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THE

ORGAN IN WORSHIP.

A SERMON.

Delivered in the Main Street Christian Church,
Lexington, Ky., May 11, 1889.

BY

PROF. A. FAIRHURST.

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THE ORGAN IN WORSHIP.

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[A Sermon, delivered in the Main Street Christian Church, Lexington, Ky.,
May 11, 1889.]

"Let all things be done unto edifying," is the great law of worship laid down repeatedly in the New Testament. How much latitude is left to the human mind in worship? Prayer, and the singing of "spiritual songs" are universally recognized by us as parts of Christian worship, and preaching as a Christian work.

God might have prescribed certain prayers to be repeated by man, but he has not done this. In this most solemn service, in which the worshiper comes face to face with God and talks to him as a child to a father, no words are put into his mouth, no prescribed tone of voice required. The details as to prayer, praise and thanksgiving are left to the mind and heart of the individual worshiper, that his spiritual powers may be exercised and developed thereby.

It may be asked, is there not danger here? Yes. Many foolish prayers are offered, many petitions are made which, if answered, would prove to be a curse instead of a blessing. The danger in leaving the individual soul free in this matter is as nothing compared to that which would grow out of the detailed prescription of word, tone and action, whereby the human being would be converted into a mere machine, capable only of plodding through certain prescribed forms.

It is not to inform God of our needs that we pray, for our heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him, but it is for the good of the human soul to pray, although it is certain that it will often make mistakes while praying.

Man grows spiritually by the full exercise of this privilege under the general direction of the Word of God. The great duty of the minister of the gospel is to preach Christ. In doing this, however, no two of the thousands of preachers among us ever proceed in detail alike, and the same preacher in different communities adapts his sermons to their different wants. The minister of the gospel does not feel himself restricted to the language of the New Testament in presenting Christ to the world. He feels under obligation to tax to the utmost his reason and his imagination in order to induce men to obey the gospel, and that the church may be edified. Among us he is expected to speak extemporaneously, thus giving the greatest freedom to the exercise of his powers. He does not confine himself to the figures of the New Testament, but gathers from his own imagination such figures and scenes as he thinks will edify his hearers, and he brings from his own experience the things that throb with life, that he may stir up the pure minds of his Christian auditors. Is it not dangerous for man to exercise these powers in the pulpit? Exceedingly dangerous. The foolish things that have been said in the pulpit by authorized preachers are beyond the power of man to number. Would it not therefore be much better for man to confine himself in preaching to the language of the New Testament? To require this would be to put the seal of death upon his noblest powers. Better is it to use the powers we have, make mistakes, and grow thereby, than to sit like parrots,
forever repeating certain prescribed forms of words.

The infant learns to walk only after many efforts and many hard falls. The soul of man walking toward God will often stumble and sometimes fall, but, if honest, it will arise with renewed strength and continue its upward march. Our mistakes, as well as our successes, become our teachers. The minister of the gospel in the exercise of the highest calling known to man, traverses heaven and earth and ocean's depths that he may gather treasures to lay at the feet of the Master. This is done at the expense of many mistakes, yet as a whole, the results are most fruitful in edifying the church.

A thousand details upon which the successful preaching of the gospel largely depends are left to be determined by the wisdom of man, and this, with the certainty that in so doing he will make many mistakes.

"Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. v. 19). The spiritual songs here spoken of are not to be found in the Bible. We, as a people, believe that modern poets have written many spiritual songs, for we have gathered them together and bound them in the form of hymn-books, and we have used them from week to week in our worship. The makers of these books have gathered songs from saints and sometimes from sinners, and from people of the most diverse religious views, from whom we, as a people, differ in very important doctrines. Yet we sing these songs, the products of a multitude of diversified minds and hearts, sing them unto the edification of the church, and ask no questions as to the soundness of the faith of their authors.

To us they are truly spiritual songs, wrought out of the trust and deepest experience of their authors' hearts, full of the life with which they have inspired them. It has been said that the writers of a nation's songs do most to form a nation's character. So the writers of songs for the church do most for the life of the church. The very words of these songs, to old and young alike, become common household property. They enter into that branch of worship, which, more than any other, leaves a definite and ineffaceable impression upon the mind and heart.

