

Seek The Old Paths

"Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths...and walk therein."

(Jeremiah 6:16)

Vol. 18, No. 7

July 2007

RESPONDING TO A DEFENSE OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Alan E. Highers

The *Christian Chronicle* (January 2007) reported that the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Fort Worth, Texas, had decided to "add an instrumental worship assembly with communion on Saturday nights." According to the *Chronicle*, Rick Atchley, described as "Senior Minister" of the congregation, said, "Richland Hills must put the kingdom of God and Christ's mission above concern that the change might hurt the congregation's standing or influence with Churches of Christ." He stated, "I firmly believe that if Richland Hills is to be most faithful to God's word and Christ's mission, we must become a both/and church with regard to instrumental and *a cappella* praise." The *Chronicle* described Atchley as "a national leader in efforts to foster better relations with instrumental Christian Churches."

In a lesson delivered at Richland Hills on December 10, 2006, Rick Atchley stated that the Holy Spirit had spoken to him and revealed to him that it was wrong to oppose instrumental music. After the disclosure of his "revelation" from the Holy Spirit, Atchley then sought to offer a defense from the scriptures for the decision at Richland Hills. In this issue of THE SPIRITUAL SWORD, we propose to answer the arguments and defenses which he set forth and to show, that, in fact, he has departed from the faith once delivered

(Jude 3). The Richland Hills elders, in supporting his teaching, have betrayed the heritage bestowed upon them and have failed to tend the flock of God of which they are overseers (Acts 20:28-31).

PAST DEFENSES OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

The Richland Hills effort is simply another chapter in a long list of attempts to defend the use of instrumental music in worship. It is noteworthy that many different approaches have been tried. When one failed, the advocates and defenders of the instrument switched over to another line of argument. There has been a studied determination to keep the instrument at all costs even when it was the cause of division and disunity, and there is a long history of trying *different* arguments each time one type of defense is unsuccessful. Some of these efforts may be characterized in the following manner:

1. *Authorized by scripture.* All of the early attempts to defend instrumental music were appeals to the scripture. J. Carroll Stark affirmed in debate with Joe S. Warlick in 1903 in Henderson, Tennessee, "The word of God authorizes the use of instruments of music for praise in the church of Jesus Christ." Arguments were made from the Old Testament, from the presence of Jesus and the

disciples at the temple, from the reference to harps in heaven, and from other passages that there was scriptural justification for instruments in the worship of the church.

2. *Required by the Greek.* In 1920, O. E. Payne of the Christian Church published a book entitled *Instrumental Music Is Scriptural*. He advanced the argument that instrumental music is required by the Greek word *psallo*. He said the instrument "inheres in *psallo*" and that it "is mandatory." According to Payne's theory, one could not obey the command of God without an instrument. Christian Church preachers at first were elated by Payne's book. They thought it was unanswerable. S. S. Lappin, a former editor of the *Christian Standard* called it "the best treatment of the subject I have ever seen." It was the circulation of Payne's book that eventually led to the famous debate between N. B. Hardeman and Ira M. Boswell, conducted in the Ryman Auditorium in Nashville (see the introduction to the debate book by F. B. Srygley). Notwithstanding all of the praise and adulation poured out upon Payne's book, however, by the time of the debate in 1923, the promoters of instrumental music had lost their zeal for Payne's book and their champion would not affirm its thesis.

3. *Permitted by the Greek.* By the time of the Hardeman-Boswell Debate, the promoters, who had been

so enthusiastic for Payne's book, had begun to see the consequences of it. If the instrument *inheres* in the Greek

word, then the instrument is not merely *allowed*, it is *required*. That is precisely what Payne had argued. He contended that one could not *psallo* without a mechanical instrument any more than one could *baptize* without immersion. This would not only *justify* the use of instrumental music (which the proponents were all anxious to do), but it would also *mandate* the instrument (which, of course, they did *not* wish to do). Paul and Silas sang hymns in prison (Acts 16:25), but no one contends they had a piano or organ in their cell. Without an instrument, pursuant to Payne's argument, they would have been in violation of the admonition of God. Therefore, even though the circulation of O. E. Payne's book led to the Hardeman-Boswell Debate, Boswell wanted no part of it and refused to affirm Payne's position. Instead, he took the stance that instrumental music was *permitted* or *allowed* by the Greek word *psallo*, but it was not *required*. In effect, he gave up the argument from the Greek. Brother Hardeman pressed him throughout the debate to explain how one could worship "either with or without" the instrument if the mechanical instrument of music was embraced in the Greek word *psallo*. It was a dilemma from which Boswell was never able to extricate himself.

4. *Only an aid.* Beginning in the 1950s, men such as Burton W. Barber and Julian O. Hunt began to advocate the notion that instrumental music was not "in the worship," but it was merely an *aid* to the worshipper. Just as a walking cane aids one to walk, and eyeglasses aid one to see, so the instrument of music aids one to sing, argued Barber, Hunt, and their colleagues. They

attempted to place instrumental music in the same category with songbooks, public address systems, and electric lights. G. K. Wallace engaged in debates with the "aid only" advocates, and he pointed out that a walking cane does not add an element to walking, and eyeglasses do not add an element to seeing, but instrumental music adds another element to the worship. When one uses a songbook, he is still only singing; when one uses a public address system, he is still only teaching. Electric lights do not constitute an additional act of worship in the assembly. But when an instrument of music is introduced into the worship, something *in addition to* singing is added. It is an added element to the worship for which there is no divine warrant or scriptural authority. In this connection, one should note how the arguments for instrumental music went through a metamorphosis. From arguing that the Greek word *psallo* required the use of an instrument in worship, to arguing that the Greek word allowed the use of an instrument in worship, by the 1950s it was argued that the instrument was not even "in the worship," or part of the worship, but it was merely an aid to the individual. But there is more.

