

**INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC
IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP SERVICE?**

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Introduction

The discussion concerning whether church music should be restricted to unaccompanied singing is not new. Since the early centuries of the Christian era, scholars have made studies of apostolic practice in church music. While it has been only in recent years that instrumental music has come to be a widespread practice in church worship, this comparatively new practice has become so universal in some religious groups that many persons would be surprised to know that there are religious people who do not use musical instruments in their worship.

Most people, when attending a Primitive Baptist church service for the first time, are quite puzzled and amazed to find that no instrumental music is used. They naturally are curious as to the reasons for this practice; and unless reliable information is secured, they may conclude that merely from the standpoint of personal taste, Primitive Baptist churches do not prefer instrumental music. This conclusion is not true.

Primitive Baptist churches, in refusing the use of instrumental music in worship, do not do so just to be peculiar. To them, it is not a matter of expediency, but an issue of principle. They believe that no religious problem is rightly solved by the criteria of personal preferences, individual tastes, or human wisdom, but by the supreme authority of Jesus Christ expressed in the New Testament. They have reverently and humbly sought out the correct answer to the all-important question: Does Jesus Christ authorize the use of instrumental music in the worship of God? Their objective investigation of the divine word has produced the conclusion that there is neither command, precept, nor example for the worship of God by the use of instrumental music during the New Testament dispensation. Therefore, they sincerely believe that the practice of instrumental music in the worship service is a departure from the divine plan.

While the Primitive Baptist churches take their stand solely on the basis of Holy Scripture, they nevertheless derive comfort from the fact that they are not alone in this belief. Many of the world's great religious leaders have been opposed to using instrumental music in worship, and there are hundreds of thousands of people who do not use it.

To all who disagree with this position, a sincere appeal is presented to make an impartial, unbiased, candid investigation of the study at hand. They are urged to compare all the claims made herein with the Scriptural facts, and only then will they be able to draw a definite, honest conclusion as to the value of the stand taken by Primitive Baptist churches against the worship of God with instrumental music.

The Scriptural Record

The following list includes every reference to the type of music which the early New Testament church used in worship to God. An examination of these Scriptures make plain the kind of music which God designed for His church.

- 1) "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mt. of Olives" (Matt 26:30; Mark 14:26).
- 2) "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God" (Acts 16:25).²⁰
- 3) "For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name" (Romans 15:9).
- 4) "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (I Cor. 14:15).
- 5) "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." (Eph 5:19).
- 6) "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." (Col 3:16).
- 7) "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12).
- 8) "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms" (James 5:13).²⁰

Conclusions Drawn from Consideration .of the Scriptures

Where in the inspired record of the New Testament church is there found a single reference authorizing instrumental music in worship? Nowhere! The most careful, meticulous investigation of the New Testament will not produce a single word in favor of this practice. One may search the New Testament in vain for either command, example, or inference for the use of musical instruments in worship service.

The Lord's church is a New Testament institution, and the New Testament tells the items of worship the Lord put in it. It has been shown that the New testament is silent concerning instrumental music in the worship. It is evident that those who do use musical instruments in the worship service do without Scriptural authority.

When Christ ascended back into heaven, the Holy Spirit undertook to guide the disciples of Christ in their activities of worship (John 16:13). The Spirit guided the apostles into singing and into exhorting others to sing, but the Spirit never guided the apostles into performing upon instruments in worship or into exhorting others to do so.

The Argument From Silence is Invalid

Some, in trying to get around the plain New Testament teaching on the type of music to be used in the church, have endeavored to argue from silence. According to this method, because the New Testament does not say, "Thou shalt not use the instrument," and since there is no express condemnation of the practice, it must be acceptable to God. This is a false conclusion derived from the erroneous premise that the silence of the word of God is as much a guide for men as its positive commands. In other words, some wrongly believe that a thing is all right for worship unless explicitly forbidden. But it can easily be demonstrated that this type of reasoning will not work.

