

Does the New Testament Authorize Mechanical Music in Worship?

History of mechanical music in worship

Luther: The organ in the worship of God is an ensign of Baal.

Calvin: It is no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of tapers or revival of the other shadows of the law. The Roman Catholics borrowed it from the Jews.

Spurgeon: I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery.

History of mechanical music in worship

Wesley: I have no objection to the organ in our chapels provided it is neither seen or heard.

Clarke: I am an old man and an old minister, and I here declare that I have never known instrumental music to be productive of any good in the worship of God and have reason to believe that it has been productive of much evil. Music as a science I esteem and admire, but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor.

I. Musical praise in the OT

Singing

Dt.31¹⁹ Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel.

Ps.47⁶ Sing praises to God, sing praises! Sing praises to our King, sing praises! ⁷ For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with understanding.

Ps.51¹⁴ Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, The God of my salvation, And my tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

Mechanical music

Ps.68²⁵ The singers went before, the players on instruments followed after; Among them were the maidens playing timbrels.

Ps.150³ Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp!

⁴ Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!

⁵ Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals!

I. Musical praise in the OT

II. Musical praise in the NT

Only singing is authorized

1. Mt.26:30
2. Mk.14:26
3. Ac.16:25
4. Ro.15:9
5. 1 Co.14:15
6. Ep.5:19
7. Col.3:16
8. Hb.2:12
9. Ja.5:13

1. Complete list of NT vss that mention musical praise by Christians on earth.
2. NT mentions instruments (12x), dancing (5x) but never as acts of praise.
3. If God wants these things today, why did He not say so...as in OT?

Testimony of ancient writers

Dr. Frederic Louis Ritter, Vassar College:

“We have no real knowledge of the exact character of the music which formed a part of the religious devotion of the first Christian congregations. It was, however, purely vocal... As late as the 4th Century, St. Hieronymus says, speaking of the degraded state of Roman spectacles, ‘A Christian maid should not know what a lyre or flute is, nor what their use is.’”

Testimony of ancient writers

Edward Dickinson, Oberlin College:

“...while the pagan melodies were always sung to an instrumental accompaniment, the church chant was exclusively vocal ... Many of the fathers, speaking of religious song, make no mention of instruments; others, like Clement of Alexandria and St. Chrysostom, refer to them only to denounce them.”

Testimony of ancient writers

Clement: “Only one instrument do we use, viz., the word of peace wherewith we honor God, no longer the old psaltery, trumpet, drum, and flute.”

Testimony of ancient writers

Chrysostom: “David formerly sang in psalms, also we sing today with him; he had a lyre with lifeless strings, the church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre, with a different tone, indeed, but with a more accordant piety. Their high religious and moral enthusiasm needed no aid from external stimulus; the pure vocal utterance was the more proper expression of their faith.”

Testimony of ancient writers

John Spencer Curwen, member of Royal Academy of Music, President of Tonic Sol-fa College, London, 1880: “Men still living can remember the time when organs were very seldom found outside the Church of England. The Methodists, Independents, and Baptists rarely had them, and by the Presbyterians they were stoutly opposed. Yet, even in the Church of England itself, organs did not obtain admission without much controversy.”

Encyclopedias

Schaff-Herzog, “In the Greek Church the organ never came into use. But after the 8th Century it became more and more common in the Latin Church; not, however, without opposition from the side of the monks... The Reformed Church discarded it; and though the Church of Basel very early reintroduced it, it was in other places admitted only sparingly, and after long hesitation” – Vol.2, p.1702.

Encyclopedias

McClintock and Strong, “Students of ecclesiastical archaeology are generally agreed that instrumental music was not used in churches till a much later date; for Thomas Aquinas, AD 1250, has these remarkable words: ‘Our Church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize’” – Vol.8, 739.

Historians

Prof. John Girardeau, Presbyterian scholar, Columbia Theological Seminary, S.C., “It has thus been proved ... that the church, although lapsing more and more into defec-tion from the truth and into a corruption of apostolic practice, had no instrumental music for 1200 years [he means it did not become general during this period, rd] ...It is heresy in the sphere of worship.”

Commentators

Vincent, “But neither Basil, nor Ambrose, nor Chrysostom, in their panegyrics upon music, mention instrumental music, and Basil expressly condemns it. Bingham dismisses the matter summarily, and cites Justin Martyr as saying expressly that instrumental music was not used in the Christian Church.”

Ancient writers

Chrysostom, “It was only permitted to the Jews as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because they were lately drawn off from idols; but now, instead of organs, we may use our own bodies to praise him withal” – (on Ps.149) ib. 192.

I. Musical praise in the OT

II. Musical praise in the NT

III. Musical instruments do not
harmonize with NT

John 4:24

- Jn.16¹³ However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.
 - Mechanical music is not revealed.
 - Can we use them and abide in truth?

John 4:24

- 2 Tim.3¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
- 2 Pt.1³ as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue.

Mt.15

⁹ And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.

¹³ But He answered and said, “Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.”

¹⁴ Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.

Mt.21:23-27

Every religious practice is based on God's authority or man's authority.

Jn.14:15, if love God...keep commandments

- Love leads us to please the one we love, not ourselves.
- Contrast: “I like it” ... “I think it's beautiful” ... “I'm satisfied with it”
- Ro.10:17, faith comes from God's Word...
- Pr.14:12, 'seems right' is not good enough
- Col.3:17, we must respect Lord's authority

No one can disagree with our practice

- **Baptism** – sprinkling, pouring, immersion?
- **Giving** – first day of week, as prospered?
- **Lord's supper** – first day of week?
- **Singing** – even those who use mechanical music admit singing is scriptural...
 - 1 Thes.5²¹, **test all things; hold fast what is good.**
 - **NOT . . . Hold fast what 'I prefer'**