

Did The First Century Church Use Instrumental Music In Worship?

Bible Answers About Worship

One of the first impressions obtained by a visitor to our services today is the fact that mechanical instruments are conspicuous by their absence. Being so commonly used in churches of today, the fact that we do not use mechanical instruments of music causes surprise and wonder on the part of many, and not infrequently the question is raised, "Why do Churches of Christ refuse the use of instruments of music in worship?"

Essential to a proper understanding of this matter are two very important questions: First, "What is the purpose of our worship?" The Scriptures are crystal clear that our worship must be for the purpose of pleasing our Heavenly Father, inasmuch as that is the design and end of all of our worship. Jesus said, "But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers. "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:23-24 NAS). Second, the next question arises, "Just what is it that pleases Him?" The answer to that question is to be found only in the Bible. All we know on that matter is set forth upon the sacred pages of God's Word. That being true, then we must appeal to the Sacred Scriptures for the solution to our problem.

Before making our appeal to the Scriptures to answer the question before us one should know that two facts confront those who would introduce instrumental music into the worship of the church: (1) There is no trace of evidence that instrumental music was ever used in the worship of the church in the New Testament; (2) There is no evidence that instrumental music was used in the churches which continued in existence immediately after the close of the New Testament, and no evidence that the corrupted churches which ultimately arose in succeeding centuries made use of it until hundreds of years later. Competent historians of music show that instrumental music in worship did not occur until long after the New Testament period closed.

From the first verse of Matthew 1 to the last verse of Revelation 22, the last verse in the Bible, there is not so much as the slightest hint of the use of instrumental music in Christian worship. Jesus Christ nowhere mentioned it. The Holy Spirit never commanded it. No apostle ever sanctioned it and no apostolic church ever practiced it. It is wholly, friends, without authorization in the Word of God.

True worship is practiced by adhering to three important facts. First, there must be adoration and homage paid to the right object—God (Jno. 4:24). Second, it must be with the right spirit, which means the right frame of mind (Matt. 15:8). Third, it must be in keeping with God's word (Jno. 17:17).

There are four objections to the use of mechanical music in the worship of the Lord's church that we present for your consideration:

First, instrumental music in Christian worship is wrong, because it violates the principle of faith: The New Testament teaches that every child of God must walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7). Therefore, we cannot use the instrument in worship and do so by faith; there is simply no authority in the New Testament for its use in Christian worship. We must remember Cain's offering was rejected because it was not by faith (Heb. 11:4). Similarly, Nadab and Abihu were put to death because they used strange (unauthorized) fire—which God did not command (Lev. 10:1-2).

Second, the use of instrumental music in Christian worship violates the principle of specific commands. God commanded, "Singing and making melody in your heart" (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). This is a specific command, a specific kind of music, which excludes any other kind. God did not tell Noah not to use poplar wood in the building of the ark, but He did tell him to use gopher wood which excluded every other kind of wood. The Lord did not tell us not to use fish and on the Lord's Table, but He did tell us to eat the bread and drink the cup which excludes all else. When He tells us to sing, He excludes any other kind of music.

Third, the use of instrumental music in Christian worship is wrong because it rejects the authority of Jesus Christ. One of the great fundamental lessons of all-time is the fact Jesus Christ has ALL authority. The New Testament provides explicit warning to every believer against going beyond that which is written (1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Jno. 9-11). Such "going beyond that which written," is adding to the word of God (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18). This fact becomes all-important to remember when we understand Jesus Christ has ALL authority (Matt. 7:28-29; 17:1-5; Acts 3:22-23; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; Matt. 28:18 and Heb. 1:12). Indeed, the plain teaching of the explicit commands in the Bible instruct us clearly as to the fact that Jesus Christ wants us to sing in Christian worship. Why not be satisfied to do just what Jesus has commanded?

Fourth, instrumental music in New Testament worship is wrong, because its use makes void the word of God. The proponents and users of the instrument in Christian worship ignore the word of God in this respect. The use of instrumental music in Christian worship constitutes vain worship (Matt. 15:9). If we truly regard the Bible (New Testament) as our complete and final authority today in matters religious, then we must obey God rather than men on the point of singing rather than playing the instrument in Christian worship. Paul wrote: "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim 3:16-17 NAS).

God desires to be worshipped in songs of praise with the voice of man, which He created. He does not desire worship which has been corrupted with things man has introduced. Such only serves to cheapen that which God Himself has made. Man's voice is the most perfect musical form known in the entire world. Nothing produced by modern technology can compare to the beauty, range, and pitch of the human voice. May we therefore honor the Creator by singing with our voices instead of presuming to add to our worship what we ourselves have created (mechanical musical instruments).

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