

*Music Matters in the Lord's Church* by Aubrey Johnson, Nashville, TN: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christian, c. 1995, 140 pp. ISBN: 0-89098-141-8, Cost: \$9.00.

Aubrey Johnson writes for members of the church of Christ primarily to instruct them concerning the various aspects of a cappella music. Members of the churches of Christ, for the most part, do not use instruments of music in worship to God. The book consists of thirteen chapters, designed for one quarter of study, that address various issues with regard to the type of music the New Testament authorizes for use in worship to God. Johnson begins with acknowledgments, a dedication and preface. He gives a survey of religious music at the beginning of the study and at the conclusion of the study in order to gauge the difference in thought and attitudes about the type of music authorized by God before and after one has read the book. The book closes with a bibliography.

In chapter one, Johnson argues that music matters. Religious music can be a source of great blessing. But, it has also been controversial and a battleground. Members of churches of Christ have resisted the use of instrumental music while other religious groups have readily accepted it. Why? Is it a matter of preference? Is it a matter of being peculiar? Is it a matter of pettiness? Johnson answers "no" to each of these questions. Music matters because God ought to be obeyed even in small matters. Music matters because correct worship has far reaching consequences in glorifying God and pleasing Him.

In chapter two, the author looks at music in the Old Testament. Johnson gives an overview of the use of musical instruments in the Old Testament. He considers their use outside of worship to God and as a part of worship to God. He shows that the instrument was not authorized by God in the Pentateuch as a part of the worship of the Tabernacle. The instrument was used by King David who introduced them into Levitical worship. David commanded the Levites to appoint from among themselves men to serve as temple singers who would be accompanied by instruments of music (I Chron. 23:5). Several passages in the Psalms call for instruments to be used in worship to God (Psa. 150:3-6). Other passages that reference the use of instruments in worship to God are Isaiah 38:20 and Ezra 3:10. II Chronicles 29:25 declares that the Lord commanded the use of instruments by David, Gad and Nathan who were His prophets. When God wants instruments to be used He authorizes them. The absence of the use of instruments in worship to God in the New Testament shows that God did not want them. Instead, He authorizes Christians to sing. Johnson argues that a worship practice in the Old Testament does not authorize its use in the New Testament.

Chapter three addresses the subject of music in the New Testament. During the intertestamental period, the Jews began to develop the synagogue as places of worship. The temple had been destroyed by the Babylonians. The Jews were in captivity in Babylon. Scholars believe that the music used in the synagogues was exclusively vocal. Some suggest that the church adopted this style of worship. However, the church's use of vocal music comes directly from the New Testament itself. Vocal music in the New Testament church was commanded by God. Instrumental music, in worship to God, is not mentioned in the New Testament. Johnson mentions three main passages where music in worship is mentioned in the New Testament: I Cor. 14:15, 26; Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16. Each of these passages indicates that singing was commanded by God. Johnson states, "A grateful heart is the only instrument authorized by Scripture" (p 38). The only basis upon which people began to use instruments of music is because they liked them and wanted them.

Johnson addresses the subject of music and authority in chapter four. He begins by revealing that most people like instrumental music because it makes them feel worshipful. However, worship to God must be done “in spirit and in truth.” The heart must be stirred, but the worshipper must also obey God’s will. Worship according to truth means worshipping God as He has revealed. Johnson affirms that there is no authority for the use of instruments of music in worship to God in our present time. There are only two sources of authority that guide us in worship: God or men. Worshipping according to the commandments of men is vain worship. Johnson shows that the Old Testament cannot be used to authorize instruments in worship today. He shows that there is no command or example of instruments being used in worship in the New Testament. The use of instruments in the book of Revelation is symbolical and not a grounds for their use. Also, one cannot appeal to instruments as aids in worship. The instrument constitutes a different form of worship altogether than vocal music.

In chapter five, Johnson examines the argument for instruments from the silence of the scriptures. Some scholars have taught and believed that silence (no Scripture authorizing or condemning the use of instruments) permits their use. Others hold that the silence of the Scriptures forbids their use. Johnson affirms that a positive command from God authorizes all that is involved in carrying out the command. God has commanded us to sing. Singing does not require instruments in order to carry out the command. Therefore, instruments are excluded. The law of exclusion is illustrated by Johnson using God’s commands to Moses to speak to the rock and smite the rock; the positive command to be baptized and common sense illustrations from everyday life. “Silence is not to be equated with permission” (p. 54).

