivalent to the Hebrew word יִנְנֶה (*m^enăg·gēn*, “play”). Then the phrase “know how to play” (*yō·dē^a năg·gnē*) is translated into the Septuagint Greek text as εἰδότα ψαλμόν (*eidota psalmon*, “understands playing on the harp”). Thus, when Paul told the Ephesians to engage in *adontes* (singing) *kai psallontes* (psalming), he is utilizing a

⁶⁶James Burton Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music,” 20.

⁶⁷Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 305.

⁶⁸*Septuaginta*, (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart) 1979.

word (*psallontes*) that the Jewish Christians in Ephesus understood.⁶⁹ The believers at Ephesus were encouraged to “sing and play,” frequently translated as “make melody.” Since the Septuagint (LXX) was the Bible utilized by Jesus and His Apostles, it is logical that they would have employed the word *psallontes* as the Jews currently understood it.

The translators of the Septuagint utilized the Greek word *psalmon* (playing on the harp) to express the Hebrew word *m'ănăg-gēn*, (נָגַן, “play”). When Paul says, “**sing** and **make music** (*psallontes*),” is he not reflecting upon musical composition associated with the Psalms? It is significant, at least to me, that Paul, in the Ephesian epistle, unlike the Colossian epistle, adds an additional thought. In the Ephesian letter, he says to “sing and make music,” but in the epistle to the Colossians, he only says, “sing.” Consider the following parallel:

EPHESIANS 5:19-20	COLOSSIANS 3:16-17
Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. <u>Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord</u> , always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.	Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you <u>sing</u> psalms, hymns and spiritual songs <u>with gratitude in your hearts to God</u> . And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

⁶⁹See Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 1295, where they comment on the word “psalm” and “making melody”:

psalms—generally accompanied by an instrument.... **Making melody**—Greek, “playing and singing with an instrument.” **In your heart**—not merely with the tongue; but the serious feeling of the heart accompanying the singing of the lips (cf. I Cor. 14:15; Ps. 47:7).

See also Harold W. Hoehner, “Ephesians” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, Editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1983), where he comments on the meaning of the words “making melody”:

First is communication with **one another with psalms** (psalms, OT psalms sung with stringed instruments such as harps), **hymns** (psalms, praises composed by Christians), **and spiritual songs** (a general term). Second is communication with **the Lord** by *singing* and *making melody* (*psallontes*, singing with a stringed instrument) **in the heart**.

See also Alfred Martin, “Ephesians” in Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, Editors, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 1314, where he writes about the Greek participle translated as “making melody”:

Psalms. This word usually indicates songs set to instrumental accompaniment, as does also the participle translated **making music** (*psallontes*).

Does the phrase “sing psalms” in Colossians convey the same admonition that Paul expresses in “sing and make music”? The word “sing,” even today, does not exclude “making music” through instruments. It is not uncommon for individuals to invite someone to go and hear individuals or quartets sing, but it is generally understood that just the mention of the word “singing” does not exclude mechanical music. “**Make music**” is a common term among musicians to mean to “**play**” instruments along with their singing.

Paul says that this “singing and making music” is to be “in your heart to the Lord.” How were they to give thanks? Paul says with “singing and playing.” But, Paul added the prepositional phrase, “**in your heart to the Lord.**” In other words, this singing and playing on instruments should not be mechanical, that is to say, our singing is not to be unthinking, unconscious, or emotionless. It is to be done with our hearts, that is, not merely with our lips and with our fingers. One sings and plays with his heart when he excites his mind to an understanding of the sentiments presented in the words repeated.

This expression attached to “singing and playing” is very similar to the words found in 1 Chronicles 13:8 concerning David and assembled Israel in their rejoicing about the return of the Ark of the Covenant: “David and all the Israelites were celebrating **with all their might** before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets.” Whether we say, “in your heart to the Lord” or “with all their might,” we are saying the same thing. Moses also said to the children of Israel concerning their devotion to God and His Law: “And now, O Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God **with all your heart and with all your soul**” (Deuteronomy 10:12). When David exhorted his son Solomon about the building of the Temple, he said:

And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him **with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind**, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every motive behind the thoughts. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever. (1 Chronicles 28:9)

Paul, in the Ephesian Epistle, varies this expression in order to drive home the necessity of doing one’s “singing and playing” from the soul, not just the mouth. Listen once more to Paul as he addresses the servants of earthly masters: “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and **with sincerity of heart**, just as you would obey Christ” (Ephesians 6:5). Again, he writes: “Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God **from your heart**” [ἐκ ψυχῆς, *ek psychēs*, from the soul] (6:6). The words of Peter also call attention to the inward versus the external: “Love one another deeply **from the heart**” [ἐκ καρδίας, *ek kardias*] (1 Peter 1:22).