5. *Congregational singing unauthorized.* Don DeWalt, a prominent author and publisher among Christian Churches, propounded the view that no passage of scripture authorizes congregational singing. His allegation was answered by Guy N. Woods in an article in the *Gospel Advocate* dated May 16, 1985. One wonders what value there is to this argument. It reminds us of the argument between two school boys. One says, "You are a liar." The other responds, "You are another!" Now, think about it. The second boy does not deny he is a liar, but he merely contends that the first boy also is a liar. That would make both of them liars. There is little to gain from such an argument. This is the essence of DeWalt's argument. When we point out that there is no scriptural authority for the use of instrumental music in worship, the reply is, "Neither is there authority for congregational singing in worship." It is the classic "you-are-another" argument. In essence, it admits, "We know we

CONTRIBUTIONS

Wilma Jewett	\$10
David & Lisa Horwath.....	\$100
Jackie Weathers.....	\$50
Church of Christ, Rockford, IL.....	\$25
Anonymous.....	\$200
John H. Brown.....	\$25
Island Church of Christ, Anacortes, WA	\$50
Ruby York.....	\$148
Anonymous.....	\$70
Murel & Pat Jones	\$50
Baker Church of Christ, Baker, FL.....	\$25
Anonymous.....	\$300
Anonymous.....	\$200
Chuck & Nancy Verkist	\$25
Saks Church of Christ, Anniston, AL.....	\$50
Quartz Hill Church of Christ, Quartz Hill, CA.....	\$100
Barbara R. Shandor	\$100
Oil City Church of Christ, Oil City, LA.....	\$50
W. D. (Bill) Gower.....	\$100
Anonymous.....	\$50
Robert M. Price.....	\$200
Bobby & Mary Lawrence	\$100
Mark & Tina Lance	\$25
Beginning Balance	\$17,516.14
Contributions	\$ 2,053.00
Debits	
Postage	\$ 3,717.32
Paper & Supplies	\$ 2,215.44
Ending Balance	\$13,636.38

EDITORIAL COMMENT...

This month's *Seek The Old Paths* is longer than usual, but is necessary to include the article by brother Alan Highers in its entirety. It is a lengthy reading, but rich material in answering Rick Atchley's speeches at the Richland Hills Church of Christ in December, 2006, in which he argued in support of mechanical instrumental music in worship. Brother Highers' article appeared in the April 2007 issue of *The Spiritual Sword*. I encourage you to keep this information for future use. The February, March and April 2007 issues of *Seek The Old Paths* also contained material on Instrumental Music. They are available at www.seektheoldpaths.com/stop2007.htm.

do not have scriptural authority for instrumental music,” but, “You are in the same predicament because neither is there authority for congregational singing.” We will have more to say about authorization for congregational singing when we take up Rick Atchley’s speech, but let it suffice for the present to say that this is one of the weakest efforts ever devised to justify instrumental music in worship.

We must not overlook the significance of these shifting sands of argumentation. Why did the platform constantly undergo change?

6. *No authority needed.* In 1988 I engaged in a public debate with Given O. Blakely at Neosho, Missouri, on the instrumental music issue. The discussion was published in book form. Don DeWelt, Julian O. Hunt, Duane Dunning, and other preachers and debaters for the Christian Church were in attendance. Blakely attempted still another end run in his attempt to justify instrumental music. He contended that worship is not regulated in the New Testament and, therefore, no authority is needed. It seemed apparent that Blakely’s contention was an embarrassment to many of the old-time Christian Church debaters who were in the audience. They had attempted to prove that instrumental music had scriptural sanction, but Blakely apparently had seen the futility of making that defense, and he abandoned it altogether. His argument was largely a repudiation of his predecessors. If worship is not regulated, he was asked why people could not pray to Mary, use Rosary Beads, burn incense, place meat on the Lord’s Table and, in fact, do whatever they wished in worship. He could never satisfactorily answer this question because of his position that there is no regulation of worship in the New Testament and no need for authority.

It seems that the efforts to defend and justify instrumental

music in worship had come full circle. From early efforts to argue that the use of instruments is scriptural, the promoters had gone from one position to another until eventually they seemed to throw up their hands in dismay and exclaim, “We have no need for scriptural authority!” We must not overlook the significance of these shifting sands of argumentation. Why did the platform constantly undergo change? It is obvious that if the proponents had found a successful basis for defense, they would not have continued to change, weave, and vacillate from pillar to post. The very fact that they kept plowing new ground manifests their dissatisfaction with each defense they had attempted. All the while, churches of Christ held to one basic position, namely, that there is no scriptural authority for the use of instrumental praise in the worship of the New Testament church. It is just that simple. All of the efforts to the contrary are endeavors to overcome that one, simple, straightforward proposition.

AN EXAMINATION OF CHURCH HISTORY

In recent years several scholarly studies have been done regarding the attitude of the early church toward instruments of music. The historical information is so clear and so uniform that it merits particular attention and study.

One of the most valuable resources in this field is *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church* by Everett Ferguson, first published in 1972 and now available in its third edition (1999). Ferguson’s credentials as a church historian are beyond dispute. He holds the Ph.D. (“with distinction”) from Harvard University. He is an established author and served as editor of the *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, now in its second edition. He taught at Abilene Christian University from 1962 until his retirement in 1998. Several quotations from his book are worthy of particular emphasis.

1. New Testament Period

The New Testament itself is a historical document and, therefore, it is important to consider what it reveals from a historical perspective. Here is the conclusion:

So, no instrument is found in the New Testament reference, but only vocal praise, and thus no New Testament authority for instrumental music in worship is available (Ferguson, 18).

The conclusion drawn from the New Testament texts and from linguistic evidence was that instrumental music was not present in the worship of the New Testament church (Ferguson, 40).

Keep these quotations in mind, for we will have occasion to consider them further at a later time in this study.

2. Early Writers

They give an explicit condemnation to instrumental music (Ferguson, 67).

If early Christian writers speak so harshly of instruments in social contexts, one can only imagine the outcry which would have been raised to their presence in a worship service. The fathers never conceived that possibility (Ferguson, 72).

This is evidence that the “church fathers,” or writers during the first four hundred years, clearly opposed instrumental music.

3. Instrumental Music a Late Addition

It is quite late before there is evidence of instrumental music, first the organ, employed in the public worship of the church. Recent studies put the introduction of instrumental music even later than the dates found in reference books (Ferguson, 73-74).

Keep in mind that these are conclusions drawn by a noted church historian from the evidence reflected in his book. Instrumental music, far from being a New Testament practice, actually was introduced quite late in the historical scheme.

4. Tenth Century

It was perhaps as late as the tenth century when the organ was played as part of the service. This makes instrumental music one of

the late innovations of the medieval Catholic Church (Ferguson, 74).

This evidence is not to be taken lightly. Some have thought the organ may have been used by A.D. 600 to 700. According to Professor Ferguson, recent studies indicate its introduction may be even later than first thought.

5. Historical Conclusion

There are good historical, theological, and musicological grounds to engage only in *a cappella* music in public worship. This is safe, ecumenical ground that all can agree is acceptable. Instrumental music cannot be confirmed as authorized in the text of the New Testament. It did not exist in Christian worship for centuries after the New Testament (Ferguson, 84).

To sincere hearts who are seeking truth rather than a contrived defense, these are sobering and thought-provoking words.

6. Other Historical Data

Some might object to Everett Ferguson's conclusions because he is a member of the church. In light of his academic attainments and historical expertise, the charge rings hollow. Ferguson argues the case on the basis of the historical and biblical data, not on the grounds of his preferences or theological background. But more than that, his conclusions are buttressed by other scholars who have no background in churches of Christ. James W. McKinnon, not a member of the church, wrote his dissertation at Columbia University on "The Church Fathers and Musical Instruments" (1965). He reaches the same conclusions already set forth here. He states:

One arrives then at two distinct yet related conclusions. There is the fact that early Christian music was vocal and there is the patristic polemic against instruments. The two are related in that an analysis of the polemic confirms the fact (McKinnon, 2).