When God commands men to do anything specifically, everything else in the related category is excluded. For example: a) Bread and fruit of the vine are the elements God has ordained for the Lord's Supper, according to Matt 26:26-39. The specific divine requirement for these elements excludes everything else. No one would be foolish enough to insist upon adding meat and potatoes to the Lord's table because the New Testament doesn't expressly prohibit their use for this purpose. b) When God commanded the children of Israel to use a lamb for the Passover feast (Exodus 12:3), every other kind of animal was automatically excluded. God did not have to expressly mention all the animals that were not to be used; the kind specified excluded all others.

There are two kinds of commands in the Bible: specific and generic. For instance, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood" (Gen 6:14) is a specific command. God specified the wood, and that settled the question of the kind of wood. God did not say, "Thou shalt use no other kind of wood;" but the fact that God limited the wood to gopher wood forbade use of any other kind. Now if God had said, "Make thee an ark of wood," the use of any kind of wood would have met this generic command.

If the New Testament had simply said, "Make music," the commandment could have been complied with by making either vocal or instrumental music, or both. God, however, did not say that. He said "sing," and that restricts the music to vocal music. The specification and limitation is as clear here as it was the in the command to build an ark out of gopher wood.

Origin and History of Instrumental Music in Christian Worship

There is not a solitary reference to the use of instrumental music in the worship of any New Testament church during the entirety of the apostolic age. Not only is the New Testament absolutely silent about authorizing this practice, but for several hundred years after the death of the last apostle and the conclusion of the New Testament canon, the only references made to instrumental music are the denunciations written against its use by prominent religious leaders.

The first appearance of instrumental music in church worship was about the sixth century A.D. The exact date of its introduction varied in different localities; but it can safely be concluded that there was no general practicing of it until after the eighth century, and

even after this date it was long resisted by leading religionists. The quotations to follow present historical information about the practice of the primitive church regarding music. The scholars who are quoted all concur that instrumental music was not part of the worship of the primitive church.

A) The American Encyclopedia, Vol. 7, page 688, "The Pope Vitalian is regarded to have first introduced organs into some of the churches of Western Europe about 670; but the earliest trustworthy account is that of one sent as a present by the Greek emperor Constantine Copronymus to Pepin, King of Franks in 755."

B) Chambers Encyclopedia, Vol. 7, page 112, says: "The organ is said to have been introduced into church music by Pope Vitalian in 666 A.D."

C) The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. 2, page 1702, states: "In the Greek church the organ never came into use, but after the eighth century it became common in the Latin church, not, however, without opposition from the side of the Monks...the reformed church discarded it; and though the church of Basil very early introduced it, it was in other places admitted only sparingly and after long hesitation."

D) The McClintock and Strong Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature, Vol. 6, page 759, "The Greeks, as well as the Jews, were wont to use instruments as accompaniments in their sacred songs. The converts to Christianity accordingly must have been familiar with this mode of singing; yet it is generally believed that the primitive Christians failed to adopt the use of instrumental music in their religious worship."

E) Lyman Coleman, Presbyterian scholar and author makes the following statements in his book, *The Primitive Church*, page 370-371, 376-377, "Both the Jews in their temple service, and the Greeks in their idol worship, were accustomed to sing with the accompaniment of instrumental music. The converts to Christianity, accordingly, must have been familiar with this mode of singing...but it is generally admitted, that the primitive Christians employed no instrumental music in their religious worship...Such musical accompaniments were gradually introduced; but can hardly be assigned to a period earlier than the fifth and sixth centuries."

F) Professor John Girardeau, Presbyterian Professor in the Columbia Theological Seminary in Music in the Church, page 179, makes the following statement: "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" (that is, it was not in general use until that time).

G) Dr. Frederic Louis Ritter, *History of Music from the Christian Era to the Present Time*, page 28, "We have no real knowledge of the exact character of the music which formed a part of the religious devotion of the first Christian congregations. It was, however, purely vocal."

