

## **God's Permission, Pianos, & PowerPoint**

A staff writer for *Christianity Today* (a denominational magazine founded by Billy Graham) wrote about his experiences while visiting churches in his area. While visiting a church of Christ, he was confused by their "inconsistency" in refusing to worship with instrumental music while using PowerPoint, since neither one is mentioned in the New Testament.

Is this inconsistent? Why will we use one and not the other? Many people have this question, so let's consider this alleged "inconsistency."

The short answer is because the New Testament contains God's permission to use PowerPoint but lacks permission to worship by playing musical instruments. "How so?" many ask. Consider:

- "Teach the truth" is God's command (1 Tim. 3:15). The New Testament records both verbal and written teaching. Power Point is simply written teaching, thus we clearly have God's permission to use it.
- No permission exists in the New Testament to worship God with instruments today. It is not in the worship of the church in the New Testament, despite the Jewish background of many who became Christians in the first century. (They would have been familiar with instruments of music in Old Testament worship.)
- We have God's permission to worship by singing music (1 Corinthians 14:15). No one today has God's permission to worship by playing music.

We must limit ourselves to doing the revealed will of the Father in order to avoid lawlessness (Matt. 7:21-23).

**-by David Halbrook**

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## **When God Leaves the Serpents**

The story of the Israelites' lack of faith is one even our small children know. Over and over again, God's people refused to trust Him to take care of their needs, and insisted that they had it better in Egypt – the very place they were once so desperate to escape.

This attitude continued even after the sin at Kadesh, where God's patience finally ran out and the people were condemned to never enter the land of promise. And yet, He continued to take care of them.

In Numbers 21:1-3, He delivered them in battle from the Canaanites. And in the very next verse, it says, "the people became impatient because of the journey." They even asked God why He bothered to bring them out of Egypt in the first place, if all they were going to do was to eat manna and die in the wilderness. (v. 4, 5).

God responded immediately, and left no guesswork to His displeasure. He sent fiery serpents among the people, and many of them died from the poisonous bites. And naturally, they turned to the only One they could under those circumstances.

"We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from us." (v. 7).

What I find so interesting is that while God was not deaf to their entreaty, He didn't give them what they wanted. Surely, in our minds, no serpents at all would be much better than having a way to be healed just in case one bit you. And yet, as is often the case, God did not follow human logic. He gave the people what they needed, instead of what they wanted.

Rather than take the serpents away, and remove the suffering they caused, God left them and allowed them to cause injury and even death. He placed His people in a situation where they were forced to realize that their only option was to trust Him.

But His lesson did not stop there. From a medical perspective, looking at a metal serpent would do absolutely nothing for a snake bite. The people had to choose to believe God when He said they would be healed by looking upon it, and then they had to *act* on that belief.

Of course, they could very well have gotten angry with God instead, claiming that a bronze serpent wasn't what they asked for. They could have refused to look at the serpent, insisting on

getting exactly what they wanted instead of what God knew they needed. But I imagine if any Israelites were so foolhardy, they did not live to regret it for very long.

There are a lot of things I want in life. Good things, wholesome things, things that I know would make me very happy. I try to pray about all of them. And yet it can be so easy to think of my Father as nothing more than an ATM. I decide what I need, and I get exactly that much out. Nothing more, nothing less, and it usually happens pretty immediately.

When I go to God with my desires, my hopes and dreams for my future, am I informing Him of what I want? Or am I asking with the knowledge – and acceptance – that He has total control, and that if I don't get what I want, that means He knows I don't need it?

And when He gives me what I do need, do I grow angry, as if the waiter brought me the wrong meal? Or do I accept His will, and obey it in the simple faith that He will take care of me if only I relinquish control?

Walking by faith and not by sight is a daily, strenuous exercise. Let us not grow weary of the journey, and instead thank our Lord that we will always have exactly what we need – and that He knows better than we what those needs are.

- by *K. M. Smith*

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## ***Can We Have Too Much “Positive” Preaching?***

We readily acknowledge the importance of positive preaching. Brethren need the “comfort of the Scriptures” (Romans 15:4). Paul sent Tychicus to the Ephesians so that he could “comfort your hearts.” Timothy was dispatched to Philippi (Phil. 2:9) and Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2) in order to comfort the brethren. Clearly, this kind of positive encouragement is essential. The Bible has much to say about it. No one denies this.

There are, however, some among us who are determined to only preach positive things. They want to specialize in positive preaching and to emphasize only those things which (they claim) are designed to “build up” the hearers. They will not deal with controversial topics, and they refuse to spend time rebuking the sins and weaknesses that exist in men's lives.

This “positive” approach fails to present the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), and at least two serious consequences will follow:

1) Christians will not be admonished to root out the evil that is in their lives. We must “put off the old man” (Colossians 3:9). We will never become the “new man” that we ought to be (vs. 10) until we have been instructed adequately in this regard.

2) Christians will become conditioned to only want this sort of teaching and preaching. After having a steady diet of positive emphasis, brethren will lose all tolerance for forceful preaching on important doctrinal and moral issues. The apostle Paul anticipated such a scenario: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim. 4:3).

We are not at liberty to be “specialists” in only one aspect of the work. If we emphasize the positive while neglecting the negative, we have not done “the work of an evangelist” (2 Tim. 4:5). Our job involves both the positive and the negative. We are to “reprove, rebuke, and exhort” (vs. 2).

- by *Greg Gwin*