More important than explicit opposition to instru-

ments is the simple fact that they were not used in the patristic period (McKinnon, 268).

Therefore, the historical data takes us at least four hundred years — first century, second century, third century, fourth century — and no instruments!

7. Mosheim

The Christian worship consisted in hymns, prayers, the reading of the Scriptures, a discourse addressed to the people, and concluded with the celebration of the Lord's Supper (Ecclesiastical History, Vol. I, p. 303).

8. McClintock and Strong's Cyclopedia

The Greek word *psallo* is applied among the Greeks of modern times exclusively to sacred music, which in the Eastern Church has never been any other than vocal, instrumental music being unknown in that Church, as it was in the primitive Church (Vol. VIII, p. 739).

This is from an older but highly respected Bible encyclopedia.

Now, what does the evidence show? Instruments of music were not used in the New Testament period in the worship of the church, nor were they used in the patristic period covering a period of at least four hundred years. Further, it was hundreds of years after the apostolic age before they were introduced into the assembly, perhaps as late as the *tenth century*. They were not promulgated by Christ or the apostles, but organs were a late innovation fostered by the medieval Catholic Church. All of these facts are important to bear in mind when we come to deal with the arguments advanced by Rick Atchley in his defense of instrumental music at Richland Hills.

ARE THESE NEW ARGUMENTS?

One reason the Richland Hills defense has provoked study is because some have never heard these arguments. One preacher wrote to say: "As a 31-year old preacher, some of Atchley's arguments are new to

me, and I so appreciate your helping me to answer those." Another wrote that "[Atchley] makes some arguments I have never heard. Please consider dealing with his arguments and making your answer widely available." After reading such expressions as these, I was curious to see what "new" arguments had been made in favor of instrumental music. Everett Ferguson recently stated: "No new arguments have been advanced in favor of instrumental worship in the assembly. In that regard, the case is where it stood 100 years ago. The facts have not changed; attitudes have. If anything, the case for *a cappella* music is stronger now" ("Still the Greatest Threat," *Gospel Advocate*, July 2006).

After listening to Rick Atchley's lecture, I understand why some of the younger brethren think the arguments are new. It is not because they are "new," but it is because they are "old." Most of the younger preachers have been exposed to the more recent positions that "no authority is needed," or the instrument is "just an aid to worship." Atchley has studied the old debates (he states this in his lecture), and he has adopted and adapted the arguments that Christian Church preachers made 75 to 100 years ago in an effort to prove that "instrumental music in Christian worship is scriptural." Many of our younger preachers have never heard these arguments because Christian Church preachers largely gave them up and ceased making them about 50 years ago. Now, Rick Atchley has trotted them out, dusted them off, and refurbished these old arguments in an attempt to defend the decision at Richland Hills to institute the instrument. No one has ever said that Rick Atchley is not fluent, articulate, and clever in making these arguments. He actually is more facile than his predecessors, but, nevertheless, it is a fact that all of the arguments he makes have already been answered in the past.

THE FIRST-TIME READER

Atchley begins his presentation by indicating he was taught as a child that if one would just take his Bible and study it, he would conclude instrumental music is wrong. He says he now realizes that conclusion

is “simplistic,” “judgmental,” “arrogant,” and “divisive.” He states, “Truth is, almost no one, reading the Bible sincerely for the first time, would ever conclude that instrumental praise is unacceptable to God.” This is an interesting comment, to say the least. First, it is not really an argument or reason which justifies the use of the instrument. What some reader might conclude does not establish whether a practice is either right or wrong. Yet, this has become a popular argument to try to defend the instrument. Some call it the “desert island defense,” that is, if a man on a desert island picked up his Bible and began to read, he would never conclude that instrumental music is wrong. Second, if it is simplistic and arrogant to suggest that a man who reads his Bible would conclude instrumental praise is wrong, why is it not simplistic and arrogant to say that one who reads his Bible would conclude that instrumental praise is acceptable? Atchley never explains this apparent contradiction.

Furthermore, does Atchley not recognize that thousands of readers, in fact, have read their Bibles and concluded that instrumental music in worship is not acceptable to God? This is the very reason we commenced this article with the clear historical foundation that instrumental music was *not* used in the New Testament era and, further, that it was openly *opposed* for at least the first four hundred years of church history. Churches of Christ did not suddenly decide a hundred years ago that instrumental music was wrong and thereby become “simplistic,” “judgmental,” “arrogant,” and “divisive.” The historical evidence indicates it may have been as late as the *tenth century* before instruments were introduced into church assemblies — a *late* innovation of medieval Catholicism. Former Richland Hills elder Bill Minick introduced Atchley’s lesson by noting that Rick always does his homework. Perhaps Rick should have been encouraged to do a little *more* homework on this subject before he spoke so disparagingly about churches of Christ.

Adam Clarke (1762-1832), famous Methodist commentator, stated in his comments on Amos 6:5: “I am an old man and an old minis-

ter; and I here declare that I never knew them [musical instruments] productive of any good in the worship of God; and have reason to believe they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire, but instruments of music *in the house of God*, I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity.” John L. Girardeau, Presbyterian, was a professor at Columbia Theological Seminary in South Carolina, who wrote a book entitled *Instrumental Music in Public Worship*, first published in 1888. He says, “We are Christians, and we are untrue to Christ and to the Spirit of Grace when we resort to the abrogated and forbidden ritual of the Jewish temple.” David Benedict, noted Baptist historian, in his book *Fifty Years Among the Baptists*, declares, “Staunch old Baptists in former times would as soon have tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries....” These statements (and many others that could be cited) are not given to prove that instrumental music is wrong, but rather to show that the assertion is absurd that no one would conclude instrumental music is wrong just from reading the Bible. The fact of the matter is that thousands have reached the conclusion from reading their Bible that instrumental music is wrong, and this is not just among churches of Christ. Further, the early Christians, even for hundreds of years after the first century, believed it was wrong, and their writings attest this fact. In fact, instrumental music was not used in worship for eight hundred to a thousand years after the church was established. That certainly was a long time for people to be “simplistic” and “arrogant.”

One other thought is important here. If one would conclude — just from reading his Bible — that instrumental praise is acceptable in the worship of the New Testament church, why did Rick Atchley not cite the passage where such praise was ever utilized? It is one thing to assert that no one would ever conclude instrumental praise is unacceptable to God; it is quite another to open the Bible and point to the book, chapter, and verse where it is found.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

We now turn our attention to the actual arguments set forth by Rick Atchley in his advocacy of instrumental music in worship. He commences his case with an appeal to the Old Testament.