Many other encyclopedias and early church histories could be cited to show the origin of instrumental music. All of them show definitely that its eventual use was a historical development, and not a revealed New Testament teaching. Thus, being something that was introduced centuries after the death of the apostles, it has no place in apostolic Christianity.

There were instruments of music of many and various kinds that were in use during the age of the apostles. Their never being introduced into the worship service by the apostles or the early Christians is conclusive evidence that they were undesirable as a means of expressing praise. Instrumental music is incompatible with the direction for singing given in the New Testament.

The Testimony of Great Religious Leaders

Today a vast majority of churches use instrumental music in worship, while the Primitive Baptist churches are among the few which do not, being content with the original New Testament practice of congregational singing. Even in many churches which do use the instrument, the practice is of only comparatively recent origin and often introduced over the protest of great Bible scholars and religious leaders. The following quotations will illustrate this:

A) John Calvin, one of the founders of the Presbyterian Church: "Musical instruments in celebrating the praise of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews." John Calvin's Commentary, Ps. 33.

B) Adam Clarke, the greatest commentator of all time among the Methodists: "I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them (musical instruments) productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music, as a science, I esteem and admire; but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music; and here I register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity." Clarke's Commentary, Vol. 4, page 684.

C) John Wesley, the reputed founder of the Methodist Church, is quoted by Adam Clarke to have said: "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen." Clarke's Commentary, Vol. 4, page 684.

D) Martin Luther, a distinguished reformer, "called the organ an ensign of baal." McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia, Vol. 6, page 762.

E) Charles H. Spurgeon, recognized as one of the greatest Baptist preachers that ever lived, who preached for 20 years to thousands of people weekly in the Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle, London, England, did not have musical instruments in the worship. M.C. Kurfest, Instrumental Music in the Worship, page 196.

F) Conybeare and Howson, famous scholars of the Church of England, in commentary of Eph 5:19 say, "Make melody with the music of your hearts, to the Lord...let your songs be, not the drinking of heathen feasts, but psalms and hymns; and their accompaniment, not the music of the lyre, but the melody of the heart." *Life and Epistles of St. Paul*, Vol. 2, page 408.

G) J.W. McGarvey, well-known minister of the Church of Christ, "It is manifest that we cannot adopt the practice without abandoning the obvious and only ground on which a restoration of Primitive Christianity can be accomplished." *What Shall We Do About the Organ?*, page 4.

The above religious leaders, not a one of whom was a member of a Primitive Baptist church, have been quoted, not for the purpose of proving instrumental music in the worship wrong (the fact that Christ left it out proves that), but to show that the practice of having instrumental music in the worship service has been rejected by many religious leaders of the world. If no one taught instrumental music in the worship wrong, it would not change the New Testament teaching. But it is interesting to note that historians, encyclopedists, and religious leaders are agreed that the music characteristic of the New Testament is the music characteristic of Primitive Baptist churches.

Considerations from the Original Language of the New Testament

It is often claimed that the Greek word psallo implies accompaniment with man-made instruments of music. The practice of the early church shows that this claim could not be true. If psallo meant to sing with instrumental accompaniment, the apostles violated the confidence the Lord placed in them, for they did not use musical instruments in their praise, nor did they teach the church to use them.

The word psallo occurs five times in the New Testament - Romans 15:9; 1Cor 14:15 (used twice in this passage); Eph 5:19; and James 5:13. Without an exception, all the standard translations, King James, English Revised, American Standard, and Douay (Roman Catholic), render psallo as "sing, sing psalms, sing praise, make melody." In not a single word of these versions is the word translated as meaning to perform on mechanical instruments of music. The leading modern versions, such as Goodspeed, Weymouth, Moffatt, and Knox, all translate psallo essentially the same as the standard translations. The men who gave us these versions, both standard and modern, are among the world's most competent Greek scholars; if the playing on mechanical instruments of music is expressed in the meaning of the word psallo, as used by the New Testament writers, is it not exceedingly strange that these translators failed to so render it?

