

# What About Instrumental Music? #1

**Introduction.** One of the great distinguishing factors between the Lord's church and the endless number of religious groups is the refusal by the Lord's people to use instruments of music in its worship. Sadly, most of the people who are members of denominations have never stopped to question why they use instrumental music because it is all they have never known.

The use of instruments began centuries ago and is still flourishing with the use of rock bands in "praise" to God. "Christian" bookstores full of CDs and "Christian" consumers have made the "Christian" instrumental music genre a multi-million dollar industry. Sadly, churches of Christ have not been immune to this trend. Rubel Shelley, in *The Christian Chronicle*, said, "Instrumental music and atonement are not of the same status or consequence to the human soul and its eternal welfare." This kind of false comparison is at the very heart of sin and Satan himself as he tempts us with sin. We sin because we rationalize to ourselves, "This is not as bad as doing that." Continuing this trend, the Richland Hills Church of Christ began using instrumental music in 2007, and it will unfortunately not be the last congregation to do so.

As we begin, no Christian, to my knowledge, denies the use of instrumental music on the basis that they do not like it or that pianos and drum sets are too expensive. It is a matter of authority and all of us need to be able to give an answer to those who ask (1 Peter 3:15).

## ***I. The Kind Of Music Specified***

- A. The Old Testament authorized three types of praise to God.
  - 1. Singing (2 Chronicles 29:30; Psalm 40:3; 51:14-15; 71:23; 89:1; Isaiah 52:8).
  - 2. Instrumental music (2 Samuel 6:5, 21; 1 Chronicles 16:40-43; 23:5; 2 Chronicles 7:6; 29:25; Psalm 43:4; 68:25; 150:3-5).
  - 3. Dancing (Exodus 15:20-21; 2 Samuel 6:14; Psalm 149:3; 150:4).
  - 4. These passages have four important ramifications.
    - a) Singing, playing instruments, and dancing were all clearly stated to be acceptable acts of worship.
    - b) Singing, playing instruments, and dancing were three different types of musical praise. They were often done together, but each one constituted an additional, distinct act of praise to God.
    - c) Playing instruments and dancing were each, in and of themselves, a means or avenue of praising God, as was singing.
    - d) When God was willing to accept instrumental praise, He very plainly said so.
- B. The New Testament scriptures authorize singing only (Matthew 26:30; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; 13:15; James 5:13).
  - 1. This is a complete list of all New Testament verses that mention musical praise to God by Christians on earth. As in the Old Testament examples,

- words like “sing,” “speak,” “teach,” “admonish,” and “fruit of our lips” all clearly refer to vocal music.
2. If God could express Himself well enough in the Old Testament for Hezekiah and David to understand that instrumental music was commanded, are we to suppose that God finds it more difficult to express Himself in the New Testament?
- C. The command to sing is specific and excludes all other kinds of music.
1. God told Noah to build the ark of gopher wood. By specifying “gopher wood” God eliminated all other kinds of wood (Genesis 6:14).
  2. God’s command to Aaron to offer two he goats and a ram in atonement sacrifices excluded every other animal (Leviticus 16:5).
  3. God’s command to sing excludes any other kind of music. The only two kinds of music are vocal and instrumental. God specified vocal.
- D. The New Testament is sufficient in explaining our worship and service (Romans 1:17; 1 Corinthians 9:21; 2 Peter 1:2-3).