OLD TESTAMENT ARGUMENTS

The Seventh-day Adventists and other Sabbath-keepers have always turned to the Old Testament to justify their doctrine. The proponents of instrumental music in the worship of the New Testament church also do the same. Atchley makes three arguments from the Old Testament in his presentation.

Argument #1 — God did not just allow instrumental music; he commanded it. The following verses are cited: II Chronicles 7:6; 29:25-26; 5:13; Psalms 33:1-3; 92:1-3, and 150:1-6. It should first be noted that these passages are not relevant to Rick Atchley’s contention. He cites Old Testament passages where he says God did not just “allow” instrumental music, he “commanded” it. But this is not what he is claiming for the New Testament church. One of his later arguments maintains that New Testament passages “neither prescribe nor prohibit” instrumental music. In fact, he calls his lesson topic “The Both/And Church,” meaning they can have *both* vocal music *and* instrumental praise. If instrumental music is a command of God, you could not have a “both/and church,” where the church sometimes obeys the command and at other times disobeys the command. Neither could one argue, as Atchley does, that the New Testament passages “neither prescribe nor prohibit” instrumental music. If New Testament verses do not “prescribe” instrumental music, then it is not a “command” in the New Testament. “Prescribe” is defined as “to set down as a rule or guide; enjoin, to order the use of.” Atchley says the New Testament passages do not “prescribe” the use of instrumental music. Therefore, his argument from the Old Testament that God did not just “allow” instrumental music, but he “commanded” it makes his argument inapposite to the New Testament.

The question also arises: Why seek Old Testament authority if instrumental music is authorized in the New Testament? We are not speaking about Old Testament worship; we are speaking about New Testament worship. What worship was authorized for the New Testament church? Rick has already acknowledged, as he must, that instrumental music was not commanded in the worship of the New Testament church. Therefore, the Old Testament worship and New Testament worship are demonstrably distinct.

Foy E. Wallace, Jr. wrote: “The proposition is not a question of finding the use of instrumental music in the Bible. That is easy. It is not a question of finding its use in worship. That is easy also. But the task of those who use it is to find where the New Testament authorized its use in the church. That task is not so easy — it cannot be done” (Wallace, 231). So, in finding instrumental music in the Bible, Rick has done the “easy” thing; in finding instrumental music in worship, he also has done the “easy” thing. What he cannot find is where the New Testament authorized its use in the church. Wallace told of an old farmer who went to buy a horse, and the horse trader kept making glorious statements about the history of the horse. The farmer finally said, “Tell me what this horse is, I don’t want a *wuzzer*; I want an *izzer*.” The advocates of instrumental music are anxious to tell us what “was,” but they are not much inclined to tell us what “is.”

Atchley notes that the use of instrumental music in the Old Testament was not merely an aid, but it was “worship itself.” If the playing of the instrument was worship itself, who did the worshipping? Was it only the person playing the instrument? How could someone singing with an instrument, but not playing, be worshipping on the instrument?

Another argument is attempted here, namely, that according to Psalm 81:1-5, instrumental music pre-dated the law and, therefore, was not done away when the law was repealed (Col. 2:14). Seventh-day Adventists make the same argument regarding the Sabbath, that it was observed before the giving of the law (Ex. 16:26), and they likewise con-

tend that the Sabbath was not abrogated with the law. It is clear, however, that animal sacrifices also predated the law (Gen. 4:4), yet all know and understand that this does not mean animal sacrifices are a part of New Testament worship. Neither is Sabbath-keeping or the use of instrumental music.

The argument is also advanced that we are commanded to sing psalms; the psalms contain references to instrumental praise, and thus the question is asked: Can we sing something that we are not allowed to practice? First, to sing psalms is not limited to Old Testament psalms. *Arndt-Gingrich-Danker* defines *psalmos* as “1. of the OT Psalms ... 2. of Christian songs of praise.” With reference to psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in Ephesians 5:19, Gerhard Delling states: “Greek-speaking Judaism does not make any general distinction between **humnos**, and **psalmos**, or **ode...**” (*TDNT*, Vol. VIII, p.499). Therefore, the allegation by Atchley that “these are the very Psalms we are commanded to sing” is misdirected. But that is not all. In Psalm 66, the writer says: “I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay my vows...I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams: I will offer bullocks with goats” (vv.13,15). Now, let Rick answer his own question: Can we sing something we are not allowed to practice? Can we practice burnt offerings, animal sacrifices, and the burning of incense in the worship of the New Testament church? Obviously, Christians can sing psalms that are consistent with New Testament teaching and practice, but everything in the psalms is not harmonious with the worship of the New Testament church.

Argument #2 — God blessed instrumental music. The scripture given for this argument is II Chronicles 5:13-14 in connection with the dedication of the temple and the installation of the ark of the covenant. It is said, “The trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord...for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of God.” In this same context we are told that the congregation “sacrificed sheep

and oxen” (II Chron. 5:6). God was undoubtedly pleased with the dedication of the temple, the praise that was offered up to him, and the animal sacrifices that were made upon this occasion. But to say that God was pleased with these things under the Old Testament system furnishes not one scintilla of proof that God would be pleased with either instrumental praise or animal sacrifices under the New Covenant. Rick Atchley is quite articulate in propounding his case for instrumental music and, in all likelihood, will persuade and deceive some, but in actual fact, to rely on Old Testament verses dealing with the dedication of the temple to prove that instrumental music is acceptable to God in the New Testament church is actually an admission of the paucity of his cause. He has done the best he can with a case that is pale and anemic. The surprise is that members of the body of Christ and elders at Richland Hills would be fooled by this appeal to these old arguments and the Old Covenant when every Christian is “dead to the law by the body of Christ” (Rom. 7:4). Shame, shame.

Atchley tries to bolster his Old Testament appeal by stating there is not a hint in the Bible that God was ever anything but pleased by instrumental praise. The problem with that assertion is that there is not a hint in the Bible that New Testament Christians ever engaged in instrumental praise; therefore, it is not a question of whether God was pleased with it or not in New Testament practice. It simply did not exist. Once again, this is the reason we commenced this study with irrefutable evidence about the practice of the church for hundreds of years — from the first century through the second, the third, the fourth — and no instrumental praise! The argument that God blessed instrumental music has merit for us in the New Testament era only if it can be shown that God was pleased and blessed instrumental music in the worship of the New Testament church. This is the Herculean task that Rick is never able to overcome.

Argument #3 — Messianic prophecy anticipated instrumental music would continue in the coming kingdom. Rick relies upon

Psalm 45:6-7, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore, God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.” He points out that this language is quoted in Hebrews 1:8-9 and applied to Christ.