We travel up and down the ages, and through all nations, to obtain the songs for the Church of Christ. Wherever a true poet has sung something pure and good and holy, we marshal his song under the banner of Christ and label it "a spiritual song." We, as a church, have used these songs almost exclusively, leaving out for the most part the singing of psalms and hymns, if by hymns is meant something found in the Bible. Thus, in laying the foundation for our church music, in selecting the very body and soul of which music itself is to be but the garment, we have exercised the widest possible liberty. We have not confined ourselves to the Bible, nor to any one nation, nor creed, and much less to poets of like faith with us. We have gladly accepted the songs written under every creed, and of unknown authors by the score, whose lives and characters we can never know, and all this to the edification of the saints. If there is one place where, more than another, we have been liberal in our interpretation of Scripture, it is in the selection of spiritual songs.

The mind of the church has been left free to determine for itself what songs are spiritual and what songs will edify. Is this not a dangerous power for men to exercise, and would it not be better, especially in these latter days, when men are no longer inspired, if the church would confine herself to the singing of psalms? We must acknowledge that very often a poor song is found in our hymn-books, and frequently a song is sung that is far from edifying. Who can record the mistakes that the people of God have made in these respects? In what manner can the spiritual songs be presented so as to make the best impression upon the minds of the hearers? "Let all things be done to edifying." The song is not presented for its own sake, nor to edify God, but to edify the hearers. The essential thing in music is to impress, as much as possible, the sentiment of the song upon the mind and heart of the worshiper.

To present the gospel of Christ so as to convert the sinner and edify the saint, is the work of the preacher, yet in doing this his elocution (the sounds of his voice) may be a
most important element. Give the same
discourse to two men. From the lips of
the one with a magnificent voice, well cul-
tivated, it will fall like magic; while from
the lips of him who stammers and is slow
of speech it will fall like lead. The differ-
ence is simply in the sounds they make.
In the one case it is most edifying; while
in the other it is wearisome. Yet God has
ordained no particular style of elocution.
The rule is, "let all things be done unto
edifying." If there should be a congrega-
tion some place which would prefer to hear
the one who stammers and is slow of
speech, then his speech will be edifying to
that congregation and it ought to select
him. There are certain regions where it is
demanded of the preacher that he shall use
the so-called "holy tones" in delivering his
discourses. To these congregations such
tones are edifying, and, consequently, scrip-
tural.

God has ordained no particular tunes nor
styles of singing. Singing which edifies
one congregation may be repulsive to anoth-
er. To the first it is scriptural, but to
the second the same music is unscriptural.
Edification is the scriptural end to be
gained. Here is a spiritual song. In what
garb shall it be clothed in presenting it to
the ears of the hearers so as to make it
most edifying?

We have seen that in praying, preaching
and in the selection of spiritual songs we,
as a people, have allowed the widest and
freest use of the human faculties. Matters
of the highest interest have been left to be
determined solely by human wisdom. God
has trusted man in the amplest way, has
required him to exercise his highest facul-
ties to the utmost in matters that pertain to
his soul's highest interests. If he can trust
man in the above things, can he not also
trust him in the less important matter of
presenting the songs so as to make them
most edifying? Here is the song. Uttered
with certain sounds it will edify, uttered
with others it will not edify. The only
question is, What sounds shall be used to
accomplish the end? Does God care more
for one sound than for another? I insist
upon it that edification is the end to
be gained by preaching and music, and
by all worship. The matter of the sermon
and the spiritual song are the materials for
edification, while the elocution of the min-
ister and the music are the means by which
the sermon and the song are impressed
upon the minds of the worshipper. If it is
safe for the church to create and select the
songs that she sings, it is also safe for her
to select the music by which these songs
shall be made effective in worship. If it is
safe for her to create the song, the very soul
of that which is to be clothed by music, it
is also safe for her to select the music which
is to clothe the song.

The objector to the organ may take either
of several positions:

First, he may say that the use of the or-
organ is not edifying, and it is therefore un-
scriptural.

Second, that it is unscriptural, and there-
fore it is not edifying.

Third, that it is edifying, but at the same
time it is unscriptural, and therefore ought
not to be used in worship.