This thought—“in your heart”—is very similar to the words of Paul, as cited above, to the Corinthians: “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**” (1 Corinthians 14:15). Paul is saying, in essence, that the whole soul of each individual should be filled with praise.

The psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs should be sung with a spirit of thankfulness, which spirit permeates the believer's singing and playing—corporately or individually.

Amos and Instrumental Music

Under the caption “Crooked Efforts to Justify Their Use,” Coffman (1905-2006) develops three additional arguments to substantiate his belief system about instrumental music. His first argument under this caption focuses on Amos 5:23 and 6:5. He cites Amos 5:23 and 6:5 to justify his position that instrumental music is sinful. He writes:

Furthermore, we must point out that Amos condemned the use of instruments in the Old Testament: ‘Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols’ (5:23; cf. 6:5).⁷⁰

Goebel Music, too, associated with the Churches of Christ, makes this Scripture an argument against the use of Instrumental music.⁷¹ As we seek to unravel Coffman's convoluted reasoning, it is necessary to call attention to the proper method of exegesis. **The task of any interpreter is to discover the intended meaning of the author. The way an author helps his readers to interpret his statements is through his context.**⁷² If we isolate a passage from its context, we can arrive at a meaning that is totally foreign to the author's intent. If we wish to understand what Amos meant in a particular verse, the reader must examine the way the author thinks and writes in the verses preceding and following his statements. Amos 5:23 and 6:5 are anchored in history. We cannot separate the historical setting of the author without destroying the intended message. Is it possible to understand these two texts? Yes, Amos' meaning is available and can be understood from his book. Interpreters need to learn how to read a book as a book. As we seek to uncover the meaning of any text, we should never read isolated passages divorced from its historical background. In the examination of these two texts, this study now focuses upon these two verses separately.

Amos 5:23

Amos 5:23 is a favorite text among many Christians within the various subdivisions within the Christian community. Misapplication, in my judgment, is not deliberate on the part of those who cite this verse to give credence to their opposition to instrumental music, but an honest mistake of the heart. An important rule of interpretation of any text is to approach the text with a sound historical treatment. We have to look at the writers of both the Old and New Testaments with a detached eye; that is to say, we must learn to look at the various Scriptures

⁷⁰ Coffman, “The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music,” 21.

⁷¹Goebel Music, “The New Testament Commands Us to Use Old Testament Psalms,” *The Spiritual Sword* 10, no. 1 (October 1978): 22-27.

⁷²For a detailed study of context, see Dallas Burdette, “Dallas Burdette's Pilgrimage of Faith,” in Dallas Burdette, *From Legalism to Freedom: A Spiritual Narrative of Liberation* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 1-26, especially page 6. See also Dallas Burdette, “How to Read the Word of God,” *Ibid.*, 160-170.

from a neutral standpoint and to see the historical background and to hear the historical Word as it was uttered to the first audience. Many Christians do violence to the historical context in justifying their presuppositions. In the following explanation of this text (5:23) as well as 6:5, we must take into consideration the relevance of the historical details leading up to a particular statement.

There are two different contexts for each of these isolated Scriptures. Amos 5:23 is associated with the nation of Israel (Northern Kingdom) and 6:5 is associated with both the nation of Judah (Southern Kingdom) and the nation of Israel (Northern Kingdom). Amos writes: “**Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps**” (5:23).

