

May 17, 2020

What About Instrumental Music in Worship?

First-time visitors to our worship assemblies generally take note of the fact that we do not use any mechanical instruments in our worship. We do not use organs, pianos, harps, etc., and this makes us “different” in the minds of most people. It is not that we are deliberately trying to be “different,” but we are trying to follow the divine pattern when we approach God in worship.

Inasmuch as **God** is the Object of our worship (John 4:23-24), then His will must be followed as we seek to honor and praise Him in worship. That we must follow God’s will when we endeavor to worship Him is evident in Matt. 15:8-9 wherein Jesus said this of the scribes and Pharisees: *“These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And **in vain** they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”* You will please note that Jesus described their “worship” as being “**in vain**.” In contrast to “vain” worship, Jesus said “*God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship **in spirit and in truth**.*” Inasmuch as God is the object of our worship, and inasmuch as our worship “**must**” be “*in spirit and in truth,*” then we must follow God’s directions, and not simply do what pleases us.

More specifically, as we think about acceptable worship, we note that there are at least five essentials which must characterize our worship. It must: (1) be directed **to God**, the proper object, John 4:23-24; (2) Be “**in spirit**,” John 4:23-24; (3) Be “**in truth**,” John 4:23-24; (4) **edify** the worshippers, I Cor. 14:26, and (5) it must be decent and in order, I Cor. 14:40.

By way of further clarification, with regards to worship, we state that worship on the Lord’s day includes “five items of worship.” These “items of worship” involve: (1) “*continuing in the apostles’ doctrine,*” (2) partaking of the Lord’s supper, (3) singing praises to God, (4) prayer, and (5) giving of our means (Acts 2:42; 20:7; Eph. 5:19; I Cor. 16:1-2, etc. In the New Testament God has given ample instruction with regards to what is acceptable in each of these “items of worship.” In this article, we are focusing upon only one of these items — that of singing praises to God.

A study of the New Testament reveals that singing is very much a part of acceptable worship unto God. Please read: Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 13:15; James 5:13. Moreover, we have approved **examples** of God’s people praising Him in song (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25). Also the need to sing praises to God is **necessarily inferred** in such scriptures as Rom. 15:9 and Heb. 2:11-12. Hence, by **divine command, approved example, and necessary inference**, we learn that singing is an essential part of our worship unto God.

As it relates to singing in worship, please note Eph. 5:19 and Col. 3:16. Eph. 5:19, “*speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and making melody in your heart to God.” Col. 3:16: “*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*”*

From the preceding, we learn that the **kind** of music offered is vocal or acapella; it involves “**singing**” — nothing is said about “playing.” The **kind** of songs are specified, it being “*psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.*” Elvis Presley’s song “you aint’ nothing but a hound dog,” or Dolly Parton’s song “My Tennessee Mountain Home” do not fit the category of “*psalms*

and hymns and spiritual songs.” The **instrument** upon which “*melody*” is to be made is specified; Scripture says “*singing and making melody in your heart to God,*” Eph. 5:19. Man made the harp; God made the “*heart,*” and melody must be made on the instrument which God made, not an instrument of man’s making. The “*heart,*” or instrument upon which “*melody*” is to be made is that part of man which: Thinks, Prov. 23:7, Reasons, Mark 2:8, Wills or intends, Heb. 4:12, Purposes, 2 Cor. 9:7, and Loves, Matt. 22:37. A mechanical instrument of man’s making can do none of these things!

The following verses contain all that is said in the New Testament with regards to worshipping God in song, namely: Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; Acts 16:25; Rom. 15:9; I Cor. 14:15; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:12; Heb. 13:15, and James 5:13. Read those verses and you will note that such words as “*sang,*” “*sung,*” “*sing,*” “*speaking,*” “*singing,*” “*teaching,*” and “*admonishing*” were used. Nothing was said about “*plucking,*” “*picking,*” or “*playing.*”

“But,” someone says, “the Bible doesn’t say you can’t use instruments of music in worship.” True. Nor does the Bible say “you can’t stand on your head or do sit up’s in worship.” But our worship must be determined by what the Bible **has said**, not by what it does not say! But the Bible does warn us not to “*pervert the gospel of Christ,*” Gal. 1:6-9, not to go beyond the word of God, 2 John 9-11, and not to add to or take from the word of God, Rev. 22:18-19. Moreover, Historians are in agreement that the New Testament church in the first century did not use mechanical instruments of music in worship! In fact, they generally agree that the first example of such being used following the establishment of the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), occurred about 666 A.D., and that it was introduced by Pope Vitalian I, **not** by Jesus Christ!

