



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

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## VICTORY IS OURS

We like to win. Anybody who thinks of his team as “lovable losers” is deceiving himself. Second place just means you are the best among the losers, but a loser nevertheless. Nobody ever wrote a self-help book about losing with grace and dignity; if somebody did it didn’t sell well. We like winners, and we like to be winners.

When was the last time you saw a joyous celebration by the losing team? No, it is the winners that celebrate. In the Tour de France the winner gets the kiss from the pretty young lady. The winner of the Indianapolis 500 auto race gets the celebratory glass of milk. The Kentucky Derby is the run for the roses, but only the winner gets them. It has always been thus. The Greeks ran for a crown in the Olympic Games. Caesar came home in triumph, which originally meant he got the ancient equivalent of a ticker-tape parade.

The Jewish people are no different. Passover is really a celebration of victory over Egypt, when God brought them out with “a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm.” (Deut 26:8) Purim is a celebration of victory over the machinations of Haman (boo! hiss!). (Esth 9) The most well known victory celebration for the Jewish people, though, is probably Hanukkah.

The holiday (December 16-23 in 2006) is technically a celebration of the rededication of the Temple. In a real sense, however, it is a celebration of victory. Without military victory, the Temple would have remained defiled. Antiochus IV Epiphanes had defiled the Temple. Judas Maccabaeus had led the revolt that was in process of defeating the Seleucid Greeks.

Then Judas and his brothers said, "See, our enemies are crushed; let us go up to cleanse the sanctuary and dedicate it." So all the army assembled and went up to Mount Zion. There they saw the sanctuary desolate, the altar profaned, and the gates burned. In the courts they saw bushes sprung up as in a thicket, or as on one of the mountains. They saw also the chambers of the priests in ruins. (1 Maccabees 4:36-38)

While it was the result of a military victory, the dedication of the Temple was also a spiritual victory. It would have been easy for the Jewish people to assimilate

into Greek culture. They could have accepted the defiling of the Temple as a sign of Greek ascendancy. Instead they battled for their spiritual lives, and the dedication of the Temple was their victory.

He chose blameless priests devoted to the law, and they cleansed the sanctuary and removed the defiled stones to an unclean place. They deliberated what to do about the altar of burnt offering, which had been profaned. And they thought it best to tear it down, so that it would not be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it. So they tore down the altar, and stored the stones in a convenient place on the temple hill until a prophet should come to tell what to do with them. ... At the very season and on the very day that the Gentiles had profaned it, it was dedicated with songs and harps and lutes and cymbals. All the people fell on their faces and worshiped and blessed Heaven, who had prospered them. (1 Maccabees 4:42-46, 54-55)

It has been said that, since the destruction of the Second Temple, the table in the home is the equivalent of God’s temple. If that is so, then we need regularly to do what the Maccabean victors did. We defile the home and the table in many ways: disrespect, angry words, infidelity, indifference. At this time of the year, and regularly through the year, we need to cleanse and rededicate our lives and our homes. “Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I am the LORD your God.” (Lev 20:7) Then there will be great rejoicing and the disgrace will be removed. (1 Maccabees 4:58) Then we will have won a victory as great as that celebrated on Hanukkah.

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# ***THE SILENCE THAT SHOUTS***

One hundred years ago the U.S. Census officially recognized the split between the instrumental and non-instrumental restoration churches (Christian Church, Disciples of Christ, churches of Christ). In that hundred years there has been much discussion, some unfortunate splitting of churches outside the United States, and not a little acrimony. Even now, as discussions and debates continue more than ever on college campuses and in “unity meetings,” there is still much disagreement and misunderstanding.

Part of the misunderstanding results from those of us in the non-instrumental groups failing in recent years to teach why we believe what we believe. It is not enough to say that we believe it is wrong to sing in the assembly of the church with accompaniment by “mechanical instruments of music.” Our young people and those who use instruments need to know why we are so adamant about what seems to them a minor thing. This failure to teach the “why” with the “what” was shown recently in a question about the “argument from silence.”

The questioner, a member of an instrumental church, asked why, if we don’t use instruments because the Bible doesn’t authorize them, we use songbooks, pitch

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## The writer of Hebrews argues the validity of the argument from silence.

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pipes, and other things we can’t find mentioned in the Bible. This shows that we haven’t clearly explained the argument about the scriptures being silent about instruments. When we make the argument clearly, this question becomes irrelevant; but most people even in the non-instrumental groups have trouble understanding why.