The best choirs may have sung their songs, but to God their music was simply noise. The Israelites’ worship had become meaningless and empty. When we approach this text with certain presuppositions against instrumental music, this text appears to give validity to one’s beliefs.⁷³ The background leading up to this terse, or brief, statement deals with ritual punctiliousness, even to the point of excess. Just a casual reading of Chapters 4 and 5 reveals a worship that is “soulless worship”—worship that was no longer pleasing to God. God, through Amos, states His opposition to that which He had earlier commanded:

I hate, I **despise** your religious feasts; I **cannot** stand your assemblies. ²² Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings,^a I will have no regard for them. ²³ Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. ²⁴ But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream! (5:21-24)

The nation of Israel had turned their hearts from God, and they were using their “religious feasts,” their “assemblies,” their “burnt offerings and grain offerings,” their “fellowship offerings,” and their “instruments” to praise God in a soulless fashion—only mechanical. The Israelites, like so many Christians today, used religion as an emotionless means to stay, hopefully, in God’s grace. The Lord is interested in the heart as well as the mind. It is in this same vein that Jesus responded to an individual who tested Him about the greatest commandment in the Law:

Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’^a ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^b ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matthew 22:37-40)

⁷³This kind of application is what I call **presuppositional hermeneutics**. In other words, this brand of hermeneutics isolates Scriptures from its context and then builds its theology upon the so-called book, chapter, and verse citation. This is the same kind of interpretation that Satan exercised in his confrontation with Jesus when he cited from Psalm 91:11-12. Satan misapplied the intent of the author, thus Jesus had to correct his application with another Scripture (Deuteronomy 6:16). I, too, cited these two Scriptures (Amos 5:23 and 6:5) in the early years of my ministry. I, too, was not conscious that I had misapplied these Scriptures.

^a Traditionally *peace offerings*

^a Deut. 6:5

^b Lev. 19:18

The Israelites failed in all three. Fifteen hundred years after Moses penned these words (Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18), Paul, too, desired the Ephesians to “sing and make music in your heart (τῇ καρδίᾳ, *tē kardia*, with the heart) to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19). The *Revised Standard Version* renders this phrase as “with all your heart.” William Barclay⁷⁴ in his *The New Testament: A New Translation* translates: “**with all your heart.**” Edgar J. Goodspeed⁷⁵ in his *The Bible: An American Translation* also translates: “with all your heart.” Also, James Moffatt⁷⁶ in his *The New Testament: A New Translation* renders this phrase as “praise the Lord heartily.”

The case in Greek can be dative,⁷⁷ locative,⁷⁸ or instrumental.⁷⁹ The sense of this phrase in context is “**with** the heart.” This sense is also found in a parallel passage in Colossians: “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” (Colossians 3:16). Even if one translates *tē kardia* as locative (“in the heart”), the meaning is still “with the heart.” Just a comparison of Colossians 3:16 with Ephesians 5:19 settles the matter—“with gratitude in your hearts.”

In the Ephesian Epistle, Paul calls attention to the ethical behavior that a servant should exhibit toward his owner or master. He writes: “doing the will of God **from your heart**” (Ephesians 6:6). The phrase “from your heart” is a translation of the Greek, which is literally translated “from [the] soul” (ἐκ ψυχῆς, *ek psychēs*). Psalm 111:1 also captures the expression (“with all your heart”): “I will extol the LORD **with all my heart.**” When the ark of God was being moved from Abinadab’s house on a new cart, the Chronicler pens: “David and all the Israelites were celebrating **with all their might** before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets (1 Chronicles 13:8). Another psalm of David also expresses the thought of Paul in Ephesians 5:19. Pay attention to David: “I will praise you, O LORD, **with all my heart**” (Psalm 138:1).

⁷⁴ **William Barclay** (1907–1978) was an author, radio, and television presenter, Church of Scotland minister, and professor of divinity and biblical criticism at the University of Glasgow.

⁷⁵ **Edgar Johnson Goodspeed** (1871–1962) was educated at Denison University and the University of Chicago. Goodspeed went on to become Professor of Biblical Literature and Patristics at the University of Chicago in 1894. Goodspeed's works include *The Twelve: The Story of Christ's Apostles*, *Problems of New Testament Translation*, and *The Apostolic Fathers: An American Translation*

⁷⁶ **James Moffatt** (1870–1944) was educated at Glasgow University and went on to become a professor of Greek and New Testament Exegesis at Oxford in 1911. A short while later, Moffatt accepted the position of professor of church history at the United Free Church College. Moffatt’s utmost ambition was to provide an easily readable Bible. His contributions included paraphrased translations for coherent understanding. Moffatt is the author of International Critical Commentary (ICC) *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*.