The Greek Catholic Church, with more than one hundred million members, does not use instrumental music in its service. Of all people they ought to know whether psallo includes mechanical instruments. Their conclusion is that it means simply to sing.

Many competent lexicographers of New Testament Greek could be cited to show the meaning of psallo as it is used in the New Testament. Two will suffice: (1) Moulton and Milligan, who have written one of the most complete and reliable lexicons dealing with New Testament Greek, give the following definition of psallo as it is used in the New Testament: "sing a hymn." (2) Abbott-Smith gives substantially the same definition: "...in N.T. to sing a hymn, sing praise."

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

Those who wish to justify the use of instrumental music in worship offer many seemingly plausible objections to the stand taken by those who believe instrumental music in worship to be wrong. Several of the more usual ones are considered here.

Instruments Used in Old Testament Worship

Some attempt to justify instrumental music in New Testament worship by saying that it had a place in Old Testament worship. But if that authorizes the playing of musical instruments in the worship, it will also authorize the offering of animal sacrifices and the burning of incense in the worship. If men bring instrumental music into the worship service today on the ground that it is mentioned in the O.T., consistency demands that they bring animal sacrifices and the burning of incense also. In the O.T. David said, "Praise him with psaltery and harp, praise him with timbrel and dance; praise him with stringed instruments and organs" (Ps 150:3-4). Are we to have dance a part of our worship today? Is it acceptable to pick out of Jewish worship just what we want, leaving the rest, or rather should it not be to find out what God has seen fit to continue and sanction for Christian worship?

Prayer was a part of Jewish worship, as was the burning of incense and animal sacrifice. Christians today rightly continue prayer as an act of Christian worship and reject the burning of incense and animal sacrifice on the principle that we are now living under the law of Christ in which prayer is commanded and exemplified. Burning incense and animal sacrifice are not sanctioned in Christian worship, and the New Testament is just as silent on the use of instruments of music in worship.

Today we are living under the New Testament rule²⁰ rather than the Old Testament authority. If we rightly divide the word of truth, we must understand that the law (that is, the Mosaic law, including the Ten Commandments), "is become our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" (Gal 3:24-25). The beautiful lesson of the Transfiguration teaches us that Christ is the only begotten Son of God and to "Hear ye Him" (Matt 17:5). We do not practice circumcision as a religious rite because we are to hear Christ and not Moses. We do not use mechanical instruments of music in worship because we are to hear Christ, not David.

Christians do not keep any of the old covenant. Christians keep some things that were in the old covenant but they keep them not because they were in the old, but because they were made a part of the new.

Instrumental Music Used in Heaven

Many who favor musical instruments in the worship service turn to the book of Revelation and cite Scriptures which speak of harps in heaven and conclude that whatever is suitable in heaven should be permitted in Christian worship. In a typical passage, Rev 5:8, "And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints." In the first place, Revelation is a highly symbolic book which draws aside the curtain of the future and gives us a picture of spiritual things in heaven. In the second place, even if the things mentioned here are literal, the fact remains that it would be very unsound reasoning to conclude that mechanical instruments of music should be used here because harps are used in heaven. This verse from Revelation also mentions "beasts" and "golden vials full of odors (incense)." If we follow the principle that what is acceptable in heaven is acceptable in the church, not only must we have harps, but we must also have beasts and incense. There will be no marriage or giving in marriage in heaven (Matt 22:30); shall we abolish it here? There will be no baptism or Lord's Supper in heaven, but Christ commanded both to be practiced in the church.

Instruments Used in the Home

It has been said that instruments of music are all right in the home, so why not in the church? If one will stop to think, he can name several things in the home which would not be suitable for Christian worship. Washing hands is an act of cleanliness in the homes, but Jesus condemned it as an act of worship (Mark 7:1-13). Eating meat and vegetables is all right in the home, but we would be desecrating the Lord's table to put it there.