“But” someone else says “they used instruments of music in the Old Testament.” We agree! As proof, please read such scriptures as 2 Chron. 29:25; Ps. 33:2; Ps. 87:7; Ps. 98:5; Ps. 150:3-5, etc. However, the law of Moses has been blotted out, taken out of the way, and nailed to the cross, Col. 2:14. Under the Old Testament the priests were taken from the tribe of Levi, Num18:1-32; Heb. 7:11. But Jesus is our “*High Priest,*” Heb. 4:14; He is “*High Priest over the house of God,*” Heb. 10:21, which is “the *church*” which He built (I Tim. 3:15; Matt. 16:18). The priesthood from Old Testament times to the New Testament age has been changed (from the Levites to Christ), and scripture says “*the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law,*” Heb. 7:12. Hence, Jesus “*is the Mediator of the New Covenant*” (Heb. 9:15), not the covenant which God gave to the Jews through Moses.

The fallacy of trying to justify the use of instrumental music in worship in this the gospel age may be seen by observing the contrast between the Old and New Covenants.

With this in mind, please note these facts about the law of Moses: (1) it was given to a physical nation, Deut. 5:1-2, (2) Upon experiencing a physical birth, its subjects came under that law, Heb. 8:11, (3) it required fleshly circumcision, Lev. 12:3, (4) It involved a physical tabernacle, Heb. 9:6,7, (5) It required animal sacrifices, Heb. 9:6,7, (6) it could **not** take away sins, Rom. 3:20; Heb. 10:4.

In contrast to the Law of Moses, please note these facts about the gospel of Christ: (1) It requires a spiritual birth, John 3:5; I Pet. 1:23, (2) This spiritual birth puts one into a spiritual kingdom, John 3:5; 18:36, (3) it puts one into a “*spiritual house,*” I Pet. 2:5, (4) this covenant is spiritual in nature, Rom. 8:1-2, (5) It was ratified by the blood of Christ, Heb. 9:15-17, and (6) it **can** take away sins, Rom. 1:16; Acts 2:38.

With these thoughts in mind, we state that the **music** we offer in praise to God must be in keeping with the nature: (1) of the “*house*” of which we are a part, I Pet. 2:5, (2) of the “*kingdom*”

of which we are a part, John 18:36, (3) of the nature of **the birth** which puts us in the kingdom, John 3:5, (4) of the “*circumcision*” God now requires, Rom. 2:28-29, and (5) of the “*sacrifices*” we are to offer, I Pet 2:5 .

With regards to our not using instruments of music in worship, I state that others were also opposed to such. We have already noted that instruments of music in the gospel age were first introduced by Pope Vitalian I in A.D. 666. Martin Luther, who founded the Lutheran church, described “the organ in the worship of God as an ensign of Baal.” John Calvin (“the father of Presbyterianism”) said: “Musical instruments in celebrating praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the Law.” John Wesley (“the father of Methodism”) said “I have no opposition to the organ in our chapel provided it is neither seen nor heard.” Charles Spurgeon (famous Baptist preacher), in commenting on I Cor. 14:15, said: “I would as soon **pray** to God with machinery as to **sing** to God with machinery.”

Note: We did not quote these men to justify our non-use of mechanical instruments of music in worship, but to show that others have reached the same conclusion when they investigated the Scriptures. In fact, insofar as the so-called “Protestant world” is concerned, the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship does not date back more than 500 years! And the so-called “Protestants” borrowed it from the apostate church of which Vitalian I was pope!

Conclusion: Concerning instruments of music in this the Gospel Age, it may be said that: (1) they are **not** commanded, (2) They can **not** be used “*by faith*,” 2 Cor. 5:7, (3) they can not be used in “*the name*” of Christ, Col. 3:17; (4) they were not used in the worship of the church in the first century, and (5) They are not a part of the “*doctrine of Christ*,” 2 John 9. Beloved, in that last day we will be **judged** by the word of the Lord, John 12:48, so it behooves us to **abide** by His word now!

—B. Witherington