⁷⁷The dative case is the case of reception. (The apostle is speaking to the crowd.)

⁷⁸The locative is the case of location or position. (The apostle is in the house).

⁷⁹The instrumental also uses the same form as the dative and locative and expresses means or instrument, as the name implies. (The apostle teaches with laws). For an excellent explanation of the various cases in Greek, see Ray Summers, *Essentials of New Testament Greek*, revised by Thomas Sawyer (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 15-20.

The context of Amos 5:23 sets forth God’s attitude about observance of the things commanded by Him when one’s lifestyle is totally contrary to love—love for God and love for one’s neighbor. Many Israelites labored under the impression that if they attended their “solemn assemblies” with their punctilious observance of the rituals commanded by God, then all things would be okay. They failed to understand that what God really desires is the person, not their rituals. Even though the offerings were important aspects of their Levitical heritage, nevertheless, the Lord rejected his own institutions and his instruments of music because of their unethical behavior. These rituals and their musical instruments gave their performers a false sense of security. They had rejected the very heart of the Law. In fact, God taunted them, as it were, to sin:

“Go to Bethel and sin; go to Gilgal and sin yet more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three years.^b ⁵ Burn leavened bread as a thank offering and brag about your freewill offerings— boast about them, you Israelites, for this is what you love to do,” declares the Sovereign LORD. (Amos 4:4-5)

Later, God says, “I hate, I despise your religious feasts; I cannot stand your assemblies” (5:21). These activities became the focus of God’s hatred because they furthered the false sense of security, refuge, or safekeeping. We can hardly reflect upon Amos 5:21 without due deliberation upon the words of Isaiah (739 BC), approximately twenty years later, concerning the same mindset of God against the southern kingdom of Judah:

Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations— I cannot bear your evil assemblies. ¹⁴ Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. (Isaiah 1:13-14)

As with Amos (760 BC), so, too, Isaiah (739 BC) gives God’s reaction to their rituals, rituals of worship not expressive of emotions of the heart. Both Israel and Judah were lulled, or pacified, into thinking that their religious rituals were fulfilling their religious duties. As observed earlier in this chapter, God commanded instruments of music (2 Chronicles 29:25) to be employed in the Temple to honor Him. God is not condemning the use of the instruments anymore than He is condemning sacrificial offerings, which He commanded. God’s rejection of their rituals focused upon their external behavior—behavior that God deplored.

One hundred years later than Isaiah, Jeremiah (627 BC) addressed the deplorable conditions in the southern kingdom. He calls attention to their ethical behavior as well as their punctiliousness to their rituals. Listen to Jeremiah as he paints a graphic picture of the same scenario that both Amos and Isaiah addressed:

This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: ² “Stand at the gate of the LORD’s house and there proclaim this message: “Hear the word of the LORD, all you people of Judah who come through these gates to worship the LORD. ³ This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. ⁴ Do not trust in deceptive words and say, “This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!” ⁵ If

^b Or *tithes on the third day*

you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, ⁶ if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, ⁷ then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers for ever and ever. ⁸ But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless. ⁹ Will you steal and murder, commit adultery and perjury, burn incense to Baal and follow other gods you have not known, ¹⁰ and then come and stand before me in this house, which bears my Name, and say, “We are safe”—safe to do all these detestable things? ¹¹ Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD. ¹² Go now to the place in Shiloh where I first made a dwelling for my Name, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of my people Israel. (Jeremiah 7:1-12)

We should recall that over one hundred years earlier that Amos called attention to their unethical conduct versus their tenacity to the strict observance of their religious rituals. They employed their music in a mechanical way as well as their other activities in order to please or appease, so they thought, the God of heaven. Their worship was not “from the soul.” Their worship was “soulless” worship. The people of Israel practiced ritual over, or above, heart obedience. God wants worship from the soul/heart, not mere external ritual. The same is still true today. This is why we must sing and make music with all our hearts. What did God want from the Northern Kingdom? Listen to Amos, once more, as he reveals the words of God to this apostate nation:

For I know how many are your offenses and how great your sins. You oppress the righteous and take bribes and you deprive the poor of justice in the courts. ¹³ Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil. ¹⁴ Seek good, not evil, that you may live. Then the LORD God Almighty will be with you, just as you say he is. ¹⁵ Hate evil, love good; maintain justice in the courts. Perhaps the LORD God Almighty will have mercy on the remnant of Joseph. (Amos 5:12-15)

Amos 6:5

Once more, Amos focuses upon the don’t-care attitude (Amos 6:1). In this Scripture, he begins with the Southern Kingdom and then, immediately turns his attention to the Northern Kingdom and then back to the Southern Kingdom. Once again, Amos leads up to the use of instruments in their gatherings—their homes. Amos 5:23 appears to be in a context of Temple worship, but Amos 6:5 appears to be in a context of one’s life outside the Temple. He deals with their sumptuous lifestyles—lives lived in total disregard for the poor. Listen to Amos as the Holy Spirit speaks through him:

You put off the evil day and bring near a reign of terror. ⁴ You lie on beds inlaid with ivory and lounge on your couches. You dine on choice lambs and fattened calves. ⁵ You strum away on your harps like David and improvise on musical instruments. ⁶ You drink wine by the bowlful and use the finest lotions, but you do not grieve over the ruin of Joseph. (6:3-6)

Just a casual reading of this text reveals the ghastly consequences of surface religion. In 5:18, Amos pronounced a “woe” on the Northern Kingdom, now he pronounces a “woe” on the Southern Kingdom (6:1). In this pericope (6:1-7), Amos condemns their luxurious lifestyle—a lifestyle of self-indulgence and gluttony, which was supported by a reign of terror (6:3). This

same life of self-indulgence also appeared in the Northern Kingdom. It is in this regard that God called attention to their extravagance at the expense of the common people:

I will tear down the winter house along with the summer house; the houses adorned with ivory will be destroyed and the mansions will be demolished,' declares the LORD. (3:15)

How does this lifestyle coincide with the Southern Kingdom? We read of their ivory-inlaid beds, drinking wine by the bowls, use of the finest lotions, no feelings for the poor, and no compassion or understanding of the impending judgment of the Northern Kingdom.

It is in this context that Amos mentions musical instruments. In 5:23, we discover that God is not pleased with their musical instruments since their worship was hypocritical—performed in order to impress the people with their acts of piety. **Now Amos turns his attention to the imitation of musical instruments employed by David, instruments commanded by God.** What is the difference between David and the Southern Kingdom leaders who also employed musical instruments? The answer lies in the attitude. In other words, David employed the instruments to God's glory, but, on the other hand, their instruments were used for frivolous songs. Unfortunately, many Christians cite Amos to prove that God had not authorized the use of instruments in praise to God. This use of instruments was unauthorized by God. Yet, this interpretation violates a clear passage of Scripture that states that God told David to use instruments. We should listen to the Holy Spirit as he has the Chronicler to record God's instructions to David:

He stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by **David** and **Gad** the king's seer and **Nathan** the prophet; **this was commanded by the LORD through his prophets.**²⁶ So the Levites stood ready with David's instruments, and the priests with their trumpets. (2 Chronicles 29:25-26)

David made songs for God's glory, but the Israelites made songs to the glory of their feast. These individuals were not serving the Lord but their own appetites. The context of 6:5 is that the songs were "**frivolous**" in nature. They composed songs and played them on harps as David did. The one was frolicsome; on the other hand, the other was for God's glory. They had, so to speak, their jazz, their rock and roll, and their hard-rock music. There is a proper and an improper use of songs and instruments. Even religious songs must be sung with lives lived to glorify God. Their religious songs did not coincide with their lifestyles as the people of God. We can hardly read Amos 6:1-5 without due reflection upon Paul's admonition to the Christians in Ephesus. Listen to Paul as he addresses the proper use of songs and instrumental music, not drunken songs sung with musical instruments:

Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.¹⁹ Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. **Sing and make music in your heart** to the Lord,²⁰ always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:18-20)

Worship: Relegated to Mere Spectators

This is the third argument under Coffman's new caption ("Crooked Efforts to Justify Their Use"). His second contention surrounded 2 Chronicles 29:25, which is cited above. His third quarrel with the use of the instrument is as weak as his other opinions developed in his short essay. He complains that if we allow individuals to play the instrument, then this moves the so-called worship service from the hands of the church into the hands of professionals.⁸⁰ He continues his arguments by writing: "Thus, the congregation's role as participants in the worship is relegated to the status of mere spectators."⁸¹ This argument is extremely off base. If we were to apply this kind of rationale, then we would have to stop one person from preaching and another individual from leading in prayer, or another person from leading the singing; otherwise, according to Coffman, the "worship is relegated to the status of mere spectators."