Atchley quotes Psalm 45:8 from the NIV, “All your robes are fragrant with myrrh and aloes and cassia; from palaces adorned with ivory the music of the strings makes you glad.” He admits this was a “wedding psalm.” Not everything in the Psalm applies to Christ or the gospel dispensation. No one can say the writer of Hebrews quoted anything from this Psalm about instrumental music. Further, there is no indication that the “music of the strings” in this passage referred to worship. These were sounds that emanated from “palaces adorned with ivory,” i.e., a reference to the wedding imagery.

Some prophecies have a dual fulfillment so that a portion of the utterance may be messianic and applied to Christ, while other parts do not. In II Samuel 7:12-14, it was prophesied to David that God would set up his seed after him, and “I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son.” The writer of Hebrews quotes this prophecy and applies it to Christ (Heb. 1:5), yet there are later statements in the same prophecy that have no application to Christ. “If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men” (II Sam. 7:14). There certainly is no prophecy about Jesus committing iniquity and being chastened with the rod of men. This would have been applicable to David’s son, Solomon, but most certainly not to Christ, yet it is found in the same context that the writer of Hebrews applies to Christ.

There is not a word in Psalm 45 that prophesies instrumental music would be a part of the worship of the New Testament church. Rick apparently became so excited when he saw “music of the strings” mentioned in the Psalm that he overstated his case and claimed what he could not prove.

He next refers to Psalm 18:49, “Therefore will I give thanks unto thee, O Lord, among the heathen, and sing praises unto thy name.” Also, notice is given to Psalm 57:9, “I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations.” He notes that Paul quotes from at least one of these in Romans 15:9, “And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.” One might wonder why Rick quotes any of these verses since not a one of them — either in the Psalms or in Romans — says a word about instrumental music. “Sing praises,” Psalm 18:49; “sing unto thee,” Psalm 57:9; and, “sing unto thy name,” Romans 15:9.

But, here is the hook. Rick says the Hebrew word used in these Psalms for “sing praises” and “sing unto thee” is *zamar*. He states, “You won’t find a lexicon anywhere that fails to include instruments in defining what the word *zamar* means.” Further, he states, “So Paul said, here’s the prophecy that the Gentiles are going to *zamar* to your name.” Just to be accurate, Paul did not use the word *zamar*; he used the future tense of the Greek word *psallo*. Now, here is an interesting question: Did the translators of the Bible not know the meaning of *zamar*? According to Rick, one will not find a lexicon anywhere that fails to include instruments in defining the word; yet, even the NIV from which he quotes uses the word “sing” as the translation of both *zamar* and *psallo*, whether translating the word in Psalm 18:49, Psalm 57:9, or Romans 15:9. Not a one of them says “play” or “use instruments.” Is it not strange that the translators of the Bible did not know as much about these words as Rick Atchley?

By the way, what ever happened to the individual who just takes the Bible and reads it without any help? Rick talked about such an individual at the beginning and the ending of his lesson, but now he is forsaking the English Bible and reaching into Old Testament Hebrew. It is doubtful that any sincere individual reading his Bible would figure out what Rick says about *zamar* and *psallo*. Presumably, however, he or she could understand the English Bible in

these passages when it says “sing,” “sing,” “sing.”

Rick’s comment about *zamar* is very adroitly worded. He says no lexicon “fails to include instruments” in defining the word. He could have said the same thing about the Greek word *psallo*. Both words have instrumentation in their background, but neither word mandates the use of an instrument. If Rick thinks *zamar* requires the use of an instrument, he is wrong. In fact, the first definition of *zamar* in Brown, Driver, and Briggs Lexicon is “of singing to.” The second definition is “of playing musical instruments.” It is quite clear, therefore, that *zamar* does not necessitate instrumental music. It may be used of “singing,” and this is obviously the definition the translators gave in the passages under consideration.

But Rick Atchley has even more serious problems with his “prophecy” argument. He says that Old Testament prophecy “anticipated instrumental music would continue in the coming kingdom.” We have seen both from the New Testament and from early church history that instrumental music was not present in the early church. Did the prophecy fail? Where is the fulfillment? If inspired prophets anticipated that instrumental music would be in the church, we should find it there. Inspired apostles would certainly proclaim inspired prophecy. Where did the apostles of Christ ever teach that instruments were to be in the church?

In Deuteronomy 18:20-22, God set forth the test of a true prophet: “But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die. And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the Lord hath not spoken? When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him.” Now, one of three things must be true: (1) Instrumental music will be found in the New Testament church, or (2) the prophets prophesied falsely according to the test of a true prophet, or (3)

the words of the prophets have been perverted in their meaning. We have already seen that instrumental music was not found in the New Testament church, and we do not believe that the prophets prophesied falsely. That leaves only the fact that the prophecies have been perverted in their meaning, and they do not mean, nor were they ever intended to mean, that instruments would be found in the worship of the church.

Finally, Rick says if God's attitude toward instrumental music changed, we would expect one of three things: (1) A clear passage condemning instrumental music, (2) a clear passage commanding *a cappella* praise only, or (3) a prophecy announcing the end of instrumental music. These are Rick's rules, not God's rules. The entire Old Testament system was abrogated (Rom. 7:4; Col. 2:14; Gal. 5:4). We are under the new covenant (Heb. 7:12). God now speaks to us through his Son (Heb. 1:1-2). It was not necessary for the old law to be done away piecemeal. All of these humanly devised rules would be unnecessary if the advocates of instrumental music could just find *one verse* that authorizes its use in the worship of Christians.

NEW TESTAMENT ARGUMENTS

Perhaps every member of the body of Christ is anxious to know what arguments can be advanced from the New Testament. Let us examine what has been presented.

Argument #1 — Jesus never deals with the issue. Yes, rub your eyes; that is the first argument from the New Testament. What does it prove? Jesus did not deal with every subject and every issue that would be faced in the church. That is undoubtedly the reason he said, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:12-13). Rick says that when the anti-instrument advocate speaks on this subject, he must speak where Jesus does not. What about the pro-instrument advocate? If Jesus *never deals with the issue*, then, of course, Rick is speaking where Jesus does not. I wonder if he could not see that.

He is so fixated on criticizing churches of Christ, and justifying the position he has taken, he cannot see a contradiction when it rises up and stares him in the face.

After stating that Jesus never deals with the issue, he then endeavors to show that Jesus approved instrumental worship. He cites the case of the prodigal son who returned home, and there was music and dancing (Luke 15:25). He notes that the word for music is *sumphonia* from which we get our word *symphony*. Let us not forget the dancing, which, by the way, is from the word *choros*. (Rick did not mention the dancing in this verse, only the music). How long before Richland Hills announces a "dancing service" also? Get the picture, please. The prodigal has been lost but now is found. He returns home, and the father kills the fatted calf, places the robe on his shoulder, the ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet. The elder brother returns from the field to hear "music and dancing." There is rejoicing at the return of the lost boy. The fact that *anyone* — and most certainly a gospel preacher and member of the body of Christ — would rely on this event to establish instrumental music in the worship of the New Testament church is too far-fetched for words. If anything in the world ever demonstrated the poverty of evidence for such a practice, the appeal to this event most assuredly does. Pitiful.