The first objection is well taken, if it can
be sustained. How shall a congregation
determine whether the organ aids the vocal
music unto edification or not? "Let all
things be done unto edifying." This rule
throws upon the worshiper himself the re-
sponsibility of determining whether the
different branches of the worship are edif-
ying or not. God does not tell us that
brother A preaches good sermons, nor that
brother B sings well. We must determine
these things for ourselves as individuals. If
some members say that the organ is edify-
ing to them, then we must accept their de-
cision so far as they are concerned. If oth-
ers say that the organ is not edifying to
them, then we must accept their decision
as to themselves. There is no other method
whereby it is possible to tell what is most
edifying. With regard to the votes cast in
favor of the organ in worship, it will gen-
erally be found, I think, that the great ma-
majority of those who understand music
are in favor of the organ. This
fact goes to show that the or-
organ will improve the quality of the
music, for it must be admitted that those
who understand music can best judge of its
quality. The objection stated above is
doubtless valid as to some congregations,
but invalid as to others. Since each con-
gration must judge for itself as to what
particular kind of music is edifying, and
since some congregations decide that the organ is edifying, while others decide that it is not edifying; to the first its use is scriptural, but to the second it would be unscriptural.

The second objection is that the use of the organ in worship is unscriptural, and therefore it can not edify. God might have selected certain tunes to be used in the church, but he did not, although tunes are of the greatest importance. He has left man to make spiritual songs and to make the tunes adapted to these songs. The general plan of all worship seems to be to give man as much to do as possible, to give his faculties the widest possible range in creating the worship.

Why is it that this matter of determining the quality of sounds by which a song of human origin, and a tune of human origin, shall be brought to the ears of the worshipers, should be made an exception to this general rule, and that we should believe that man has no authority to decide the question? Is it because sound is more sacred than the song itself, or than the tune by which it is to be rendered, that man has no right to choose the sounds that he thinks will best edify? Is it because the human ear is more likely to err in this than it is in deciding what style of delivery it prefers in a sermon? Or is it because God would be especially arbitrary in this subordinate matter makes an exception to his general rule. His idea ever seems to be to develop through exercise and to the utmost every good faculty which man possesses. Open every avenue of the soul and let God come in. Let him come through the reason, the imagination, the memory, the conscience, the eye and the ear. Let the human ear, so often greeted by discordant sounds in daily strife, when it comes into the house of God, be greeted by the grandest and sweetest harmonies that human genius can produce, that the soul may be lifted up in anticipation of the celestial harmonies of the heavenly hosts around the throne.

"And I heard a voice from heaven as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder, and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps, and they sang as it were a new song before the throne" (Rev. xiv. 2, 3).

If instrumental music in worship is a sin on earth, is it not a sin in heaven? John, the beloved, in his old age, when his spiritual vision, free from all earthly dross, could pierce through the pearly gates, saw repeatedly the harpers harping upon their harps, and with an ear that could catch the spiritual sounds of heaven, he heard the music around the throne of God. How do you know that this language is figurative? May there not be spiritual harps in heaven? Are spirits deaf and dumb, and are there no divine sounds above? Is heaven an asylum for the deaf and dumb? God is not deaf. He who made the ear, can he not hear? But if it is a figure, would not the apostle have been very careful in that connection to have used a pure and appropriate figure? If it only edifies man, God is glorified thereby. It is man's salvation that God seeks. Repress not the human faculties in their growth, for this is not edification, but let every power of both body and mind in its most perfect form be made to praise God.

I repeat that the great idea with God, so far as worship is concerned, is to develop man, to edify him, which means to save him. In doing this he compels man to do all that is possible for him to do. The very language which he uses in worship is a human invention, and when God speaks to man he speaks to him in human language. The most of the prayers that are offered are not "thus saith the Lord," are not quotations of Scripture, but they are formed by the mind of the worshiper. So far as their form is concerned, they are human, and the best that can be said of them is that they are scriptural only by inference.

Modern sermons are not in details scriptural either by precept or example. They are preached in languages which have originated since Christ and his apostles were on the earth. As a rule, they contain but few quotations of Scripture. There is so large a human element in sermons, that we can safely say that if they are scriptural at all, they are only so by inference. As to the spiritual songs which Christians sing, they are of human origin. Not a single one of them is found in the Scriptures. If they
are scriptural at all, it is not by precept or example, but only by inference.

