

“Sing Unto The Lord”

Introduction. Psalm 104:33 says, “I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being.” People think the church of Christ strange because we do not use a musical instrument in our worship assemblies. We want people to understand why we worship without instruments. We are not against music, nor are we opposed to musical instruments.

Many people are passionate in their defense of mechanical instruments. It is interesting though, how few have stopped to even question whether or not this practice comes from God or from man. If one simply studies the New Testament, I believe you will find that the use of mechanical instruments has no place in making music to God. On the other hand, there is a beauty and simplicity to using vocal music when worshiping God.

I. Reasons Against Instrumental Music

- A. It does not have the authority of Christ.
 1. There are nine verses in the New Testament regarding music in worship (Matthew 26:30; Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13).
 - a) There is neither command, example, or implication of musical instruments in worship in the New Testament. Thus, we do not use the instrument in our worship because there is no command to do so, no example of its use in the New Testament church and there is not even an implication that it was ever used in New Testament worship to God with God’s approval.
 - b) Musical instruments in worship do not have the authority of Christ and to add it to the worship is to reject His authority (Matthew 28:18-20). He wanted His disciples to teach all that He had commanded them, but they could add nothing to the message (Galatians 1:6-9). Adding unauthorized items to the worship is to reject His headship over the church (Ephesians 1:22-23). Furthermore, while some advocate we fellowship those who use instruments to worship God, 2 John 9-11 says we cannot. God does not want us to set aside the teachings of Christ for unity.
 2. But someone says, “What about the Greek word *psallo* which is translated “making melody” in Ephesians 5:19?”
 - a) We are often told that the instrument is inherent in *psallo*. Since *psallo* looks and sounds like “psalm,” people believe they authorize worship with instruments because it mentions them in several psalms (Psalm 33:2; 43:4; 49:4; 57:8; 71:22; 81:2; 92:3; 98:5; 108:2; 147:7; 149:3; 150:3).
 - b) If the instrument is inherent in *psallo*, then the instrument is no longer a matter of expediency or choice, but is a command.
 - (1) And not only that, but it would not be one instrument for the entire congregation, but each one of us would have to have an instrument or else we could not *psallo* or make melody in our hearts.
 - (2) Furthermore, the verse does not say we are to sing to the Lord, but we are to “sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord.” Therefore, we must do both, not one or the other.

- c) God has commanded that we worship Him (Matthew 4:10; Jesus 4:24), and He has always told us how we are to worship Him. God has also provided us with all we need to obey that command. Man comes equipped to worship God acceptably, without the addition of an instrument of music.
 - d) In Ephesians 5:19 *psallo* does demand that something be touched, but that something is specified in the text — the human heart.
 - (1) Instrumental music of various types was readily available in first century, contemporary society. Did they not understand the true meaning of the Old Testament, particularly Psalms? Did they not understand the meaning of various words, such as *psallo*?
 - (2) It is interesting that of all the scholars who worked on the translation of the KJV and the ASV, all translated *psallo* without the musical instrument. If the instrument is inherent in the word, why did they not translate it as such?
 - (3) In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 we are called on to “speak,” “teach,” “admonish,” “sing,” and “make melody in the heart.” Each of these actions is related to verbal activity, and none can be performed by an instrument.
- B. It cannot be done by faith.
- 1. In 2 Corinthians 5:7 Paul says we are to “walk by faith, not by sight.” To walk by faith is to walk as God’s word directs (Romans 10:17). If God’s word does not direct an action, it is not walking by faith and therefore is sin.
 - 2. It is sometimes argued that the scriptures do not condemn the use of instruments in worship and therefore they are authorized. But silence does not give consent. We do not believe this in any area of life, except with regard to the church or religion.
 - a) Parents will sometimes give their children instructions as to what they want them to do, but in doing this, they do not also mention what they are not to do. Children understand, though they do not always practice it, that silence is not approval.
 - b) We go to the doctor and he writes us a prescription, which we take to the pharmacist. Yet, the pharmacist is not at liberty to fill the prescription with any or all of the medicines the doctor did not prescribe. Do you really believe a pharmacist is authorized to fill a prescription with any medicine the doctor does not specifically say not to use?
 - c) Priests under the Old Testament law had to come from the tribe of Levi (Numbers 3:9-13). To have a priest from another tribe meant the Law had to be changed (Hebrews 7:12-14). Yet, the silence of the scriptures did not allow them to select a priest from any of the other tribes. The command to select priests from Levi eliminated all other tribes from the priesthood.
- C. It will make our worship vain.
- 1. Since we have already shown that musical instruments in worship is not of God, it must be from men and Jesus says that worship from men is vain (Matthew 15:9), i.e., it is empty and useless — unacceptable!