Further, it is asserted that Jesus taught in the temple where instrumental music was used. Once again, what does this prove? There were porches in the temple (John 10:23), and it cannot be shown that Jesus participated in the temple proper with the priests and Levites. Rick also notes that Jesus cast the money changers out of the temple, but not the musicians. The money changers were making merchandise of the house of God (John 2:16). Neither did Jesus cast out the priests for offering sacrifices. The law was still in effect during his personal ministry. Jesus did foretell the destruction of the temple along with all of the instruments and services that were part of it (Matt. 24:1-2).

Argument #2 — Instrumental music is a non-issue in the book

of Acts. It is a non-issue because it was not in use. When Paul and Silas were in prison, they prayed and "sang praises unto God" (Acts 16:25). For many years, homosexual bishops were not an issue in the Episcopal Church because they had none. When one was appointed, it became an issue among Episcopalians. During the early years of the effort to restore first-century Christianity, instrumental music was a non-issue because congregations did not use it. When the first instrument was introduced among churches of Christ at Midway, Kentucky, in 1859, it became an issue. It caused division. J. W. McGarvey said, "In the earlier years of the present day Reformation, there was an entire unanimity in the rejection of instrumental music from our public worship. It was declared unscriptural, inharmonious with Christian institutions, and a source of corruption" (*Millennial Harbinger*, November 1864). Please note that McGarvey said at one time brethren were unanimous in opposing instrumental music. Who changed?

The fact that instrumental music is a non-issue in the book of Acts actually argues against Rick Atchley's position, not in favor of it. He has mentioned that there was instrumental music in the temple. "Worship in the temple was carried on by the priests and Levites, not by the congregation. Christians need to be careful that they do not project upon the temple their own concept of congregational worship. At its center, temple worship was not a congregational assembly; nevertheless, by custom people did gather in the courts at the time of sacrifice. The Levites did the singing" (Lewis, 24). In the synagogue, however, whatever music they had was vocal without instrumental accompaniment. There was one temple, located in Jerusalem, but there were synagogues in many communities. The Jews certainly would have been familiar with unaccompanied singing. The use of instruments is a non-issue in the book of Acts because, as both history and the New Testament verify, instrumental music was absent from the worship.

Argument #3 — New Testament commands to sing neither

prescribe nor prohibit instrumental music. At this point Rick states, “Nowhere in the New Testament is congregational singing specifically authorized.” As previously noted, this is an argument propounded by the late Don DeWalt and often associated with his name. It was not originated by DeWalt, however, and, of course, as Rick proves, it did not end with him. Of all arguments offered to defend instrumental music, I have long considered this the weakest. The simple reason for this is that the argument proves nothing. What does one gain by arguing that congregational singing is unauthorized? The point seems to be, “You engage in congregational singing which is unauthorized; therefore, we may institute instrumental praise which is also unauthorized.” Unfortunately, for those who argue this point, the conclusion does not follow from the premises. If congregational singing is unauthorized, it is unauthorized. This would not prove that instrumental music is right.

It is argued that Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, and James 5:13 are all individual duties and have no reference to the corporate assembly of the saints. The fact that these are individual duties does not establish, however, that they are not fulfilled in a congregational capacity. Partaking of the Lord’s Supper is also an individual duty. “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup” (I Cor. 11:28). Observe that the verse says, “Let a man,” an individual duty. But that individual duty is fulfilled when the church comes together (I Cor. 11:18,20). Likewise, in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, the clear meaning reflects congregational activity. Note the language: “But be filled with the Spirit [present imperative], speaking to yourselves [*heautois*, plural] in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). There are actually five plural participles with imperative force, agreeing with the verb. Thayer defines “speaking to yourselves” as “reciprocally, mutually, one another.” Again, note: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you [plural, as in “all of you”] richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another [*heautous*] in psalms and

hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). The Colossian letter is addressed “to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse” (Col. 1:2). “Let dwell” is present imperative; “in you” is plural in number; “one another” is a reciprocal pronoun denoting an “interchange” of action.

Now, let us summarize Colossians 3:16. (1) Christians are authorized to teach and admonish one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. (2) This instruction is addressed to all the saints and faithful brethren at Colosse. (3) The language includes the imperative mood, the plural number, and the reciprocal pronoun. (4) It would be difficult to find a clearer description of congregational activity than all the saints and brethren at Colosse teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in their hearts unto the Lord. Let me assure you of this one thing: If Rick Atchley could find a passage like this involving instrumental music, his feet would not touch the ground, his heels would click in the air, and he would shout from the housetop that there was instrumental music in the worship of the church! The effort to deny scriptural authorization for congregational singing is an argument of sheer desperation.

Remember that his argument is that New Testament passages on singing neither “prescribe” nor “prohibit” instrumental music. Without intending to do so, Rick has given up the ground of his argument. He admits that these passages *do not “prescribe” instrumental music*. “Prescribe” means “to set down as a rule or guide.” So now, after all of his argumentation and persuasion, he acknowledges that New Testament commands to sing do not provide any rule or guide for using instrumental music. This explains in large measure the necessity for arguing from the Old Testament, the temple, the prodigal son, and on and on, to find authority for what *the New Testament does not teach*.

Finally, in this connection, he says that “sing” does not mean “sing only.” If we say we are going out to the ranch to sing some songs, that does not mean one cannot bring his

guitar. That may be true, but how do we know whether one brought his guitar? It must be stated *in addition to* the word “sing.” All we know positively from “sing” is “sing.” If one says that he had a cup of coffee, that does not mean he did not have cream and sugar. But *we do not know that* only from the word “coffee.” If one orders a “cup of coffee,” that does not authorize the waiter to add two scoops of sugar and a dollop of cream. Likewise, when God authorized us to sing, it did not include a piano, an organ, a guitar, and a set of snare drums.