The home is governed by moral law. Anything that is morally right is all right in the home. Things morally right can be religiously wrong when used as an act of worship, if not authorized by the Scriptures. There is nothing morally wrong with burning incense in the home for the purpose of deodorizing the house, but as an act of worship it is wrong since it is unauthorized by the New Testament. Both singing and instrumental music may be enjoyed in the home, but we can bring into the worship service only that which is approved by the New Testament for that purpose; namely, vocal music.

Does Not Luke 15:25 Offer New Testament Example?

Some have claimed that the prodigal son is a type of an erring Christian, and that his father's house is a type of the church. Since the return of the prodigal was celebrated with music, some conclude that it is permissible to play instruments in Christian worship. But it is only assumed that these are true types. Furthermore, if instrumental music is to

be included because it is found in the prodigal son story, then the robe, the ring, the fatted calf, and the dancing must also be included, for all these things are included in the story. Such an interpretation proves more than advocates of instrumental music in the worship service desire.

Our Talents Should Be Used for God

Some contend that since every talent is a gift from God, they should all be used in worshipping Him. Since playing an instrument is a special ability, they conclude that it must be used in the worship of God. This is, no doubt, sincere reasoning, but it is very unsound. There are many talents and abilities which we cannot introduce into the worship of God. There are athletically inclined young men in the church who can perform acts of physical prowess. Should they perform these acts in the worship of God? There are those who have the ability to tell funny stories. Should this ability be utilized in the worship service?

Does Not Instrumental Music Uplift Our Religious Feelings?

There are some who contend that instrumental music in the worship service is good because it stirs our emotions and makes us feel good. But it is not how we feel that counts; it is how God feels. In spiritual matters we are not to be guided by our thoughts and feelings; we are to be guided by the word of God. And the word of God does not authorize the use of musical instruments in the New Testament worship service.

Did the Apostles Worship in the Temple with Them?

Some contend that Christ and the apostles worshipped in the temple with instrumental music. This point has to be assumed, for the Bible nowhere teaches it. The Old Testament shows that the whole range of music was employed in the temple at one time, but historians hold that there were no instruments in the temple during the time of Christ. About 20 years before the birth of Jesus, Herod the Great tore down the old temple and rebuilt it on a grander scale. This was the one in use when Jesus was on earth. Reliable sources maintain that it never had a musical instrument in it. Even granting that there was, we are not authorized to play instruments in the worship today, for we are living under the gospel and not the law.

Instruments Are Merely Aids to Worship

To see through the fallacy of the above argument it is necessary to see the difference between aids to the worship service and additions to it. An aid is something that helps you to do the thing that the Lord directed without adding an element to the thing commanded. An addition is adding a new element to the service. Notice the following illustrations:

God told Noah to "make thee an ark of gopher wood..." (Gen 6:14). God specified the kind of wood, but that did not eliminate aids. What aids could he use?

<u>Wood</u>	<u>Aid</u>	<u>Additions</u>
Gopher	Hammar	Poplar
	Saw	Oak

If built with the hammer and saw, it would still be an ark of gopher wood. If another type of wood were added, it would not be that which the Lord commanded.

20-26). What would constitute an aid and an addition to the Lord's Supper?

Food	Aid	Addition
Fruit of the vine	Table	Milk
Bread	Plate	Meat

If served with a plate and on a table, the specified food would still be partaken. If another type of food were added, it would not be that which the Lord commanded.

Christ wants us to sing. He gives the commandment to sing. He specified the type of music. What would constitute an aid and an addition?

Music	Aid	Addition.
Sing	Song books	Play

Notes

If we sing with a song book which has notes, the specified music would be heard by God and nothing else. If another type of music were added, it would not be that which the Lord commanded.

The instrument is not an aid. It is an addition! Therefore, it is not acceptable as an aid. It was never an aid. In the Old Testament, it was considered worship by David (Ps 150).

The same thing concerning aids and additions can easily be demonstrated in the matter of church buildings, baptisteries, etc. Nothing is done with them that is not within the scope of God's will concerning the worship service. They do not set up actions in worship separate and apart from that which God has ordained, such as is involved in the use of instrumental music.

