

Objections To Instrumental Music

Instrumental Music In Worship

—*The Scriptural Objections*

This lesson looks at the issue of whether the use of musical instruments (other than the human voice and heart) are allowable and desirable in Christian song worship.

We argue that artificial musical instruments have been wrongly introduced into Christian worship. If we are to worship God properly according to his authority, and not according to our own devising, then we should sing spiritual songs without the accompaniment of man made musical instruments.

1 *Breaks the “Bible Only” Principle*

We exclude musical instruments from worship on a simple principle. In matters of religion, we hold only to what the scriptures teach that Christians ought to believe and do. The scriptures are our only rule of faith and practice.

There is no command to Christians in scripture that we should use musical instruments when we worship God. There is not even a statement by which we might clearly infer such a thing. The practice has no precedent among first-century Christians who worshipped under the apostles' instruction and guidance.

The scriptures are all-sufficient for the Christian, and we go beyond them at our peril (2Timothy 3:16-17, 2John 1:9). (The lesson on scriptural authority, entitled [Is It Scriptural?](#) shows how the scriptures provide us with our authority. You may care to read that lesson for more detail.)

2 *An Addition to God's Word*

Since God's word is silent on the use of instrumental music in Christian worship, its use requires churches to add to God's word.

At the beginning, middle, and end of the Bible, there are signposts saying, "DO NOT ADD".

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- Deut 4:2 You shall not add unto the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God"
- Proverbs 30:6 "Every word of God is tested... Do not add to his words lest he reprove you and you be found a liar"
- Revelation 22:18 "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book, if anyone adds to them God shall add to him the plagues that are written in this book."

Those who say, "It is good to use musical instruments in our worship" are "adders" and they need to read those three scriptures above and learn what they mean.

Some will make an incorrect argument about brushing teeth. The Bible is silent on brushing teeth, so why don't we say it is wrong to brush your teeth? The answer is simple: It's a good thing to brush your teeth, but the Bible doesn't tell Christians to worship God with a tooth brush.

3 Sensual worship

In the passages on singing spiritual songs, we find the command "...singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19 Colossians 3:16).

How many kinds of musical instrument are in use there?

- First there is the animate human body. Human beings sing by employing certain members their bodies as the instrument.
- Second there is the spiritual heart and mind. It is the grace in our hearts, the heart's melody, that accompanies our singing.
- The third kind of musical instrument is the artificial or man-made instrument. This is nowhere mentioned in the command. It has no place or purpose. It produces another kind of music and melody. The sounds of man-made musical instruments are neither "singing" nor "melody in the heart" as required in the command. We are not able to perform any part of the command using these instruments.

The addition of artificial musical instruments to song worship is not done to please God, but to please and perhaps to entertain people.

The Jews worshipped with many musical instruments, although this was more the invention of David than it was what God originally

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decreed (1Chronicles 15:16, Amos 6:5). The Jewish worship was very sensual. The ornate temple with all its pomp and ceremony by the priests in gorgeous dress, the heady aroma of incense and sacrifice, the music and dancing. But what was that if not the "childish" religion that was "a schoolmaster" and "a shadow" (Galatians 3:24-25, Hebrews 8:1-2). We should therefore see the instruments of that worship as being replaced by a new kind of worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23-24)

The use of instrumental music, dancing, and theatrics, in church services today is appealing to the senses and to the desire for entertainment and sensual experience. In the more extreme form, modern worship is a great sound and light show. It pleases the people, not to worry whether it pleases God.

Presumptuous worship

There are Bible examples, written for our learning, of those who acted presumptuously before God. They did what they liked and wanted. They did not listen to what God liked and wanted. They presumed to improve on God's specifications.

Cain's offering. Abel was a shepherd, and he offered lambs to God. Cain was a farmer, and he offered vegetables to God. That sounds fair enough. But God rejected Cain's offering (Genesis 4:1-8). When we examine why, we find it was simply because the offering was presumptuous. God had not commanded it. Cain thought God would accept his offering because Cain thought it was good. He did not hearken to what God wanted. Because he did not have the hearing of God's word, he did not have the faith that comes by that hearing (Romans 10:17). "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain" (Hebrews 11:4).

Moses strikes the rock. Moses had once performed the miracle of striking a rock to make it bring forth water (Exodus 17:3-7). A second time, when Moses struck a rock to bring forth water, God was angry at him, and his punishment was that he could not enter into the promised land (Numbers 20:2-13). Now God told Moses to take the rod and speak to the rock. So "Moses took the rod just as God had commanded him". However instead of speaking to the rock, Moses struck it twice with the rod. This was presumptuous in that he took it upon himself to change what God specified, and to do what he believed to be better. Moreover, Moses took the glory to himself and Aaron. "...shall we bring you water out of this rock?" (Numbers

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20:12). God was very quick to put Moses in his place. "You did not believe *me* to hallow *me*" (Numbers 20:12-13).

Nadab and Abihu offer strange fire. Nadab and Abihu did not wait for the Lord's command as to how they should light their censers. Wanting to offer incense, they put into their censers "strange fire which the Lord had not commanded them". The Lord killed them with fire from heaven (Leviticus 10:1-7). Their offering was presumptuous. They did what they thought fit.

When we worship God, let us not presume to do what we like, and expect God to like it. Let us not presume to improve on what God has specified. Otherwise, whilst we think we are doing right, God will be displeased with us.

In Good Company

What follows is not part of the Bible lesson, but addresses the idea that it is somehow weird or eccentric to refrain from using man-made musical instruments in our worship. In fact, we are in good company, and it is the modern church that has gone off centre.

- The early church did not use musical instruments in worship, although they were common in the theatres, in Jewish worship, and in the idolatrous ceremonies of the Greeks. The early Christians, however, under the apostles and prophets, did not use them in worship. They were not introduced into Christian worship until a thousand years later.
- The so-called church fathers take the position that musical instruments in Christian worship are wrong. They say they are sensuous and belong to the worldly theatre not the church. They also point out that musical instruments in worship characterised the Jewish temple worship which was a shadow of things to come and was of the childish period under the schoolmaster. Those writing against instrumental music in worship include Justin Martyr and Tertullian circa AD150, Clement of Alexandria circa AD200, Augustine, Gregory of Nazianus, Jerome, Theodoret and Chrysostom circa AD350-400.
- The church in the second millennium, although it had generally departed in many ways from primitive Christianity, was still not using instrumental music in worship, except for some isolated instances. Thomas Aquinas (AD1250) makes this remarkable statement: "Our church does not use instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize."

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- The Protestant reformers and other renowned preachers were opposed to the use of musical instruments in worship. Some examples...
- Martin Luther: "The organ in the worship to God is an ensign of Baal."
- John Calvin: "It is no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of tapers, or revival of other shadows of the law. The Roman Catholics borrowed it from the Jews."
- John Wesley: "I have no objection to the organ in our chapels provided it is neither seen nor heard."
- Adam Clark: "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 to 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. This is the abuse of music and I here register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of that infinite Spirit who requires his followers to worship Him in spirit and truth."
- Charles Spurgeon: "I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery... Israel was at school and used childish things to help her learn; but in these days when Jesus gives us spiritual food, one can make melody without strings and pipes... they would hinder rather than help our praise." (Commentary on Psalms 42:4)
- John Knox: referring to the organ in church worship, called it "a kist of whistles." (a kist is a box or chest)
- Alexander Campbell: "To the really spiritually minded, it would be like a cowbell in a concert."