

Music in New Testament Church Worship

Have people ever asked you why we do not use instrumental music in our worship?

Have you struggled to explain it?

Numerous reasons could be given but we will begin with the basic Biblical reasons.

The Bible is the inspired Word of God and we are guided by its commands and approved examples.

Throughout the Bible we are warned not to add to or take away from God's Word.

1 Corinthians 4:6 says do not go beyond what is written.

1 Peter 4:11 requires our speaking to be consistent with the oracles of God.

2 John 9 warns that we are to abide in the doctrine of Christ, not just believe and practice the parts that we like or choose.

Similar warnings are given in Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Proverbs 30:5-6; and Revelation 22:18-19.

Leviticus 10:1-2 makes it clear that God is not pleased when we add or substitute something when He has given his directions to us. We are not free to go beyond what is commanded and treat His Word casually like a food recipe.

Think about it! When the doctor writes a specific prescription and you take it to the pharmacy, does the doctor have to say what not to use? He only has to write what it is and the amount of it. If another medicine or amount is used by the pharmacist or patient, it is an addition because the pharmacist or patient added to or changed what the doctor prescribed. It might not make you well and could even kill you because it is an addition. We are also in danger when we add to or change what God has prescribed in His Word.

When the Bible specifies something, it excludes doing something else of the same kind or type.

We cannot change it or add to it.

Additions are things that go beyond what the Bible specifies. They add to a commandment of God.

Just because the Bible does not say don't do something does not mean that it is approved by God.

We should speak only where the Bible speaks and remain silent where it is silent.

We must find the authority in the Bible for what we believe and do.

The New Testament gives us specific direct commands and approved apostolic examples to sing which is a specific kind of music.

Those specific commands and examples exclude the use of other kinds of music for New Testament church worship such as playing an instrument.

The Bible is clear about what kind of music to use in New Testament church worship.

Let's read what is written referring to Christians worshipping God in music.

1 Corinthians 14:15 - I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.

Ephesians 5:19 - 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 with all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

Acts 16:25 - Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.

Hebrews 2:12 - In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to you.

Hebrews 13:15 - Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips.

James 5:13 - Let him sing psalms.

The voice and heart can and does fulfill all that God requires in regard to New Testament church music.

A mechanical instrument cannot and does not do what is required and is not authorized by God.

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A study of early church history confirms the teaching in the above Scriptures.

It is clear that for over 600 years the church only used vocal music and strongly opposed introducing musical instruments even though they were used in Jewish worship and pagan worship. People converted from those religions ceased the use of their instruments and limited their church worship music to singing. Instruments were first introduced in church worship about 670 A.D. Opposition was so strong that they again ceased their use. It was not until the 800's that instruments were commonly used in the Roman church. It is interesting to note that the Greek Orthodox Church, whose members are largely Greek speaking and understand the Greek language in which the New Testament was written, never used and to this day do not use musical instruments in their worship.

Early church leaders and other notable religious scholars were unanimous and vehement as they spoke out against the use of instrumental music. They were united against it.

Justin Martyr, ca. 100-165 A.D. - "The use of singing with instrumental music was not received in the Christian churches as it was among the Jews in their infant state, but only the use of plain song."

Dr. Curt Sachs, Columbia University, an eminent musicologist - "All ancient Christian music was vocal."

Joseph Bingham, Church of England - "Music in the church is as ancient as the apostles; but instrumental music is not."

Huldreich Zwingli, an accomplished musician, 1484-1531 - "Music, choral or instrumental, no matter how religiously inspired, artistically beautiful, or superlatively performed, must be prohibited from worship because Scriptures has made its existence there impossible."

John Calvin, protestant reformation leader, 1509-1564 - "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law." - Commentary on Psalm 23.

John Wesley, founder of Methodism, 1703-1791 - "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided that they are neither seen nor heard."

Charles Spurgeon, British Baptist preacher, 1834-1892 - "We should like to see all the pipes of the organs in our non-conformist places of worship either ripped open or compactly filled with concrete. The human voice is so transcendently superior to all that wind harmonies by association with blowing an scraping. Israel was in school and used childish things to help her to learn; but in these days, when Jesus gives us spiritual manhood, one can make melody without strings and harps. We do not need them. They would hinder rather than help the praise. What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettiness of a quartet, bellows, and pipes! We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it." - Commentary on Psalms 42.

Note: Some try to justify using mechanical instruments in worship today by saying that Old Testament worship included musical instruments by the command of God in places such as 2 Chronicles 29:25-28. If we carry over that Old Testament command then we also must sacrifice animals, burn incense, observe their feast days, etc. However, 2 Corinthians 3:14; Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 7:12; 8:5-13; 10:1 clearly teach that we are not under the Old Covenant. It was done away on the cross of Christ and replaced by the New Covenant. You cannot use something in the Old Testament to justify something unless it is also in the New Testament.

Conclusion: God has spoken and told us to sing in New Testament church worship. No one will say that singing is wrong. The problem is when people teach or practice something the Bible does not authorize. We have no right to change it to please ourselves.

Jesus never authorized a mechanical instrument of music in New Testament church worship.

No apostle ever sanctioned it. No New Testament writer ever commanded it.

No New Testament church ever practiced it.

We must obey the commands and follow the examples in the New Testament to please God in our worship.

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How can we fulfill God's teaching about music in the New Testament church?

God's Commands and Examples	Voice, Lips, or Heart	Mechanical Instruments
1 Corinthians 14:15 - I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.	Can	Can not
Ephesians 5:19 - speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.	Can	Can not
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.	Can	Can not
Acts 16:25 - Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.	Can	Can not
Hebrews 2:12 - In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to you.	Can	Can not
Hebrews 13:15 - Let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips.	Can	Can not
James 5:13 - Let him sing psalms.	Can	Can not

The voice and heart can and does fulfill what God requires in regard to New Testament church music. **A mechanical instrument cannot and does not** do what is required and is not authorized by God.

What does God want us to play in church worship?

God gave us an organ to play and that organ is the heart. The only instrument God authorizes us to play in worship is the heart. The meaning and use of the Greek word **psallo** during the time the New Testament was written was clear because it specified what instrument to pluck or twang if an instrument was intended.

In three places in the New Testament where **psallo** is used the specific instruments are named - the **spirit** and the **understanding** in 1 Corinthians 14:15 and making **melody** in the heart in Ephesians 5:19. The apostle Paul was speaking of spiritual worship and sincerity.

In two places in the New Testament **psallo** is simply translated **sing** in Romans 15:9 and James 5:13. In modern Greek language today **psallo** simply means to sing as Greek Orthodox churches continue to practice as they have from their beginning.

Almost all Greek lexicographers, translators, and commentators agree that the New Testament usage of the word **psallo** referred to singing and never included the use of mechanical instruments in worship.