### **The argument from silence**

Basically the “argument from silence” says that where the Bible gives a specific command, the silence about other ways of doing what is commanded is as important as the command itself. If the Bible says to do something in a specific way, then it is no longer silent. Even its silence about other ways of doing things becomes a deafening roar.

There is a distinction that must be made between a general command and a specific command. In this context, a general command tells us to do something, but does not specify how to do it. Jesus

said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations.” (Matt 28:19) The command to go is general, not specifying how to go. Thus we may go by camel, car, or carrier pigeon. We can fly on a plane, walk across the street, or use the internet. That he doesn’t say how makes the means open to reason. Later in that same verse he says to go, “immersing them.” That part of the command is specific. We may not choose not to baptize, because it is a specific part of the command. We may not say that somebody must be immersed and place membership in a congregation before they can be saved. That would be adding a condition not specified. Because baptism is specifically in water (Acts 8:36; Acts 10:47; 1 Peter 3:20-21) we don’t have the option of baptizing in rose petals.

Although I think there are stronger arguments against the use of musical instruments, the specificity of the scripture, in the same way as the examples above, binds its silence on this issue. That is, because we are told to be “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,” (Eph 5:20) that automatically and emphatically excludes all other manner of making music in the assembly. Many eminent scholars through the years, including John Wesley, agree (although the Methodists don’t follow him in this point).

Some people argue that the silence is permissive rather than prohibitive. Yes it says sing and make melody in your heart. Yes it says speak to one another in song (Col 3:19). But that doesn’t exclude the use of drums, guitars, pianos, or organs. Because these are pleasing to us and enhance our sense of worship to God we will add them, because the scripture doesn’t say we can’t.

Actually, many people understand the argument but refuse to apply it just in this one case. They will agree that God told Noah to make an ark of gopher wood (Gen 6). They will even agree that if Noah had used pine or oak, instead of or in addition to, he would have disobeyed God and we wouldn’t be here right now. They just refuse to substitute singing for gopher wood and musical instruments for oak or pine.

King Saul knew the law said only a priest could offer the sacrifice on the altar. But when Samuel delayed his coming Saul argued that the scripture that specified the priest did not specifically exclude anyone else. He offered the sacrifice, and lost the kingdom. (1 Sam 13) Don’t try to tell Saul that the argument from silence is not valid!

In this respect, even the writer of Hebrews argues the validity of the argument from silence. In fact, he uses it to prove that Jesus established a new covenant that was superior to the old. The Messiah is a priest of this new covenant, but could not be a priest under the old because of the argument from silence.

For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. (Heb 7:12-14)

What might we not get away with by using the argument of those who use musical instruments? “Thou shalt not covet ... any thing that is thy neighbour's.” (Ex 20:17) Since it does not say I can't covet anything belonging to someone who is not my neighbor I will covet the car of the person two streets over. The Corinthians were turning the Lord's Supper into a feast. After all, Jesus had used unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, but because he didn't specifically forbid other foods, surely they could add those as well. Paul condemned such action. “Despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.” (1 Cor 11:22) God seems to understand the silence that shouts when a specific is given; why can't we?

In one instrumental Christian Church somebody found a tract. It purported to list every New Testament scripture about such practices as priestly garments and burning incense. When opened, the pages were blank. They could have, but wouldn't, add musical instruments in the title. The difference is that there is no specific command that would make the adding of burning incense or special clothing wrong or right. There is a specific command to sing with the heart and voice.

## A different kind of silence

Earlier I said that a true understanding of this argument against musical instruments would make questions about songbooks, church buildings, and other trappings irrelevant. The reason for that is that these things have no specific command related to them. The command is to sing and make melody in the heart. That doesn't command or deny using printed words or music for the song. It doesn't disallow the song leader (another thing about which the scripture is truly silent) from using a means to determine on what note to start the song. If a scripture could be found saying to worship with an unobstructed view of the sky, then a church building might be wrong. Since the churches in the New Testament met in a variety of places, obviously no specific command was given that would make a building right or wrong. The one is the silence in the presence of a specific command; the other is total silence.

