

Discussions on Instrumental Music in Worship (Part 1)
Where Are We and How Did We Get Here?

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It's a little tough to have an elephant in the middle of the room and everyone pretends he's not there. But when a group doesn't want to talk about the elephant, they become quite skilled at ignoring him. We are talking about instrumental music in worship precisely because we don't want to talk about it. Having an elephant in the room that no one wants to acknowledge is actually a sign of dysfunction. It is unhealthy for any family or church to have topics they can't discuss. The problem is NOT the issue itself but the reluctance to talk about it. With such reluctance come fear, anxiety, suspicion and assumptions.

These discussions are **not** designed to lead us to adopt instrumentation rather they are designed for nothing more than to **educate** and **facilitate discussion**. **Success** of these Sunday evenings will be measured, not by any changes that might occur, but **by our ability to have meaningful dialog**.

Our Plan will be as follows:

1. Tonight: *Where Are We and How Did We Get Here?*
 - a. Explore why this discussion is so difficult for us to have
 - b. Our historic hermeneutic
 - c. Baggage we bring with us
 - d. The essential element for us moving forward
2. Next Week: *Examining the Scriptures*
 - a. Big picture look at musical instruments used in worship through the Bible
 - b. Temple worship and Synagogue worship
 - c. Singing in the New Testament
 - d. Brief examination of the history of the early church
3. Third Week: *Where Do We Go from Here?*
 - a. Honest look at reasons some prefer to use instruments and reasons some prefer to sing Acapella in worship
 - b. Discussion groups to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of those reasons
4. Fourth Week: *What Should We Do Now?*
 - a. This will be an open forum for you to say anything you'd like to say about what should happen at Clear Lake in the future
 - 1) There will be no polling or voting
 - 2) No decisions made at this meeting
 - b. This will be time for you to give your opinion and speak your mind

Our Identity

Let's begin with why this discussion is so difficult to have. It is difficult because singing Acapella is a major part of our identity as a Church of Christ. It has become a marker of what a Church of Christ is. Acapella [ah kuh-**pel-uh**] simply means *without instrumental accompaniment*, and the secondary meaning is *in the style of church or chapel music*.

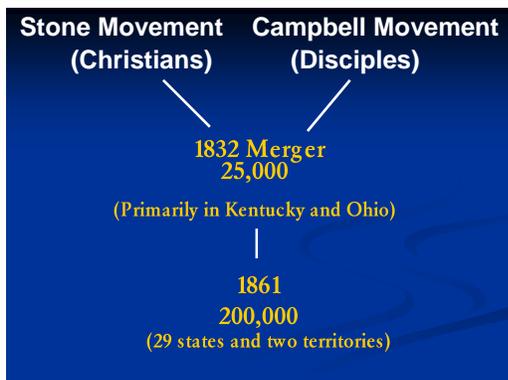
Acapella has been a major part of our historic identity. There are two statements that summarized the stereotype of the Church of Christ when I was young:

1. “They think there are the only ones that are going to heaven.” This was really a misleading statement of our most basic beliefs, however, when you heard some of our preaching, it wasn't far from the truth.
2. “They don't believe in music.” This was a total overstatement as we practice verbal music without instrumental accompaniment in the assembly.

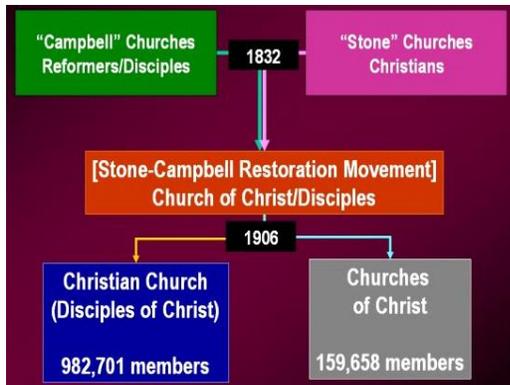
So how did Acapella become so closely aligned with our identity? To answer that question, we must take a look at our history. We grew out of a merger of two separate movements identified by the primary leaders of each group. Barton Stone led a group known as Christians; and Alexander Campbell's followers were called Disciples. The state of Christianity in their day was terribly divided so each of them independently began “**freedom**” movements. They sought to be free of any man-made doctrines. They believed that it wasn't the Bible that divided Christians but the additional baggage that had accumulated over the years. It was their goal to strip away and free themselves of this accumulated baggage and simply be Christians.