Chapter six addresses music and early church history. Johnson reviews the two main reasons for rejecting the use of instruments of music in the worship of the New Testament church. The first is that Christians must follow the authority of the New Testament. The second is that the New Testament does not authorize the use of instruments of music. Johnson appeals to the church fathers, who are not inspired men, but who reflect the practice set forth by the apostles. They were unanimous in their rejection of the use of instruments of music in worship to God (p. 56). The Greek Orthodox Church does not use instruments of music to this day. The Greek Orthodox Church split from Roman Catholicism in A. D. 1054. Leaders in the Reformation Movement were outspoken against the use of instruments: Martin Luther referred to the organ as the ensign of Baal (p. 58). John Wesley stated, “I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither seen nor heard” (p. 59). Johnson also mentions later denominational leaders such as John Calvin, Adam Clark and Charles Spurgeon who opposed the instrument.

Johnson looks at the history of the Restoration Movement in chapter seven. The Restoration Movement in America was a religious effort to restore New Testament Christianity. The design of the movement was to go back to the Bible and base all religious faith and practice on the authority of God’s Word (p. 65). Leaders in the early part of the movement rejected the use of instruments in worship. It was around 1850 that Silas Leonard wrote that some were using instruments in worship (S. W. Leonard, “Church Music, No. 2” Proclamation and Reformer, 1, no. 2 (February 1850), p. 86 as cited by Johnson (p. 66). Alexander Campbell, a prominent leader in the movement, rejected the use of instruments. L. L. Pinkerton introduced a melodeon in the worship services at Midway Christian Church in Kentucky in 1859. W. K. Pendleton permitted the use of the instrument as an expediency. Isaac Errett and J. H. Garrison also supported the use of the instrument. Various arguments were used to defend the use of instruments including: their use in the temple and references to harps in Revelation; the use of

the Greek word *psallo*; the view that instruments are an aid; and the idea that instruments aroused feelings of devotion to God. Other voices in the movement rejected the use of the instrument in worship. Men such as Ben Franklin, Moses E. Lard, J. W. McGarvey, David Lipscomb, E. G. Sewell, and H. Leo Boles argued against its use.

In chapter eight, Johnson focuses on music and the nature of worship. Johnson affirms that worship must be God-centered. Worship is directed to God and must be pleasing to Him. Since singing is authorized by God, it is acceptable with Him. Worship must be done in spirit and in truth. Singing is especially suited to the expression of the human heart in worship to God. A secondary aspect of singing is edification. When we sing we teach and admonish one another. This means that singing is a spiritual activity that accomplishes spiritual purposes.

Johnson examines music and current trends in chapter nine. Johnson explores and addresses questions arising about imitating instruments with the human voice and hand clapping in accompaniment with the singing. Johnson states, "Just as all music is not acceptable in worship, neither is all vocal music" (p. 86). Johnson rejects the use of vocal bands that imitate sounds of instruments in the worship. He also rejects humming. "A spiritual message must be communicated by what is sung" (p. 88). Hand clapping along with the songs is rejected on the basis of a lack of scriptural authority.

The topic addressed in chapter ten is music and congregational singing. Sacred music consists of: psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sacred music has a spiritual focus. It consists only of singing. It is accomplished congregationally in worship to God. Johnson rejects solos, quartets and choirs because they do not provide a reciprocal function of mutual edification. You cannot worship by proxy. Johnson also addresses some of the arguments used in favor of special music in worship (pp. 103-105).

In chapter eleven, Johnson considers the different settings where worship might take place and whether or not sacred music must be unaccompanied by instruments of music. What is the distinction between entertainment and worship? Could one listen to or even participate in singing sacred music with instrumental accompaniment if the circumstances were not deemed worship? Johnson acknowledges that there may be circumstances where singing spiritual songs is not worship (p. 114). What role does intent play in worship? Johnson raises many questions that deserve serious thought.

Chapter twelve explores music and unity. Worship should promote harmony and not division. However, many of the music trends that have become popular today are causing division. Johnson mentions that some Christians are forced into a crisis of conscience regarding what is being done in worship assemblies whenever a current trend is introduced (vocal band or hand clapping for example). To what degree is the law of love applicable in maintaining the unity of the Spirit? Should we forgo a liberty in order to maintain peace? Johnson applies the motto, "In matters of faith, unity; In matters of opinion, liberty; In all things, charity" to music trends that threaten the unity of the church. "Christians should not be forced to choose between their consciences and fellowship with other saints" (p. 128).

In chapter thirteen, Johnson summarizes music in worship. He emphasizes the authority principle. Jesus Christ is Lord and His will must be followed in all matters of religious faith and practice (p. 130). Since Jesus does not authorize the use of instruments in worship to God, Christians should not use them. Singing in worship is authorized by the Lord and can be practiced without causing division. Innovations of man must be rejected in order to preserve the unity of the Spirit.