

## Does God Like Instrumental Music in Worship?

Any denominational visitor unfamiliar with the worship of the Church of Christ will readily notice something most peculiar about our worship: the lack of instrumental music. This is not a preference for traditional verses contemporary styles of music in worship. It is a matter of choosing Biblical or scriptural music by which to worship God. The motivation is to worship in a way that is pleasing to God.

Today, many mainstream congregations are embroiled in a struggle over styles of worship. Some of these churches have split into two groups. Others simply split up their worshipers into two or three different services: traditional worship which may include a piano or organ with a choir or contemporary worship which may include drums, brass instruments, etc.

Believe or not history is repeating itself. Most of these denominations went through this conflict over music in worship anywhere from one to four hundred years ago. The issue was over whether or not to use instrumental music, such as the organ, in worship services. That's right! In the beginning most of these denominations only recognized vocal music as the only authorized music for worship.

### Denominational Leaders on Church Music

Scholars for the Church of England wrote, "let your songs be, not the drinking songs of heathen feasts, but psalms and

hymns; and their accompaniment, not the music of lyre, but the melody of the heart" (W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, vol. 2, p. 408).

The reformation leader, Martin Luther called "the organ an ensign of Baal" (McClintock and Strong, vol. 6, p. 672).

James Pierce, Presbyterian scholar of the 18th century wrote: "The church, although lapsing more and more into defection from the truth and into a corruption of apostolic practice, had no instrumental music for 1200 years...It is heresy in the sphere of worship" (*A Vindication of the Dissenters*, Cited by Girardeau, *Instrumental Music*, p. 179).

Methodist commentator, Adam Clarke (1762–1832), wrote, "I...believe that the use of such instruments of music, in the Christian Church, is without the sanction and against the will of God; that they are subversive of the spirit of true devotion, and that they are sinful" (*Clarke's Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 684).

Benedict, the Baptist historian, said: "Staunch old Baptists in former times would as soon tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries, and yet the instrument has gradually found its way among them...How far this modern organ fever will extend among our people, and whether it will on the whole work a Re-formation or De-formation in their singing service, time will more fully develop" (*Fifty Years Among Baptists*, pp. 204-207).

Christian Church author J. H. Garrison wrote, "There is no command in the N.T., Greek or English, commanding the use of the instrument. Such a command would be entirely out of harmony with the New Testament" (Paul Southern, *What is*

Wrong, p. 105).

### Early Christian Writers on Church Music

Many historians who have investigated the writings of the early Christian writers of the first four centuries of the church's existence observed that the early church did not use instrumental music in their worship. Emil Nauman wrote, "There can be no doubt that originally the music of the divine service was everywhere entirely of a vocal nature" (*The History of the Church*, p. 132). W.K. Killen wrote, "...the whole congregation of joined in the singing, but instrumental music did not accompany the praise" (*The Ancient Church*, p. 423). In his book *Music, History and Ideas*, Hugo Leichtritt observed, "Only singing, however, and no playing of instruments was permitted in the early Christian church" (p. 34). Another wrote "...the church chant was exclusively vocal" (*Dickinson, History of Music in the Western Church*, p. 54).

The quotations above are not given as reasons why Churches of Christ do not use mechanical instruments of music in worship. The reason is a matter of faith, not historical tradition. History is not the proof of any Biblical doctrine. However, these quotes do show that for at least a while most of the early churches did follow the New Testament practice of vocal music. They further demonstrate that the New Testament Christians of today are not alone in the assertion that the original music of New Testament worship was exclusively vocal.

As New Testament Christians we seek to worship God in a way that is

pleasing to Him. Jesus spoke of God seeking a specific type of worshiper to worship Him. *"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"* (John 4:23,24). The kind of worshiper God wants is a *"true worshiper."* If there are true worshipers than there must be false or untrue or erroneous worshipers. In other words there are those who are the right kind of worshipers whom God is looking for and those who are the wrong kind of worshipers.

How does one worship God with the kind of music pleasing to Him? Two passages outline the type of music and the role it plays in their worship to God. *"Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord"* (Eph. 5:19). *"Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father"* (Col. 3:16,17). First, Christians are to sing not play. Instrumental music is excluded from worship because God specified He wants vocal music. The heart is to be the instrument that makes the melody (Eph. 5:19). While singing Christians are praising God and teaching and admonishing fellow-saints. All singing is to be done in truth and with the understanding of what is being sung (1 Cor. 14:15). The purpose of singing is multifaceted: to praise God (Acts 16:24);

teach men (Col. 3:16); and express our emotions (Js. 5:15). Playing an instrument cannot fulfill the commands of God which singing can. A worshiper cannot *"speak"* by playing an instrument (Eph. 5:19). An organ cannot teach Bible truths or admonish another, only singing can do this (Col. 3:16). A worshiper is to sing with the spirit and with understanding, but he cannot play with the spirit and with understanding (1 Cor 14:15). God wants true worshipers to make melody in their heart not on a harp (Eph. 5:19).

Those congregations who remain true to the New Testament pattern for worship do not have to worry about this renewed conflict over music in worship. God has specified how He wishes to be worshiped. He wants us to sing unto Him and one another (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Those who wish to please God and be the kind of true worshiper He is looking for will place what God likes over their own preferences.

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<b>Sunday</b>	Bible Study.....9:30 am
	Worship Service.....10:30 am
	Worship Service.....5:00 pm
<b>Wednesday</b>	Bible Study.....7:30 pm

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by Daniel R. Vess