The freedom movements quickly became **unity movements**. Denominationalism was a series of never-ending divisions. These men and others saw that the problem of division was actually created by the man-made rules and doctrines that had been accumulated over the years. So as they stripped away these doctrines, they believed that all Christians would unite by accepting the New Testament as the only rule of faith and practice. Thus the Bible became the only creed needed.

Their desire to see all Christians unite by taking their stand on the Bible led them to become **restoration movements**. The earliest leaders preferred the word “reforming.” They didn't see themselves as a separate identity and attempted to provide leadership so that all Christians from every denomination could unite upon the Bible. Alexander Campbell wrote a series of articles entitled, “The Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things.” He believed that by getting back to the teachings of the New Testament all people would be united into the one church.



The movements of Stone and Campbell merged in 1832 and were composed of 25,000 believers. By 1860, they were the fourth largest Christian denomination in the United States numbering around 200,000. By 1900, they numbered well over one million but by that point division seemed inevitable.



By 1906, two distinct bodies were listed in the U.S. Census. If you look at the numbers, most people went with the Disciples. The division involved many issues, but instrumental music in worship became the flame issue.

Arguments were developed both pro and con, but both sides agreed that instrumental music in worship was not mentioned in the New Testament. They debated how silence should be interpreted. Is silence permissive? Is silence prohibitive? Many on both sides pleaded for

unity in spite of differing opinions, but a split eventually occurred: The Christian Church being instrumental and the Church of Christ being Acapella. There were some preachers that didn't recognize the division and would preach wherever they were invited but that became less and less as the division became more pronounced.

Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a big word for interpreting the Scriptures. We developed a unique way of understanding the New Testament. Rooted in the ideals of restoration, a method developed which we used to determine what God desired from his church. So the question became, "what has God authorized?" The answer could be found using a three-pronged hermeneutic: Direct Commands; Approved Examples; and Necessary Inferences.

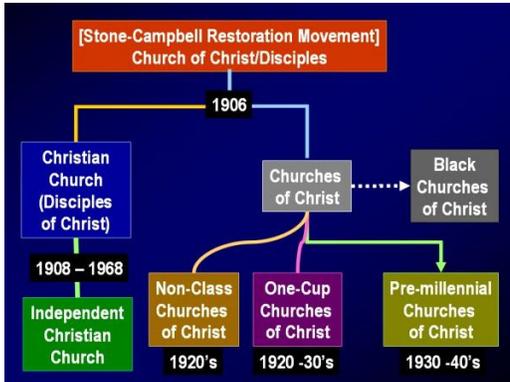
- **Direct commands** appear to be the easiest. "Repent and be baptized." "Love one another as I have loved you." We recognize that these are commands God has given us to obey.
- **Approved examples** can be illustrated by weekly observance of the Lord's Supper. Jesus taught us to take the Lord's Supper when he said, "Do this in remembrance of me" but how often should we do this? Our forefathers searched the scriptures and found Acts 20:7, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread." The first day of the week would be Sunday, thus that became the approved example for us to follow.
- **Necessary inference** is a bit trickier. An illustration might be found in the justification for church buildings. We are told not to forsake the assembly, but the Bible does not tell us exactly where we are to assemble. We can infer that we are to assemble somewhere and thus we need to build church buildings.

This way of reading Scripture creates some problems. How do we know which commands apply to us? How do we know which examples need to be followed? One might think something is a necessary inference, and another might not be convinced of the necessity. This search for authorization for church practices created multiple divisions.

Church Divisions

In the 20's, there was division over Sunday school. Where is the authority for such a practice? Mainstream churches said it was an inference, but some said there was no Bible authority.