Argument #4 — The New Testament refers to instrumental music in heaven. The following verses are cited: “And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odors, which are the prayers of the saints” (Rev. 5:8). “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints” (Rev. 15:2-3). Rick cites this latter passage from the NIV where it says, “They held harps given them by God.” When I hear this argument made (and I have heard it many times), I always wonder where the heavenly saints get the strings for their harps. Do they order them from Sears? I am not being facetious in asking this question. It points up the incongruity of supposing that spiritual beings are marching around heaven playing on literal harps made out of metal, wire, and wood. The whole idea is a belittlement of the heavenly state, the afterlife, and the glory to be revealed. Foy E. Wallace, Jr. rightly asked: “What could a spiritual being do with a material harp? There are no literal harps in heaven, never were, and never will be. Might as well tell me that a literal Ford automobile will be in heaven” (Wallace, 248). The book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature in which lessons

are taught by signs, symbols, and dramatic scenes. Each small detail in the images need not represent something; rather, it is the scene as a whole that conveys the meaning and purpose. To base a doctrine that has divided the body of Christ and alienated brethren for more than a century upon a figurative allusion in an apocalyptic book is a reckless mishandling of the word of truth. It is amazing that people can read about “four beasts” and a Lamb with “seven horns and seven eyes” and “golden vials full of odors” and “a sea of glass mingled with fire,” and all of this is figurative *except the harps*. By the way, how many “harps” have you ever seen in an instrumental service? They are rarely used. You are more likely to find a guitar and tambourine.

To base a doctrine that has divided the body of Christ and alienated brethren for more than a century upon a figurative allusion in an apocalyptic book is a reckless mishandling of the word of truth.

But Atchley says it does not really matter whether the harps are literal or figurative. He argues that God would not use them in a figurative illustration if they were wrong. No one has said there is anything morally wrong with a harp or other instrument of music. God speaks of them in the book of Revelation as he does the golden altar, the golden censer, incense, throne, crowns of gold, and many other things that we would not expect to find in the worship of the church. Where, oh where, is the passage of scripture which authorizes the use of instrumental music in the worship of the New Testament church? Why do you suppose that Rick Atchley and others go to the Old Testament, talk about the temple, make references to the heavenly state, and dig and scratch for any reference they can find to an instrument anywhere in the scriptures? It is because they *cannot find*

it in the one place they want it to be — the worship of the New Testament church. Think about it.

Argument #5 — The New Testament idea of giftedness supports the practice of instrumental praise. So far as I can determine, Atchley never develops his “New Testament idea of giftedness” from Bible precepts. His idea of *giftedness* is that if one has a gift or talent, he or she is entitled to utilize that gift in the assembly as an act of worship to God. He says playing an instrument to the glory of God is an act of worship. I am pleased to note that he does not attempt the old subterfuge that the instrument is not “in the worship,” but merely an “aid to the worship.” He readily concedes that it is *in the worship* and that playing an instrument is *an act of worship*. Thus, if it is in the worship and is an act of worship, it is either an authorized act or it is an unauthorized act. If it is merely a desire or preference of man, it is not an authorized act. Jesus said, “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9). The mere fact that one has a talent does not constitute divine authority for him to insert an unauthorized act into the worship of God.

People have different gifts. One might have the gift or talent for teaching, another for exhortation, another for giving, another for showing mercy. Keep in mind that each gift denoted in the scriptures is for something that God desires or authorizes. Not every gift is one to be exercised in the public assembly of the church. Therefore, the only scriptural idea for “giftedness” is for using our talents to do what God desires in the appropriate sphere. Some talents might be observed in the home, others in the community, and still others in the assembly. There is no generic scriptural maxim that every talent a person possesses is designed to be exercised in the public worship of the church.

In a truly last-gasp effort, it is said: “You can’t open your Bible and show me where God forbids it.” This is perhaps the oldest of the old arguments favoring instrumental music. What Rick needs to do is show where God authorizes instrumental music in worship rather than calling upon

others to show where God forbids it. Where does God forbid the burning of incense, praying to Mary, sprinkling babies, applying holy water, or handling snakes as an act of worship? The obligation is on the *proponent* of these practices to show divine authority for them. The word of God does not say, “Thou shalt not baptize in buttermilk,” but it does teach baptism in water (Acts 8:36-38). The New Testament does not say, “Thou shalt not use an instrument,” nor is such necessary, for the Christian is instructed to sing with grace in his heart to the Lord (Col. 3:16). God has given specific instructions to his people about what they are to do, and they should be satisfied with what God has revealed. If some man wants to add more to what God has said, let him furnish the authority for his action.

ADDRESSING ARGUMENTS AGAINST THE INSTRUMENT

Near the close of his lesson, Rick states that he wishes to address two arguments that are used against the instrument.

1. The Psallo Argument. *Psallo* is the Greek word used in the New Testament which is usually translated “sing.” Rick points out that it originally meant “to pluck.” In the beginning this was not necessarily a musical connection. It could be to “pluck the beard” or “twang the bowstring.” It took on an instrumental connection meaning “to play” or “to pluck the strings.” According to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, the word came to have a particular meaning in the New Testament. He defines it “in the N.T. to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song.” The instrument does not *inhere* in the word *psallo*. When the word means to play an instrument, the object of the “plucking” is either named or implied in the context. Thus, for *psallo* to denote an instrument, it was necessary for the instrument to be named or supplied in addition to the word. In Ephesians 5:19, they were to *psallontes* “with the heart.” No other instrument is named. Ferguson very aptly states, “According to these parallels, if Paul has thought of *psallo* in the broader sense of ‘make melody’ or even ‘play,’ then he has specified the

instrument on which the melody is to be made, namely the heart” (Ferguson, 18).

Rick seems insistent that *psallo* included more than singing in New Testament times. He says that Christians in the first century would have known what it meant. On this we are agreed. Now, we come back to the fundamental question that undermines all of Rick’s arguments for the instrument. *Why did early Christians not use the instrument?* We have shown from both New Testament teaching and early church history that instruments *simply were not there*. As Rick himself has argued, first century Christians would have understood the meaning of *psallo*, but they obviously did not understand it to include instruments of music because they had none. The historical evidence is highly significant in this discussion in that it shows not only the practice of the New Testament church, but also how they understood the *meaning* of their own language.

2. The Law of Exclusion (Argument from Silence). Perhaps there is no argument against instrumental music that disturbs and rangles the proponents more than this one. It is the principle that acts of worship in the public assembly of the church must be divinely authorized (Col. 3:17). The scriptures are silent about the use of instrumental music in the worship of the church. Therefore, there is no divine authorization for its use. This principle is simple, scriptural, logical, easily understood, and unanswerable, and this is why it is such a frustration to those who want their instrument and are determined to have it.

Think for just a moment about the inherent conflict in Rick Atchley’s attempted defense of instrumental music. On the one hand, he has labored assiduously to show that instrumental music is scriptural in worship in the New Testament church. From Jesus and the apostles in the Jewish temple to the prodigal son coming home to music and dancing, to traversing all over the Old Testament and then trying to get fleshly harps into heaven, he has truly *worked at it*. He did not find it where he wanted it, but he tried mightily. *Question:* Why seek to

prove it, as he has so feverishly attempted to do, unless he believes that authority is needed for its use? Finally, when he gets down to the conclusion of his proclamation, he says silence is insignificant. He tells us, “Silence in the New Testament on instrumental music is not *intentional*, it’s *incidental*.” Did you get that? *The New Testament is silent on instrumental music!* Rick Atchley said so. But it is only incidental, it is not intentional. How does he know that? Whether the silence is incidental or intentional, however, he acknowledges there is “silence in the New Testament on instrumental music.” The New Testament mentions instruments in various connections, but it is silent on the use of instrumental music in the worship of the church. His argument says in effect: “Yes, I told you I could find instrumental music; yes, I said I could prove it was scriptural; yes, I went to all those passages in the Old and New Testaments, trying to make a case. But in the end, I have to tell you that the New Testament is SILENT on instrumental music.” Thank you, Rick.

