

Is It A Sin To Use Instrumental Music?

Is It a Sin to Use Instrumental Music in the Worship Service?

Is the use of instrumental music during the singing of praises to the Lord against Gods plan for the New Testament Church? In order to respond to this question we should start at the beginning and refer to church history.

A Cappella in the First Century Church

The first clear reference to instrumental music in the worship of the church was late in the 7th century when Pope Vitalian introduced an organ as an aid to the singing. There was so much opposition to the change it was removed rather quickly, not to be replaced for some



300 years or more. And although instruments were well-known in both Jewish and Greek society and had long been used in worship prior to the establishment of the church, ***their absence from early Christian worship is quite striking.*** The only reasonable explanation appears to be that first century Christians were not convinced God had authorized their use in worship.

Up until a little more than 100 years ago, virtually all Protestant churches in the US sang a cappella. Along with the churches of Christ, the Primitive Baptist and Orthodox churches still do. A hundred years ago theologians from the Methodist, Presbyterian and Baptist churches all protested the adoption of instrumental music when it began to show up in the early 1900s. Even the name a cappella, comes from an Italian phrase meaning "in the manner of the church."

Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs in the Scriptures

speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord
~Ephesians 5:19

The scripture to the right (as well as Colossians 3:16) refers to using "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" to exhort and admonish one another and to give thanks to God, which is certainly a purpose of worship.

As mentioned above, both Jewish and Greek society worshiped using instruments. However, Jack P. Lewis, retired professor at the Harding School of Theology, states that the majority of the Psalms that refer to singing or joyful shouting do not mention instruments (*though 16 of them do*). And instruments were certainly used in post-Davidic Temple worship, but only by the Levites. The assembled audience neither sang nor played.

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[The Greek verb *psallo*](#) appears in only four New Testament verses. Ephesians 5:19 quoted above is translated “make melody or make music,” while the other three (Romans 15:9, 1st Corinthians 14:15 & James 5:13) translate as “sing.”

The Septuagint used *psallein* to describe what David did with the harp to calm Saul, but the word was usually translated “sing” *if no particular instrument is specified*. The Greek lexicon states while *psallo* in classical Greek included the use of an instrument, the meaning was changing by the time the Septuagint was written until, in modern Greek, it means “sing.”

Even in Temple worship God told the Israelites specifically what instruments he wanted played and who would play them. Our sincere desire is or should be to please God with our Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs. It seems quite odd that He would be so very specific with what was acceptable worship in the Temple, but fail to mention instruments at all to the church.

So, Is Using Instrumental Music a Sin?

Whether or not God regards the use of instruments in worship as a “salvation issue” is His call and is not our decision to make. However, we should be certain who we are trying to please. If we love Jesus we will keep his commandments (John 14:15), and few would deny that we should do that to the best of our ability. Based upon the New Testament we can know that God is pleased if we sing during our worship, but we can’t know He is pleased if we play. That confidence should be very important to us. After all, we’re risking our soul and all of eternity on our decision. Following the scriptures as closely as possible should be the objective of every believer.

*We have consulted various works in our response, including a chapter entitled “What Kind of Music Does God Want?” written by Milo Hadwin in the book *Directions for the Road Ahead*, edited by Jim Sheerer and Charles L. Williams. Another is a booklet, “The Question of Instrumental Music in Worship,” by Jack P. Lewis, retired professor at the Harding School of Theology. Both works, incidentally, refer more than once to a 1965 dissertation at Columbia University by James McKinnon, a Roman Catholic, entitled *The Church Fathers and Musical Instruments*. We also consulted “They Don’t Believe in Music,” by Dan Chambers. Dr. Michael S. Cole agrees with this assessment that [instruments should not be included in our worship](#).

On December 19, 2012 / [Instrumental Music](#) / [2 Comments](#)

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2 Comments



1. JIM CAMPBELL

7:20 pm on [September 30, 2014](#)

I know what 'established doctrine' of the churches of Christ says about the presence of instrumental music in worship, but there is one New Testament scripture that has me puzzled. We know from John's gospel that the Lord prays for the coming of the Spirit of Truth to be in his Apostles to help them [John 14: 16-17], and it is accepted that the Holy Spirit descended with power on the Apostles and Disciples on the Day of Pentecost following Christ's resurrection. So, why is the nascent Christian Church led by the Spirit to worship God "daily with one accord in the Temple", at that time – a place where instrumental music occurred constantly in line with standard Jewish worship practices, if He had strong feelings against the instrumental music exhorted in the Scriptures [e.g. Psalm 150]? I can see egalitarian traditions and requirements for considerate fellowship and humility becoming an accepted practice which might have eliminated any instrumental music. How can we be sure that it is by will of God, and not by the traditions of men that this focus on a capella music grew up, given that it's quite divisive historically in attempts to show family love between the churches of Christ?



2. [DON JOHNSON](#)

3:46 pm on [April 7, 2015](#)

In Second Chronicles 5, the author mentions singers and musicians present for the dedication of Solomon's temple, and Second Chronicles 29:25-28 mentions them again during the rededication of the temple during the reign of Hezekiah. The music in Herod's temple, with which Jesus and the early disciples were familiar, was apparently even more elaborate. During temple worship the congregation observed more than they participated and the activities emphasized the physical, leading the writer of Hebrews to describe them as "fleshly ordinances" (9:10).

In contrast, Synagogue worship was simple; it emphasized prayer and the reading of scripture and left off animal sacrifices. It was Jesus' Sabbath custom to attend the synagogue in Nazareth (Luke 4:16), which he probably preferred to the trappings of temple worship. His John 4 teaching concerning worship in spirit and truth, as opposed to the temple in Jerusalem or the Samaritans' Mount Gerizim, indicates as much.

The converts at Pentecost and immediately following were familiar with both temple and synagogue, and it is not surprising that those in Jerusalem would retain some temple associations—at least, until its destruction some 40 years later. After all, as Christians they worshipped and prayed to the same God as under Judaism, but the emphasis upon Jesus as the risen Messiah was a major difference that would have made their message

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unwelcome to the priests. The early Christians did meet daily in the temple (Acts 2:46), probably because the temple courts could accommodate them all, and Peter and John did go to the temple at the hour of prayer, Acts 3:1. The few subsequent references, however, showed that they went to the temple primarily to proclaim the message of the new life (Acts 5:20) and the good news that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 5:46).

It is certainly true that instrumental music was incorporated in many of the Psalms and was used in temple worship under the Law of Moses, but it is equally true that the written code was nailed to the cross of Christ, Col. 2:14. Further, early church fathers conducted a "polemic" against instrumental music, according to James McKinnon's 1965 doctoral dissertation on the subject at Columbia University. Their concern was instrumental music's association with banquets and orgies, not with worship, where the subject never came up. The early Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, were familiar with instruments in worship but evidently believed that God had given clear instructions on the type of music he wanted, seen in such passages as Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16, and Hebrews 13:15.

Finally, church history proves that instrumental music in worship was adopted very slowly, the organ apparently being introduced by Pope Vitalian around 660 AD. Even then, it was another 600 years before instruments began being used widely in the Roman Catholic Church, and they were later opposed by most Protestant Reformation leaders and still later by men such as Charles Wesley. Both the practice of the early church and the later reluctance to add instruments are telling. We know from New Testament teaching that God is pleased when we sing; if we add instruments to our singing we can hope that He is pleased, but we can't know for sure.