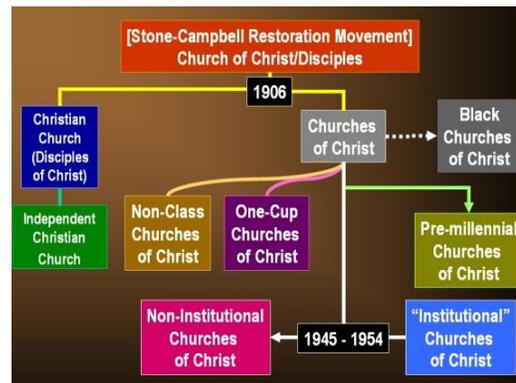
In the 30's, there was division over multiple containers for the Lord's Supper. Jesus took one cup and said, "*Drink from it all of you.*" We have a direct command from Jesus AND an example of how we should obey. Was there something significant about everyone drinking from one container that Jesus wanted his people to understand?



In the 50's, there was division over how churches could cooperate to support orphan homes and Christian colleges. Again, it had to do with Bible authority.

The leading argument in all these divisions was the silence of the Scriptures. Where is the command, example, or inference?

In the late 60's, meetings were held for leaders of the independent Christian church and the "institutional" Church of Christ. In one session, it was mentioned that the Christian church should give up instruments for the sake of unity since the New Testament is silent on the topic. Robert O. Fife responded that the suggestion was a reasonable one, but that his people would take the proposal more seriously when the Churches of Christ, that have the Sunday school, are willing to give it up for the sake of unity with the hundreds of Churches of Christ who believe it to be wrong, and for the same reason, the silence of the Scriptures. It was a good argument. Historically we have found it very difficult to be consistent in how we apply our arguments from silence.



Baggage

Any movement as old as ours is going to have some baggage. These bags are what make this discussion so difficult. I'll present four bags tonight. I think we've done some good work in overcoming the first two. Three and four are especially applicable to us. In discussing instrumental music in worship here is what we bring to the table:

- **Legalism.** This is the belief that one is saved BECAUSE of correct beliefs and practices. Thus, every doctrinal discussion has eternal consequences. Legalism makes people afraid to make any changes because, "What if we're wrong?"
- **Sectarianism.** This is the belief that we and we alone are the one true church. Any group with different beliefs and practices cannot be considered our brothers and sisters.
- **Embarrassment.** We're embarrassed by our inconsistencies and bad arguments from the past. When people ask, "Why don't you use instruments?" We are reluctant to even talk about the subject. By the end of our sessions, my hope is that you will be well informed to address that topic

- **Indifference.** This is the response - “It doesn’t make any difference what we do; just do whatever you want.” This is a reaction to the preceding bags. It is a reaction against legalism, sectarianism and embarrassment. It is the pendulum swing where we rush to the opposite extreme. If we’ve been legalistic and sectarian in our past, let’s throw away old decisions and do the opposite. Indifference sees no value in tradition and causes us to make snap decisions without fully considering all the ramifications and consequences.

A Thoughtful Approach

What is needed is a thoughtful approach that includes:

- **Scripture**—what does the Bible really teach?
- **Theology**—what does it mean to worship as a corporate body of believers? How can we best reflect the image of Christ to our community?
- **History**—what can we learn from churches through the ages?
- **Culture**—our own church culture and our larger culture

Success

Success will be defined by our ability to have meaningful dialogue. We want to have a discussion where everyone can talk freely and openly. There is a reason we don’t talk about this elephant. Some of us have very strong opinions on this issue. How can we have a discussion where people have opposing ideas? Romans 14 gives us some guidance in how to talk about disputable matters.

“Accept those whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters.” (Romans 14:1)

Using or not using instrumental music in worship is certainly a disputable matter. It is essential that we accept those who may not see things the way we do. Acceptance means not judging or quarreling.

“One person’s faith allows them to eat everything, but another person, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables.” (Romans 14:2)

I believe Paul is using a hypothetical situation here to function as a fill-in-blank argument. He contrasts the problems of a meat eater and a non-meat eater but we could just as easily fill in any disputable matter. Both the eater and the non-eater are convinced that God is on their side (both can point to different scripture references and both believe the other to be wrong).

“The one who eats everything must not treat with contempt the one who does not, and the one who does not eat everything must not judge the one who does, for God has accepted that person.” (Romans 14:3-4)

Don’t condemn someone for having a different opinion. We can have a profitable discussion on this issue if we all will agree to treat each other properly. *“Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To their own master they stand or fall. And they will stand, for the Lord is able to make them stand.” (Romans 14:5)*

In closing, let us be like Christ in all our discussions. *“May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” (Romans 15:5-7)*