

Inconsistency at Richland Hills

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The press release presents a large congregation (6,400 members) in Fort Worth bringing in instrumental music into the worship. It is the Richland Hills Church of Christ. The decision is inconsistent along four fronts.

One, the introduction of instrumental music at Richland Hills is inconsistent with *precious passages*. The fact that God wants singing only in his worship is assured by the scriptures which call only for singing in the worship. Two examples are Ephesians 5:19, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord," and Hebrews 13:15, "By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name." Apparently, their three years of study on the subject did not uncover the point of these precious passages.

Two, the introduction of instrumental music at Richland Hills is inconsistent with *previous practice*. The long history of the worship practices of the church at Richland Hills surely must stand for something. The incontrovertible fact that never before have they used the instrument in the worship points up the inconsistency of their new decision to use the instrument. Its use casts doubt and suspicion on the acceptability of former years of cumulative worship practices. The statements their preacher, Rick Atchley, is making to the effect that using instrumental music is more pleasing to God than singing unaccompanied cuts harshly into the devotional mentality of former years at Richland Hills.

Three, the introduction of instrumental music at Richland Hills is inconsistent because of a *problematic position*. Atchley labors to garner sympathy for the new position by elaborating on the decision to use it in their worship following three years of study, prayer, and fasting. He stated, "We didn't make this decision on a

Tuesday and announce it on a Sunday." Then, toward the close of his comments in the press release he refers to the subject of instrumental music in worship as "unimportant." "We've already lost too many over question that's way too unimportant," he reportedly said. This is a problematic position because Atchley cannot have it both ways. Is the subject unimportant or did it warrant the three years put into the study of it by the leadership at Richland Hills? Will Atchley chide his nineteen elders for wasting their time for three years deliberating over a "way too unimportant" subject? Did they really spend three years studying, praying, and fasting? When is Atchley telling the truth? He clearly is inconsistent in his problematic position.

Four, the introduction of instrumental music at Richland Hills is inconsistent because of a *pitiful perversion*. Atchley says one passage that weighed into the decision to have instrumental music in their worship was Acts fifteen. He concluded that the point of the conference at Jerusalem was to make it easier for the Gentiles to become Christians, and correspondingly since so many today want to use instrumental music in worship and expect its use in worship, then it makes it easier to bring people to Christ today when the instrument is used in the worship than when it is not. Atchley pointed to Acts 15:19 and said, "It is my judgment, therefore that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." Was that the point of the Jerusalem conference? Did the apostles and elders assemble to see what could be done to "make it easier for the Gentiles to become Christians"? All you have to do is look at the opening verses of the chapter to see that is a contrivance, a twisting of the scriptures. Luke wrote, "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be

circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question" (Acts 15:1-2).

Was the question how "to make it easier for Gentiles to become Christians" or to resolve whether or not the Gentiles who were becoming Christians should be required to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses? According to Atchley, Richland Hills drew wrong conclusions from reading into this passage of scripture something that never was in it.

Remember that the solution to the problem included the divine judgment that those wishing to inject into Christianity that which the apostles had not commanded were in error. Luke wrote, "Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: *to whom we gave no such commandment*: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well" (Acts 15:24-29, emphasis added).

Now, here is an important application of the Jerusalem conference to the subject at hand. Men are in error when they want to introduce into the Christian system that concerning which the apostles of Jesus Christ "gave no such commandment." That is the essence of the problem with the introduction of instrumental music into the worship of the church. The apostles did not command it. And, Atchley's explanation of the events at the Jerusalem conference constitutes a pitiful perversion of the

labors of inspired men to communicate the will of God. If God wants instrumental music to be used in his worship, then where is the passage where he commands its use? In its absence men presume to speak for God to the disruption of the harmony of the church for which Christ died.