

Musical Instruments in Worship

Colossians 3:16-17

Introduction: For thousands of years, God has authorized man to use music in worship to Him. As we study the New Testament, we find that music was an important part in the early church. Music in the first century worship was entirely and exclusively vocal. However, as time passed, man wanted to “improve” the music used in worship so he introduced mechanical instruments in the worship service.

The issue before us is not music in worship but the kind of music in worship. Does God approve of us using vocal or instrumental music in our worship to Him? Does the type of music used in worship to God make any difference to Him?

I. The history of instrumental music in worship.

A. Instruments of music were introduced into worship nearly 700 years after the church was established. It was first encouraged by Pope Vitalian in 666 A.D. of the apostate Roman Catholic church. However, it was not generally practiced until the ninth century. The practice of using instruments in worship was long resisted through the 12th century even in the apostate church. Even the Greek Orthodox Catholic church still refuses to use instrumental music.

B. By the time of the Restoration Movement in the 15th century, instrumental music in worship was so common place that all denominations that split away from the Catholic church carried mechanical instruments into their worship. Ironically, many of the denominational founders were opposed to the use of instrumental music in worship.

1. John Calvin (Presbyterian) - “no more suitable than burning incense.”

2. Martin Luther (Lutheran) - “a work of Baal.”

3. John Wesley (Methodist) - “no objection to instruments of music, so long as they are neither seen or heard.”

C. In time, even the Lord’s church, was influenced to accept this practice. The first church of Christ on record to use mechanical instruments in worship was a church in Midway, Kentucky, in 1859. The church of Christ was torn asunder. What resulted were more apostate churches known today as the Christian church and the more liberal Disciples of Christ.

II. Why we must sing.

A. Singing is commanded (Col 3:16; Eph. 5:19).

B. By singing we speak to one another, we teach one another, and we admonish one another. Instruments are not capable of speaking, teaching nor admonishing. Actually, instruments are a distraction when trying to speak, teach and admonish in song.

C. We are to sing with the spirit and understanding (1 Cor. 14:15). Can I honestly do either of these while I'm playing an instrument?

III. Why we can't use instrumental music in worship.

A. Instrumental music transgresses the authority of Christ by injecting something into worship which the Lord and His Apostles have not taught (2 Jn. 9; Col. 3:17).

B. Instrumental music makes worship vain by a practice of men (Matt. 15:8-9).

C. Instrumental music causes and has caused division (1 Cor. 1:10).

D. Instrumental music cannot be used in worship because it has no part in the truth revealed to us through Christ or the Holy Spirit (John 4:24; 16:13).

E. Instrumental music cannot be used in faith because its use is not taught in God's word (2 Cor. 5:7; Rom. 10:17; 14:23).

F. Instrumental music has no part in the divine pattern (John 12:48).

Interlude: I had the opportunity to talk to a manager of one of our local "Christian" radio stations. He actually believes that the rock music they play on their radio station when sung along by their listeners constitutes an act of worship to God. When I explained that instrumental music is not pleasing to the Lord in worship he was flabbergasted. After all, he thought he was providing worship services 24/7 to his listening audience. He departed with tears in his eyes not being able to justify this sinful practice.

For the remaining portion of our lesson, let's review a few of the most common objections used to justify the use of instrumental music in worship.

IV. "Instruments were used under the Law of Moses."

A. Agreed, but so were animal sacrifices, burning of incense, observing certain feasts, and polygamy. To keep one part of the Old Law requires you to keep it all (James 2:10).

B. To justify what we do by the Law of Moses is to commit spiritual adultery and to fall from grace (Gal. 5:4).

C. We are no longer under the Old Law. Christ died so we would no longer be subject to it (Col. 2:14; Eph. 2:14-16; Heb. 10:9-10).

V. “David used instruments of music in worship” (2 Chron. 29:25).

A. Under Moses, instruments were never authorized nor used in worship.

1. In the Syriac and Arabic manuscripts, the above passage is translated thus: “*Hezekiah appointed the Levites in the house of the Lord, with instruments of music, and the sound of harps, and with the HYMNS of DAVID, and the HYMNS of GAD, the king’s prophet, and of NATHAN, the king’s prophet: for David sang the praises of the Lord his God, as from the mouth of the prophets.*” [Adam Clark’s Commentary on the Old Testament]

2. It seems that the use of instruments by David in worship was an innovation not actually authorized by the Lord.

3. In fact, the Israelites were condemned for using musical instruments like David (Amos 6:5). “Woe to you who...”

B. Whether the passage is a mistranslation or not and whether David had permission to use instruments in worship or not, the Old Law has been abolished (Eph. 2:15).

VI. “The New Testament does not forbid the use of instrumental music in worship.”

A. This position gives respect to what the Bible does not say rather than what it does say. In other words, it says a person has a right to practice anything not expressly forbidden in scripture.

1. Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2).

2. Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:16-20; Ex. 30:1-10).

B. We must abide in what is written (2 John 9; 1 Cor. 4:6).

VII. “Instrumental music is only an aid.”

A. “Sing” is the **how** we are to speak “*to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs*” (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). When the Lord specifies the **how** something is done, we are not at liberty to change His command.

B. Noah was told **how** to build the Ark (Gen. 6:14-16). If Noah used another type of wood or built it to his own specifications, would it have floated?

C. Instrumental music is another kind of music not specified anywhere in the New Testament. It would be an addition to what the Lord commanded (Rev. 22:18).

VIII. “But there will be instruments of music in heaven.”

A. The book of Revelation, where this idea is secured, is a symbolic book. Many things are described using physical materials we understand. Symbols like sea of glass, or streets of pure gold. Will we be using man-made harps in heaven?

B. In heaven, we will not be subject to our present physical existence. We will be like angels in heaven (Matt. 22:30). Do angels use man-made harps?

C. Besides, God has not authorized us to use heavenly harps, nor could we acquire them.

IX. “Instruments are expedient.”

A. In order for something to be expedient, it must also be lawful and it must edify (1 Cor. 6:12; 10:23).

B. An expediency cannot offend another person’s conscience (1 Cor. 10:28).

Conclusion: Instead of trying to justify a practice not authorized for our use in worship, wouldn’t it make more sense just to accept what the Lord does allow? He has exclusively authorized the singing of psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. Instead of bucking God on this or any other issue, why not accept His truths, repent and obey His will?