

Why We Don't Use Instrumental Music 8-12-13

One of the big differences between the worship in the Lord's church and in the denomination is the way we make music. Almost all denominations use musical instruments to praise God in their congregations. Why doesn't the Lord's church?

To answer that we first need to step back in time. From the beginning of the church until the last few centuries, most denominations did not use instruments of music in worship. In fact, the secular term for singing without musical instruments, "Acappella", literally means "as in the church" (*a* – to, *capel* – chapel or church). Outside of the bible, history records early Christians sang only, and that early Christians saw instruments as pagan (a step we do not take today, as the Bible does not condemn musical instruments of themselves).

Ancient Testimony: Consider these quotes from history of early church thinkers:

Eusebius, 300AD: We render our hymn with a living psalterion and a living cithara with spiritual songs. The unison voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument.

Clement 190AD: "Leave the pipe to the shepherd, the flute to the men who are in fear of gods and intent on their idol worshipping. Such musical instruments must be excluded from our wingless feasts, for they are more suited for beasts and for the class of men that is least capable of reason than for men –

Chrysostom 390AD: "David formerly sang songs, also today we sing hymns. He had a lyre with lifeless strings, the church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre with a different tone indeed but much more in accordance with piety –

Augustine 354 A.D: "Musical instruments were not used. The pipe, tabret, and harp here associate so intimately with the sensual heathen cults, as well as with the wild revelries and shameless performances of the degenerate theater and circus, it is easy to understand the prejudices against their use in the worship."

These above quotes are from people we would consider to be early Catholics; however, even protestant reformers such as Martin Luther¹, John Calvin², John Wesley³ and Charles Spurgeon⁴ each denounced instrumental music in their assemblies.

However much these people saw instrumental music as either unauthorized or of itself sinful, their intellectual heirs today see it different. The Catholic church added instruments of music as early as 700 AD; Protestant churches between 1800-1900 (only the last 200 years).

¹ "The organ in the worship service is a sign of Baal." Realencyklopadie Fur Protestantische Theologie und Kirche, Bd, 14, s.433 cited in Instrumental Music and New Testament Worship, James D. Bales, p. 130.

² "Musical Instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law." Calvin, Commentary on Psalm 33, see also commentary on 1 Samuel 18:1-9

³ "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen." Cited by Methodist commentator Adam Clarke; Clarke's Commentary, Vol. 4, p.684

⁴ "We might as well pray by machinery as sing by it" and "Israel was at school, and used childish things to help her learn; but in these days when Jesus gives us spiritual food, one can make melody without strings and pipes... we do not need them. That would hinder rather than help our praise. Sing unto Him. This is the sweetest and best music. No instrument like the human voice." Charles Spurgeon, Commentary on Psalm 42

For us, we are not concerned with the authority of men, but only that of God. The Bible says *“And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.”* (1 John 3:22). When we examine musical instruments in worship, we find three catastrophic strikes against them: The Strike of Authority; The Strike of Intention; The Strike of Worldliness.

Authority: For anyone who seeks to please God, the first question on any practice is simple: is this something God authorized? Is there any command for it? Is there an example for it? Is it necessary to please God? An examination of Scripture reveals absolutely nothing about musical instruments and worship to God. To the contrary, God makes it clear to us that singing is something that pleases Him:

Matthew 26:30, “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives”;
Acts 16:25, “But at midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God”;
Romans 15:9, “For this reason I will confess you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name”;
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 in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord”;
Hebrews 2:12, “In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You”;
Hebrews 13:15, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name”;
James 5:13, “Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing psalms.”

Intent and Purpose: We ought to ask ourselves when bringing in something like musical instruments: what is our intent and purpose? Is it to please God or men? From the above passages, we find the mind of God and can know His intent and purpose; is ours the same? Roughly spoken, if our intention in worship is to please God, and God tells us that singing pleases Him, WHY would we bring in an instrument of worship? The only possible answer is that it is to PLEASE OURSELVES!

Worldly Desires: The Bible says a great deal about the danger of worldliness; one cannot be of the world and love God (Matthew 6:24); to be friends to the world is to be an enemy of God (James 4:4), and so forth. The Bible defines the world in 1 John 2:16: *“For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world.”* We know that this reminds of why our ancestor Eve made the decision to pull the fruit from the tree (Genesis 3:6 *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.*)

When we ask others why they do have instruments of music in their worship assemblies, the answers they reply with are almost always within three categories: *“It sounds good to me”*, which sounds a lot like Eve’s *“it was pleasant to the eyes”*; *“it makes me feel good”*, which sounds a lot like Eve’s reasoning that *“the tree was good for food”*; *“Everybody does it”*, which is just another *“desirable to make one wise”*. Do we see that the reasoning behind using musical instruments is precisely that of Eve when she took the fruit from the tree? Making the music WE like is worldliness!

Spiritual Music: When Jesus met the woman at the well in John 4, she brought up that there was a debate between Jews and Samaritans as to which mountain to worship on. Jesus' answer was a surprise: "*God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.*" (John 4:24). Jesus was telling her that the Old Testament was full of laws of physical (read "carnal", "natural" or "worldly") worship; God naturally never desired things like that (Isaiah 66:1-2, etc). The old law and the new law are meant to be a contrast between physical worship and spiritual worship. Consider the instruments of worship under the Old Law:

- Physical Jerusalem
- Physical Temple
- Physical High Priest
- Physical Priesthood
- Physical Sacrifices
- Physical Music

Now consider the manner these things appear in our Spiritual New Law:

- Spiritual Jerusalem (Galatians 4:26, Hebrews 12:22)
- Spiritual Temple (I Corinthians 3:16, I Peter 2:5)
- Spiritual High Priest (Hebrews 4:15, 7:26)
- Spiritual Priesthood (Hebrews 7:12, I Peter 2:5)
- Spiritual Sacrifices (Romans 12:1, I Peter 2:5)
- Spiritual Music (Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19)

No one would say that those physical things were superior to the spiritual things of the New Testament. Yet why have we excluded the two forms of music? Under the old law, there was physical music with physical instruments:

1 Chronicles 13:8 - Then David and all Israel played music before God with all their might, with singing, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on cymbals, and with trumpets.

Under the New Testament, we have spiritual instruments – the heart, the only spiritual musical instrument made by God, and from that instrument only one kind of music flows:

*Ephesians 5:19 - Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing and making melody in your heart** to the Lord,*

The return to musical instruments is no different than a return to a physical temple and physical Jerusalem to offer physical sacrifices through a physical priesthood, but trying to do these things to a God who is Spirit, who said such things were meant to teach us, and were not satisfying to Him.

Conclusion: Why is it that we are different? We desire to find God's permission to do anything. Since we cannot find God's permission to use musical instruments, we do not add them. Second, we desire to please God not ourselves. The addition of musical instruments is purely to satisfy our desires, not God's. Third, we desire to offer up spiritual sacrifices, knowing that this covenant of Christ is Spiritual, and that to please God we must worship Him in Spirit and in Truth.

1 John 3:22 And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.