Some people would then say that an instrument is just an expedient for keeping people on pitch and rhythm, just as a songbook is an expedient to keep them on the same words. That argument holds two errors. The first is that the New Testament specifies the instrument of the

human body (voice and heart). In so doing it excludes all else. The second is that in most places the instrument is not just a way to keep people on pitch and rhythm. Instruments are used for an introductory phrase or verse, without vocalization. Sometimes they are given their own musical line, separate from the vocal lines. Instruments are no longer a mere expedient. That shows the “slippery slope” that adding things that are omitted from the specific command poses. People come to eat a meal, not partake in the Lord's Supper; people come to hear the music, not to be “teaching and admonishing one another in songs and hymns and spiritual songs.” (Col 3:16) Can an organ teach? Can a guitar exhort? Can a drum speak? Being silent where the scripture is silent can be an active silence as much as a passive silence.

## Other arguments

If the argument from silence is not one of the strongest reasons we don't use musical instruments, what are some of the stronger reasons? Even without this argument, could it be shown that the use of musical

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instruments in the assembly of the church is an unwarranted addition?

Some present the argument of shadows. This says that musical instruments are like the incense, offerings, *menorah*, and priesthood under the Law of Moses. These things, according to Hebrews 8:5, are an “example and shadow of heavenly things.” As such, we no longer need the shadow, because we have the substance in Christ and his church. As we no longer need incense or a priesthood, so we no longer need the shadow of instruments.

Perhaps the strongest argument is the historical. The Jewish people consistently prohibited musical instruments in the synagogue assembly, because that was part of the Temple worship. The early Christians met in synagogues, and continued that practice. Even when they left the synagogues because of the number of non-Jewish Christians, they continued to prohibit the use of instruments. This prohibition lasted everywhere for over three hundred years and in most places for about six hundred. If our goal is to restore the worship of the early church, then we must necessarily prohibit musical instruments in the assembly for the purpose of accompaniment or as a stand-alone form of worship.

# ***PUTTING IT IN PERSPECTIVE***

Perspective is a fascinating, and sometimes tricky, thing. Artists, at least the kind I like, are quite familiar with the concept. Simply stated, objects of similar heights appear proportionately smaller the farther they are from the viewer. On a flat representation such as a painting, artists begin with lines from a given point, the vanishing point, so that the walls of a building, for instance, are kept in the proper perspective. Sometimes violating the rules of perspective creates an intentionally jarring picture, such as a person appearing as tall as a building or a house that looks out of kilter because the vanishing point is misplaced. Colloquially we speak of keeping things in perspective, meaning the important things take bigger place than the less important.

Perspective is all a matter of point of view. To one standing in the artist's place one tree may appear taller than the other, because it is supposed to be closer. To a person depicted far away in the picture, the perspective would be reversed; the apparently shorter tree would appear taller. Ursula K. LeGuin wrote a delightful story based on this idea. In it a solitary tree beside a road discusses the difficulty of appearing to get larger to oncoming traffic at the same time as appearing to get smaller to traffic that has passed. Perspective can become difficult when looked at from varying points of view at the same time, something we are ill-equipped to do.

And yet, should we not try to see ourselves as the person at the other end of the perspective sees us? When we consider ourselves and our problems so large and him so small, should we not rather view the other as larger and we ourselves as small? The Scottish poet

put it aptly. "O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us/ To see oursels as others see us/ It wad frae monie a blunder free us." (Robert Burns, *To a Louse*)

The scripture puts the idea a little differently, but the concept is still the same. "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring [literally to go before in order to show the way] one another." (Rom 12:10) We are to be examples to others of viewing things from a reverse perspective. Paul is telling us to show others how to see the other person as more important.

This is the real meaning of loving one another, including our enemies. The love spoken of is not an emotion, but an act of will. It is more than simply hoping that things go well for another. It is not just "positive good will." Love is desiring the best for another person, even if you have reason not to do so, and then acting to see that the best happens. It is seeing things from the other person's perspective, in which you may be very small, and acting on that vision. This is not always easy. We have difficulty comprehending a new perspective. It is, however, necessary if we are to be holy, as God is holy.

It is said that an airplane's shadow is the same size in flight as it is on the ground. This is because the distance in flight is minimal in comparison to the total distance from the sun. The perspective is such that the shadows are essentially the same. So it is with us. If we look at others as being just as close to, or just as far from, God as we are, then we are all the same size. When we see our brother from God's perspective we must love, because we are all the same.

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