- a) The general dates of the adoption of instrumental music in worship vary with the historian, but all agree it was centuries after the New Testament was completed. This fact cannot be wished away.
- b) In view of this, how can one account for the absence of such use in the churches of the New Testament period, and even the several immediately succeeding centuries? Did they not have access to the same information which is urged by our contemporaries in attempting to justify such use?
- 2. If we are to worship truthfully, we must worship in agreement with the word of God (John 4:24; 17:17). We cannot choose if we will worship God in spirit and in truth — we must worship Him so.
 - a) Cain worshipped God, but he injected his own ideas and rejected God's. When God gives a command, He does not authorize by what He does not say. Abel's sacrifice was acceptable because it was offered "by faith" (Hebrews 11:4). To offer the sacrifice "by faith" meant Abel offered the sacrifice in compliance with God's word (Romans 10:17).
 - b) Nadab and Abihu worshipped God, but their worship was not accepted because they added "strange fire" to their worship (Leviticus 10:1-3). If silence authorizes, there would have been no sin, but there was sin and their presumption caused them to be consumed by the fire from the altar (Deuteronomy 29:19-20; Psalm 19:13; cp. Acts 5:36; 19:13-17).
- D. It is not a good work.
 - 1. Paul assured Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that the word of God furnishes us with all good works. We do not need to invent or devise works because we think they are good (Ephesians 2:8-10).
 - 2. However, when we begin to look in His word for a command, example, or inference for the instrument in New Testament worship to God, it is obviously absent. If this is the case, then the only conclusion is that instrumental of music in worship is not a good work.
- E. It does not pertain to life and godliness.
 - 1. Peter said that God has given us "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). If God has given us this, then nothing is omitted. How has God given us this? Peter tells us God did this by "His divine power." What is God's divine power? It is the gospel (Romans 1:16).
 - 2. But is instrumental music in worship a part of the gospel of Christ? We have already seen that it is not, and since it is not a part of the gospel, it cannot pertain to life and godliness. What this really says is that there is no authority for the instrument in worship to God and to use it is sin (cp. 1 John 3:4).

II. Reasons For Vocal Music

- A. Jesus sang with His apostles.
 - 1. Both Matthew and Mark record that on the night Jesus was betrayed, He and the apostles sang a hymn before going out to the Mount of Olives (Matthew 26:30; Mark 14:26).
 - 2. I would love to have been present at that moment. I would love to have heard the words my Savior sang with His closest earthly friends on that fateful night.

3. When we sing, we follow in the footsteps of our Lord, who praised God while marching to His own death (cp. 1 Peter 2:21).
- B. Paul sang with Silas in prison.
1. In Acts 16:23-24, Paul and Silas were beaten severely with rods and thrown into a Philippian prison cell.
 2. On top of that, their feet were in stocks. But despite all they had been through that day, they were “singing hymns to God” late into the night in v. 25.
 3. When we sing, we imitate the practice of first century Christians who praised God even in the midst of unimaginable persecution (cp. Psalm 34:1).
- C. It comes from the overflow of our happiness.
1. Obviously, music has the ability to make us happy and stir our emotions. But the New Testament indicates that music is supposed to be the result of our happiness, not the cause of it (James 5:13; cp. 1 Chronicles 16:8-10).
 2. We do not make music in order to cheer our souls. We make music because our souls are cheered by the gospel of Christ.
- D. The words of our songs teach and edify the church.
1. The emphasis of singing is on the words, not on the melody. These words build up Christ’s church (Colossians 3:16).
 2. “Teaching” means to impart instruction, to instill doctrine. It has a primary application of edification for ethical living. “Admonishing” means to correct one who is at fault.
 3. Hymns and songs have often been a powerful means of implanting and clarifying truth — driving important scriptural truths deep into our hearts.
- E. Singing words of gratitude pleases the Lord.
1. God is pleased when we express our gratitude to Him with our words (Hebrews 13:15).
 2. As Paul directed the saints, God loves to hear His saints sing, “Thank you, Lord” (Ephesians 5:18b-20).

Conclusion. Someone might consider all this such a little matter, but is it? I wonder if Adam or Eve would think taking just one bite of the forbidden fruit was a little matter (Genesis 3:6)? Was it a little matter for Nadab and Abihu to disobey God in Leviticus 10:1-2? Was striking the rock when God told Moses to speak to the rock a little matter (Numbers 20:11)? Our practice is fully scriptural and comes from a sincere desire to worship God as He has directed.

For over 1,000 years, Christians have understood the importance of a cappella singing and rarely dreamed of doing anything different. But now, singing is being replaced or supplemented by the performances of solo singers, choirs, praise teams, and bands. And even in congregations where there are no “performers,” many members still do not sing. They sit quietly during the song service or they mouth the words while their minds wander aimlessly.

It is truly a shame when Christians no longer regard singing as an important part of worship. Singing is such a blessing to the church. If we showed more appreciation for the biblical richness of congregational singing, maybe there would be more participation and less people would feel a need to supplement it or replace it with something else.