The tunes which Christians use are purely human, and have been invented by musicians of the most diversified views and characters. If they are scriptural, they are so only by inference. We are not familiar with a single tune that the early Christians used, nor do we know that they sang any tune correctly. In preaching and praying, we see how great is the human element, while spiritual songs and tunes are wholly human. Yet we believe that God adopts these purely human songs and tunes as his own, and they constitute one of the most, if not actually the most efficient part of worship. May we not be in danger of underestimating the value of the human element in matters of worship? God has formulated for the human race neither prayer, nor sermon, nor song, nor tune. The reasons for this are apparent. God adapts himself to human nature. While man’s general wants in all ages and in all places are the same, yet in detail they are most varied, and in nothing is this more strikingly seen than in music. The music which edified those early Christians may not have been the music which will best edify Christians to-day. The music which edifies one congregation to-day may not edify another.

God has ever trusted each succeeding generation in every land to frame its own prayers as dictated by the general spirit of the Scriptures; to prepare and deliver its own sermons by human wisdom, in the light of the gospel; and to compose its own songs and the tunes by which they are to be rendered.

If he has thus trusted man in these large and most important things, may he not also trust that man will be able to render these songs and tunes by the aid of sounds that will make them edifying to himself? It is for man’s edification that all these things are intended. It seems evident to me that the general spirit of the Scriptures according to the method of our interpretation as a people justifies the use of the organ as an aid to the human voice in worship.

It should be borne in mind that it is the general opinion of those who understand music that an instrument aids the voice in singing. We all know that it is the habit of singers, both in public and in private, to use musical instruments for this purpose. We are sometimes told that the organ is a human invention. This is strictly true. So were the last sermon and prayer which you heard largely human inventions, and the song and the tune wholly human inventions. If we drop the human invention element out of worship, then music of any kind becomes totally impossible, and prayer and preaching will be confined to repeating certain passages of Scripture. We are told that it is a dangerous thing to use the organ in worship. This is strictly true, but it is no more dangerous than for men to pray and preach and compose songs and tunes. Mistakes are frequent in all of these matters. But God requires us to act in these things in spite of the certainty that we will make mistakes. I know of no redemption for us unless his mercy and love are sufficient. He who can make the wrath of man to praise him can also enable us to rise on our mistakes as “stepping stones . . . to higher things.” They are a necessary element in the education of a finite creature.

A third position which the objector might take is, that the organ may make the music more edifying, but it is unscriptural, and therefore ought not to be used. This position is so out of harmony with God’s usual method of dealing with men, that it hardly seems probable that any person would assume it. That God would prohibit that which edifies seems incredible. To cast the good out of the kingdom would be to divide the kingdom of truth against itself. That this would be done where every good influence is so much needed in redeeming the world, I can not believe.

It will be noticed that I have viewed this subject in its relation to edification. He who simply asserts that the use of the organ is unscriptural, and stops short with this assertion, without considering its relation to edification, is in grave error. God in all of his dealings with man, acts not arbitrarily, but acts strictly with regard to man’s highest needs. He would lift man up and redeem him through the exercise of every good faculty with which he has endowed him.

The deepest human reason, the loftiest flights of the imagination, the eloquence of
of the organ among us in worship. That it has been steadily growing in favor with us as a people is, I think, beyond question. I can see no reason why it should cease to become more and more popular in worship.

The root of this matter lies not in the church, but in Christian homes where sons and daughters, through long years of toil, are taught instrumental music, and the value of an instrument as an aid in singing. The consequences of this are inevitable. Better music at home means better music in the church. Music is not an arbitrary thing, but it has a definite mathematical basis, which those who do not understand, fail fully to appreciate. Many ears are so constructed that to them a certain amount of discord may not be unpleasant, while to the more sensitive and cultivated ear the same discord is very disagreeable.

The difficulty of creating good church music is very great, and if a large majority of those who best understand music, and upon whom rests the responsibility of creating it, desire an organ as an aid to the voice, it seems to me that their desire should have great weight in determining the matter.

"Let all things be done unto edifying." For hundreds of men, women and children, all differing from each other in intelligence, taste and education, to live together in a congregation so that the highest spiritual interests of each individual shall be advanced and the desires of each properly respected, is a great problem.

In every human organization it becomes necessary to sacrifice, to a certain extent, individual desires to the general good. Without concession of individual preference in some measure, organized effort of every kind becomes impossible. "Bear ye one another's burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ." "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."