

Musical worship to God can be edifying and enjoyable. But it must first be Scriptural. Let me explain why I believe our music should be vocal only, with no mechanical instruments.

Why Sing?

Singing is Scriptural

(Ephesians 5:18-19) “. . . Be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

(Colossians 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.”

Singing is Universally Accepted

Because singing is so clearly scriptural, all believers can unite and do it together. Never underestimate 1) the need for having God’s say-so to authorize *all* of our actions, or 2) the wonderful *confidence* that comes when we conform our behavior to what we read in the Bible.

Singing Achieves God’s Purposes

To teach and admonish. (Colossians 3:16) “. . . Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. . .”

To praise the Lord. (Col. 3:16) “. . . Singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” God wants us to praise Him with our lips. (Hebrews 13:15)

Music can be a powerful force for good. Music helps sick patients heal and can help reach people with mental disorders. Music can stir many emotions, and a musician can express certain feelings through his music. Singing *preserves* all these benefits, and *only* singing (words, song lyrics) can teach, admonish, and effectively praise God.

How Should We Sing?

Singing style may vary. Eph. 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 both mention “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs”. In the same way, the number of vocal parts and the musical arrangement are simply irrelevant.

The Bible simply says that our songs must make melody in the heart (Ephesians 5:19), and be sung with grace in our hearts. (Col. 3:16) They should be sung with the understanding (1 Cor. 14:15) and are a natural expression of joy. (James 5:13)

What About Instrumental Music?

Human Arguments

Instruments just help the singing. When we read, “Sing”, we know what *type* of music to use - vocal. Playing is its own *type* of music (instrumental) which can even stand alone. Instruments are an *addition*, not an aid, to singing. Song books and tuning forks are simply *aids* to singing because they do not *add*, nor are they separate *types* of music.

Instruments make the songs sound better. You wouldn’t say that if you’d ever heard *good* singing and mediocre piano playing;, let alone excellent singing and *lousy* playing. Our personal preference never makes something right in God’s sight. Besides, God never asks for songs to *sound* good.

I’m using my God-given talent to praise Him. Can a good cook add her favorite dishes to the Lord’s Supper? We simply can’t use all our talents to worship the Lord. Unfortunately, human reasoning has often been used to support both *the use* and *the omission* of instrumental music.

The Bible doesn’t condemn it. But God doesn’t have to say, “Thou shalt not” to make something a sin. After all, He doesn’t say *NOT* to use coke in the Lord’s Supper. And besides, just ask Nadab and Abihu how God feels when we add to our worship something “which He [has] not commanded.” (Leviticus 10:1-3) We don’t use the line “. . . *but you didn’t say NOT to*” with the highway speed limit or when ordering lunch for our co-workers, so why try it with God?

Instrumental music is okay for worship at home. Is your praying or Bible reading at home fundamentally different from what you do at church? Does God only expect us to find Scriptural authority for our worship *in the assembly*?

Biblical Arguments

God commanded it. That’s true! Instrumental music under the Law of Moses was not a human invention, it was commanded by God. (2 Chronicles 29:25; Psalm 150)

But the Old Testament (specifically the Law of Moses) is a package deal, complete with a Levitical priesthood, incense, dietary restrictions and animal sacrifices. Galatians 5:1-4 addresses Christians who were trying to keep part of the Law of Moses (circumcision). If you use the Old Testament to justify your practices, you are “a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

The fact is, *God changed His law.* He replaced the Old Testament with the New Testament - the Law of Moses with the Law of Christ. (2 Corinthians 3:7-16; Galatians 3:10-29; Ephesians 2:11-18; Colossians 2:13-17; Hebrews 8:6-13) God always reserves the right to change His instructions. He once told Moses to strike a rock (Exodus 17:1-7), then later told him to speak to it. (Numbers 20:1-13) Moses was right to strike it the first time, but was punished for striking it the second time.

We would need a *New Testament* example or statement in order for us to have authority from God to use instruments, but there simply isn’t any. Two Old Testament passages about *singing* praise to God (Romans 15:9; Hebrews 2:12) are quoted in the N.T., with *nothing* quoted about instruments.

“Psallo” means “to pluck or play” an instrument. In Ephesians 5:19, the phrase “making melody” is from a Greek word (“psallo”) that at one time meant “to pluck or play”. But words change meaning, and “psallo” in *modern* Greek means “sing” exclusively.

It's hard to know exactly what it meant in A.D. 65 or so (when Paul wrote Ephesians). But even around 200 B.C. when the Old Testament was translated into Greek (the Septuagint, or LXX), the word usually meant "sing". ([A Greek-English Lexicon of the N.T. and Other Early Christian Literature](#), Arndt, William F. and Gingrich, F. Wilbur, Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979) No translation done by any *group* of scholars (only one-man translations such as Moffatt) renders "psallo" as "pluck" or "play".

But even if we translate "psallo" as "plucking," notice how the verse reads: "plucking *in your heart*". The verse itself specifies the instrument.

There are harps in heaven. If they are literal harps, then the incense, blood, robes, etc. are literal, too.

Two Main Problems

Doubt. The N.T. mentions instrumental music in nine passages, but never in connection to a church service. If you can't find a verse that authorizes the use of mechanical musical instruments in the church, then how do you know God wants it? If you're not absolutely *sure* that an action is *right*, then it's a sin for you to do it. (Romans 14:23) "When in doubt, leave it out."

Division. As far back as the second century A.D., people who brought in musical instruments caused division among believers. Even in the Catholic church, the introduction of organs (from around A.D. 670) caused problems and division. (See "Church Music Till 800 A.D.", Donald P. Ames, C.E.I. Pub. Co., Box 858, Athens, AL 35611) In the 1800's, many churches in the U.S. split over this issue and new denominations were formed. If we agree that we can sing together, why split the body of Christ over mechanical instruments?

Conclusion

God has commanded Christians to sing. Christians who sing promote truth. Anyone who brings in

mechanical instruments to worship has no New Testament authority and brings in doubt.

Everyone can agree that singing is right. Christians who sing promote unity. Anyone who brings in mechanical instruments brings in division.

Singing accomplishes God's purposes for the church, but instruments cannot teach or admonish.

Let us teach and admonish one another in song. Let us sing and make melody in our hearts to the Lord. Let our only instrument be our *heartstrings*, and let us worship God in truth and unity.

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Quotes are from the New King James Version of the Bible.

Thirteen N.T. passages mention singing.

Unrelated to a church service: Matthew 26:30/Mark 14:26, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn after celebrating the Passover; Acts 16:25, Paul and Silas sang hymns in jail; and Revelation 5:9; 14:3; 15:3, scenes in heaven.

Christian worship: Ephesians 5:18-19; Colossians 3:16; 1 Corinthians 14:15, 26; James 5:13.

Quotations from the Old Testament: Romans 15:9; Hebrews 2:12

Nine N.T. passages mention instruments:

At a funeral (Matthew 9:23); just something kids say (Matthew 11:17/Luke 7:32); to illustrate noise (1 Corinthians 13:1); to illustrate distinctions between sounds, comparing to clear, intelligible words (1 Corinthians 14:7); and harps in heaven (Revelation 5:8; 14:2; 15:2; 18:22).



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