## ***II. Arguments For Instrumental Music***

- A. “Instrumental music is authorized by the command to sing Old Testament psalms.”
1. Since we are commanded to sing psalms in the New Testament (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16), it follows that we are permitted to practice whatever is sanctioned in those psalms. That would include animal sacrifice (Psalm 66:13-15), facing Jerusalem while worshipping (Psalm 138:1-2), worshipping God from the altar in Jerusalem (Psalm 43:3-4), dashing babies against rocks (Psalm 137:2, 4, 8-9), and moving beds and swords into the assembly (Psalm 149:5-6). That which proves too much proves nothing!
  2. Furthermore, the instruments listed in the psalms were not optional — they were commanded. It is not enough for someone merely to include just any instrument of their choice. To obey the command of God, they must use the harp, the psaltery, the instrument of 10 strings, the trumpet, timbrel, organ, cymbals, etc.
  3. To practice anything taught by Moses but not taught by Christ is wrong; it places the authority of Moses and Christ on equal footing.
    - a) To live under both the law of Moses and the law of Christ is spiritual adultery (Romans 7:1-4).
    - b) To revert to the law of Moses rejects the liberty to which we have been called and entrenches us again in the elements of the world (Galatians 3:13; 4:3, 10).
    - c) To justify what we do by the law of Moses severs us from Christ and causes us to fall from grace (Galatians 5:4; cf. 5:18).
    - d) To go back to the law of Moses for some practice not taught in the New Testament denies its sufficiency and disrespects Christ’s authority (Matthew 17:5; Acts 3:22; Ephesians 1:22-23).
    - e) To depend upon Old Testament authority for Christian practice resurrects an invalid law and denies the effectiveness of Christ’s death on the cross (Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:13-15).

- B. "Instrumental music is not expressly forbidden in the New Testament."
1. The silence of the scriptures is a valid principle of authority (Acts 15:24; Hebrews 1:5, 13; 7:14).
  2. This argument creates respect for what the Bible does not say rather than what it does say. Said another way, it tells someone to practice anything that the Bible does not expressly forbid.
  3. This line of reasoning will allow counting beads in prayer, wearing religious robes, burning incense, praying to Mary, observing the Sabbath, offering animal sacrifices, baptizing babies, and other practices that cannot be justified as a part of the gospel.
- C. "Instrumental music is only an aid or an expedient."
1. It is not just an aid, it is an addition of another kind of music. Churches may argue that they use instruments to aid the singing, but in practice they use the instrument even when no one is singing.
    - a) They play as a prelude to the service, between acts of worship, during collection, etc. They play a whole verse before people begin singing.
    - b) How can the instrument expedite or aid what is not even being done? Where is the authority for playing when it is not accompanied by singing?
  2. In order for anything to be an aid from a scriptural standpoint, it must satisfy the following points.
    - a) It must be lawful (1 Corinthians 6:12).
    - b) It must edify (1 Corinthians 10:23).
    - c) It must not offend the conscience (1 Corinthians 10:28).
  3. Instrumental music proves itself inexpedient in all of these points.
    - a) It is not on par with books, a pitch pipe, seats, lights, etc., for when all these have been used, still there has been only singing.
    - b) But when the instrument is supplied, there is singing and playing. An addition has been made. When you read Psalm 150:1-6, is this the way we use a water fountain, pews, or a pitch pipe?
    - c) Instrumental music makes "teaching and admonishing" and "speaking one with another" more difficult by making the words of the song less audible and understandable. It actually interferes with the purpose of singing!
    - d) Instrumental music is offensive to the conscience of many and has always been a source of division (1 Corinthians 10:28-33).
- D. "Instrumental music is a matter of Christian liberty."
1. Romans 14 deals with matters of indifference to God. These are matters where God has not legislated (eating of meats, etc.).
  2. Where God has not legislated, we have liberty to act or not act. God will not judge us right or wrong either way (Romans 14:1-3).
  3. As we have seen, God has legislated His will on instrumental music. That being the case, we do not have the "liberty" to add it to our worship (Revelation 22:18-19).
- E. "Instrumental music can be practiced at home, therefore it can be practiced in the church."
1. Many actions are morally right but are religiously wrong; i.e., the washing of hands and the washing of feet (Mark 7:3-7; John 13:4-5).

2. Instrumental music is not wrong in and of itself. If it were, it would be wrong everywhere, but it is wrong to add it to our worship when God has not told us to use it, no matter if we worship in the home or at the building. It is the worship that counts, not the place.

**Conclusion.** Churches of Christ are committed to speaking where the Bible speaks and remaining silent where it is silent. We are bound to do only what the Lord desires. As we have seen and as we will see in the next article, instrumental music is against the Lord's will. If we want to be a faithful church, we can only do what the Lord requires.

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