What is left for him to do? He must attack what he calls “the law of exclusion.” He must show that the silence of the New Testament about instrumental music is meaningless. Thus, he propounds the question: “What great message of God did he ever communicate by saying nothing about it?” Listen carefully. God communicated the great message that Jesus our Lord is greater than the angels of heaven, and, yes, he did it by silence, by saying nothing about it. Look at Hebrews 1:5: “For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?” The writer stated Jesus is “made so much better than the angels” (Heb. 1:4). How does he prove it? He points out that God never said at any time to an angel, “Thou art my Son.” Why? The Bible is silent about it. It refers to something God did not say. He never spoke to an angel and used the language applied to Christ. Yes, God sometimes teaches by silence. So do we.

The physician sends a prescription to the pharmacist. It prescribes penicillin for the patient’s illness, but the prescription is silent about amox-

icillin. Amoxicillin is not authorized for the patient, but it is not necessary for the doctor to write, “Do not fill with amoxicillin.” *Silence is significant*. The New Testament clearly authorizes singing. It is silent about instrumental music. It is not necessary for God to state, “Thou shalt not use instrumental music.” It simply is not authorized.

Rick asks what kind of parent would punish a child for something not spoken. The answer might be, “A good parent.” It happens every day. The father gives the car keys to the son or daughter and says, “Go to the store, and pick up a gallon of milk.” Note that the father does not say, “Do not go to the beer hall. Do not go to the bowling alley. Do not go to the dance club.” The father told the son or daughter what to do. He was *silent* about many things not to do. It was not necessary to name them. God has told us what to do in our worship to him. It is not necessary to say, “Do not pray to Mary. Do not burn incense. Do not use instrumental music.” The Bible is *silent* on these things, but God’s silence is significant.

THE REAL CONCERN

At the close of his presentation, Rick Atchley addresses what he calls his “real concerns.” He is concerned about what the “anti-instrument doctrine” says about the Bible and what it says about God. Whatever it is that he believes that the “anti-instrument doctrine” says about the Bible and about God, just remember that Richland Hills was in that same “anti-instrument” camp until just *three days before they announced their decision to add an instrumental service*. According to their Articles of Incorporation on file with the Texas Secretary of State, dated February 1, 1994, they defined a church of Christ as a body of believers who practice “singing songs of praise and edification **without the use of mechanical instruments**” (emphasis supplied). Yes, dear friends, that was Richland Hills’ own definition of what it took to constitute a church of Christ. All of that changed on November 16, 2006, when a document was filed with the Texas Secretary of State which omitted the last phrase. According to the *Christian*

Chronicle, the announcement of an instrumental service was made on Sunday, November 19, 2006, just *three days* after they filed their amendment. Richland Hills was anti-instrument (not just non-instrument) when Rick Atchley went there and for all of the years since that time until three days before they made their announcement! Three weeks after their announcement, he delivered his tirade against the “anti-instrument position.”

His closing remarks about the Bible and God restate his earlier contention that anyone reading the Bible the first time would never conclude instrumental praise was wrong. We have shown that thousands of people did so conclude, and instrumental music was a “late addition” of the medieval Catholic Church. He says God did not vacillate by accepting praise in one dispensation that he would not accept in another. This is but another admission that he could not find his practice in the New Testament. The old law was taken out of the way and nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14).

*“Yes, I told you I could find
instrumental music; yes, I said I could
prove it was scriptural; yes, I went to all those
passages in the Old and New Testaments,
trying to make a case. But in the end,
I have to tell you that the New Testament is
SILENT on instrumental music.”*

CONCLUSION

Why devote this attention to answering the contentions of one man at one congregation? First, this is not just any congregation. The *Chronicle* calls it “the nation’s largest Church of Christ.” Richland Hills is now out of step with most other churches of Christ. Some may be influenced by their action. As we have noted, Richland Hills has taken a strong stand against instrumental music in the past even to the point of including such opposition in their definition of what *constitutes* a church of Christ. We believe it is important to examine their reasons for reversing the stand they have taken for the past forty years.

Second, the preacher at Richland Hills is not just any preacher. He exerts a wide influence. Rick Atchley is a fluent speaker, a capable spokesperson, and a most persuasive promoter. He will lead some astray. After examining his defense of instrumental music, we are persuaded that he is stronger in personality than in content. His speech, reduced to writing, would not have the same effect as his oral delivery. Atchley’s argument for instrumental music is much like cotton candy — sweet to the taste and attractive to the eye, but devoid of any real substance. The Texans have a saying about people who dress like cowboys without any real experience — “all hat, and no cattle.” He makes a good appearance, spins a nice web, and plays

heavily on the emotions, but in the end he does not make out his case. He says enough to satisfy his supporters and to convince those who already *want to buy* what he is selling, but no man can do the impossible. He cannot find instrumental music in the worship of the New Testament church.

REFERENCES

Ferguson, Everett (1999), *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Fort Worth, TX: Star Bible Publications), 3rd Edition.

Lewis, Jack P. (1987), “New Testament Authority for Music in Worship,” *The Instrumental Music Issue* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company).

McKinnon, James W. (1965), *The Church Fathers and Musical Instruments* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms), Dissertation, Columbia University.

Wallace, Foy E., Jr. (1951), *Bulwarks of the Faith, Vol. II* (Oklahoma City, OK: Foy E. Wallace, Jr. Publications).

*The Spiritual Sword, April 2007
Vol. 38 No. 3, pp.5-33
Getwell Church of Christ
1511 Getwell Rd.
Memphis, TN 38111
Used by permission*

Seek The Old Paths is a monthly publication of the **East End Church of Christ** and is under the oversight of its elders. It is mailed FREE upon request. Its primary purpose and goal in publication can be found in Jude 3; II Timothy 4:2; Titus 1:13; Titus 2:1; II Peter 1:12. All mail received may be published unless otherwise noted. Articles are also welcomed.

Editor: **Garland M. Robinson**

<http://www.seektheoldpaths.org>

EAST END CHURCH OF CHRIST
102 EDISON ST.
MCMINNVILLE, TN 37110-2216
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
P A I D
Permit No. 349
McMinnville, TN