God has commanded Christians to meet (Heb 10:25). He has not specified where to meet. They can meet under a tree, by a riverside, in a large building, in a private dwelling, in the daytime, at night, etc. No matter where they meet, when they meet to worship God according to the activities that He has designated (singing, praying, etc.), they are doing no more nor less than God's will. They have not added anything; the building just aids them as a convenient place to meet. They have added nothing to the Lord's command to meet.

When Christ commanded the church to baptize, He implied everything that was necessary to carry out the command. He did not say "Go to the water," but in executing the Lord's command, we find the apostles going to the water. In using a baptistery, Christians do not baptize and do something else at the same time. If one baptizes a penitent believer in a baptistery, a river, a lake, or a pond, he is doing no more nor less than is required in the command to baptize.

Perhaps the following chart can help to further distinguish between aids to worship and unscriptural additions to worship:

God's Command	Aid	Addition
Baptize	Baptistery	None
Meet	Church building	None
Sing	Song books	None
Sing	Piano	Play

God commanded the church to baptize, meet, and sing; but, nowhere did He command the church to play. When one baptizes in a baptistery, he is not baptizing and doing something else at the same time. When one sings with a song book, he is not singing and doing something else at the same time. But when one sings and plays the piano or other instrument, he is singing and playing at the same time.

Christ affirmed that the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms are written (Luke 24:44). Therefore, it is obviously permissible to have a written psalm book. He has also commanded us to sing hymns and spiritual songs. So it is obviously permissible for us to have books containing hymns and spiritual songs.

What About the Tuning Fork or Pitch Pipe?

An occasional attempt is made to justify the use of instrumental music in worship service by contending that even those who don't use instruments in the service sometimes use a tuning fork or pitch pipe to secure the pitch.

In the first place, musical instruments and pitch pipes are not one and the same. Music, properly defined, is a succession of tones in an orderly, melodic pattern. The pitch pipe or tuning fork is not designed to produce a succession of tones in an orderly, melodic pattern. Its sole purpose is to secure the pitch for the singing.

It is impossible to sing without pitch; therefore, pitch is a necessary part of the command to sing. God has not specified how to secure the pitch, which is a necessary part of the command to sing; therefore, those who sing can secure the pitch by any orderly, convenient means.

After the pitch pipe or tuning fork has been used to secure the pitch, it becomes silent and the worship in song takes place. Nothing has been added to God's plan of worship. The

tuning fork or pitch pipe introduces no independent kind of musical activity in the worship service as do the instruments of music.

What is the Purpose of Singing in the Worship Service?

If we could remember that music in Christian worship is not for the purpose of entertaining, but for teaching and for exalting, we would have no trouble seeing why God demanded vocal music and left out instrumental music. The following chart can help the Bible student to see the way in which the Scriptural purposes of music in worship are best fulfilled:

The Bible Says To:	The Voice:	The Instrument:
Speak in Song (Eph. 5:19)	Can	Cannot
Teach (Col. 3:16)	Can	Cannot
Admonish (Col. 3:16)	Can	Cannot
Sing With Spirit (1 Cor. 14:15)	Can	Cannot
Sing With Understanding (1 Cor. 14:15)	Can	Cannot
Make Melody in Heart (Eph. 5:19)	Can	Cannot

In summary, the human voice is capable of doing everything which God commands us to do as music in worship, while the instrument is incapable of doing anything required by music in Christian worship except make melody, and it does not do that in the right place - the human heart.

It is significant that all the elements of Christian worship are based upon living things! Our bodies are living sacrifices (Romans 12:1); God's New Testament temple is made up of lively stones (1 Peter 2:5); the music of worship is performed on the most spiritual of all earthly instruments, the living, human heart and voice.

Conclusion

It was not an oversight on the part of God that He left instrumental music out of Christian worship; He makes no mistakes. Only God can know what is pleasing and acceptable to Him. Therefore, we must consult His Word as to what pleases Him in the worship service, and we rejoice because He has given us His will in the matter in such plain language.