This whole subject of worship needs a theological overhaul by the Christian community. The Christians need to rethink the traditional concept of worship. Believers must reanalyze the question: What Is Worship? It is true that in corporate worship, we are to be active, not passive. Having said this, we must also realize that participation is not always actually participating by outward visible performance. For example, we can attend a Christian assembly and participate without actually performing in the activity in a visible way. Is this a contradiction? No! For instance, we can participate by paying attention and involving ourselves in the activity, which is passive participation.

The only kind of singing mentioned in the New Testament in an actual assembly is found in First Corinthians 14. This singing is *solo* singing, not congregational singing. Even though only one person sings, nevertheless, there is still broad participation by all, even though passive in nature. The same is true when one or several play instruments; there is still broad participation, even though passive in nature on the part of the congregation as a whole. This kind of participation also includes the way we respond to other activities that occur in the assembly. Even though a congregation usually has only one person to address the congregation, still the congregation involves itself through the way it thinks and receives the message. In our hearts, we play a part in all the activities, even though we do not actively engage in the solo singing, preaching, prayers, and so on. When God reaches our hearts in sensitivity to the spirit-filled preaching and prayers, we still join in the actions, even though listening is passive in nature. It is not correct to say the congregation has relegated its activities to the "spectator" status.

CONCLUSION

All the arguments against instrumental music by Coffman are based upon a so-called worship service, which is based on the philosophy of "pattern theology." If God has not ordained a worship service with five prescribed rituals, then his position about the sinfulness of

⁸⁰ James Burton Coffman, "The Sinful Use of Instrumental Music," 22.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

instrumental music is null-and-void. The issues presented by James Burton Coffman⁸² focuses on a so-called worship service on Sunday morning—usually about one hour. The current concept of worship is one of the great obstacles to unity among God’s family today. Christians are divided over something that the New Testament never addresses.

The Scriptures never legislate concerning certain rituals to be carried out in a so-called worship service—a service with five prescribed rituals that have to be executed in a precise manner.⁸³ The New Testament does not use a worship formula for the Christian assembly, or meeting. In 1977, Dwaine Dunning questioned the traditional concept of a so-called worship service with the traditional five-rituals that have to be performed in a precise matter in order for one’s worship to be “true” worship. In 1977, Dwaine Dunning debated Rubel Shelly over the use of the instrument in the Christian assembly. **In this debate, Dunning successfully argued that all Shelly’s arguments were null-and-void since the New Testament never ordained a worship service for the Christian community.**⁸⁴

⁸²In concluding my remarks, I again want to stress that I believe that Coffman, during his earthly life, was a true believer in Jesus as the Savior of the world. He is God’s child. When he passed from this life, he entered the gates of eternity and experienced the resurrection of immortality. Unfortunately, this in-depth study is necessary to assist those who read Coffman’s essay to understand more clearly the teaching of the Holy Spirit on this subject. His mistake was an honest mistake of the heart, not rebellion against God. We should remember that salvation is not contingent upon absolute perfection in knowledge, but rather upon our acceptance of Jesus as Lord. All error is error but not all error will condemn our souls; otherwise, no one could be saved. All truth is true but not all truth is essential to salvation; otherwise, we could not be saved. Am I in fellowship with Christians in error? Yes! What other kind are there?

⁸³For a detailed study of worship, see Dallas Burdette’s four studies on worship, in Dallas Burdette, *Biblical Preaching and Teaching: Jesus and Our Privileges* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 358-438.

⁸⁴Rubel Shelly and Dwaine Dunning, *Shelly—Dunning Debate* (West Monroe, Louisiana: William C. Johnson, Inc., 1977).