

# What Does God's Word Say About...

## Musical Instruments in Worship

Many people question why the churches of Christ do not have musical instruments in worship. They ask if the church cannot afford to purchase a piano or organ. The answer to this question is always what do the scriptures say and can we afford to be disobedient in our New Testament worship to God. The Lord's church, since the time of the apostles, has not used instrumental music in worship. The reason is simple: it is not authorized in the New Testament. Those who lived under the Old Testament used instrumental music, offered animal sacrifices, burned incense, and burned candles as commanded by God in their worship of Him. Those who would defend the use of instrumental music in the worship today use the Old Testament scriptures to justify their stance. This brings into question why they choose the scriptures pertaining to musical instruments only and discard those pertaining to offering animal sacrifices in their worship.

God foretold that the Old Testament was to be replaced with a new testament (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-10). The Old Testament was "nailed to the cross" (Col. 2:14); it was "abolished in His flesh" (Eph. 2:15); and was "set aside because of its weakness and uselessness" (Heb. 7:18). Jesus Christ is the Mediator of the New Testament, "He took away the first, that He might establish the second" (Heb. 10:9). Some might argue that removing the old law is against God, but God answers clearly: "if righteousness came by the law, then Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21). Why, then, was the Old Testament law given? Paul answers "It was added because of transgressions, until the seed (Jesus Christ) would come to whom the promise had been made" (Gal. 3:19).

If playing musical instruments was authorized in our worship under the New Testament, it should be easy for one to point out the passage. There is no scripture to be found so they look to the Old Testament for authority. Many religious zealots today who believe and preach the doctrines of John Calvin, are surprised to find that he wrote, more than 400 years ago: "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of candles, and animal sacrifices which are restoring the shadows of the law."

Many prefer musical instruments in worship because they like the entertainment value. Our worship is to please God and give Him all the praise, not to entertain an audience. Our forms of worship are God-given, not man-devised. To ignore what He says and to establish our own system of worship does not please God but ourselves. God gives us details and instruction on how He is to be worshiped and expects obedience to His law. Nadab and Abihu, sons of the High Priest, Aaron, offered "strange fire before the Lord, which He did not command" (Lev. 10:1-2). Moses struck a rock rather than speaking to it and he missed Canaan for his disobedience (Num. 20:7-12). David joyfully moved the Ark of the Covenant on a new ox cart, but God killed Uzzah for not following the commandment that the Ark was to be carried on the Levitical priests' shoulders (2 Sam. 6:1-11; 1 Cron. 15:11-13). If we worship as we desire, ignoring what God has said, it is a sin of presumption, doing what we want instead of what God wants. As the psalmist wrote, "keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me; then I shall be blameless, and I shall be acquitted of great transgression" (Psm. 19:13).

The Old Testament allowed the playing of musical instruments, but no scripture authorizing them is found in the New Testament. The worship of God in the Old Testament required a number of people to be involved. Praising God was specified to be done a certain way: "Make yourself two trumpets of silver, of hammered work you shall make them; the priestly sons of Aaron, moreover, shall blow the trumpets; and this shall be for you (Israel) a perpetual statute throughout your generations" (Num. 10:2, 8). "He (King Hezekiah) stationed the Levites in the house of the lord with cymbals, with harps, lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the Lord through His prophets" (II Chron. 29:25). Therefore, the instruments, and even the ones who were to play them were specified by God. God commanded the type of "praise - worship" that was pleasing to Him:

1. Numbers 10:8 - "Who" = "Priestly sons of Aaron shall blow them"
2. Numbers 10:10 - "When" = "appointed feasts, burnt offerings, and sacrifices of your peace offerings"
3. Numbers 10:2 - "What" = "two trumpets of silver of hammered work"
4. II Chronicles 29:25 - "Who" = "the Levites"
5. II Chronicles 29:27 - "When" = "when the burnt offering began"
6. II Chronicles 29:25 - "What" = "cymbals, harps, and lyres"

Therefore, the Old Testament worship required a number of specified people doing what was commanded by God.

But the argument today is where in the New Testament does God tell us precisely HOW He wants us to worship in song? God gave us similar commands as He did in the Old Testament:

1. Ephesians 5:19 - "Who" = those assembled in worship - "one another"
  2. Colossians 3:15 - "When" = "called in one body"
  3. Colossians 3:16 - "What" = "singing with thankfulness in your hearts to the Lord"
- Clearly, God is authorizing, in these verses, what He desires: "So then, do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph, 5:17). "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father" (Col. 3:17). There is no mention of musical instruments other than singing (like to pluck an instrument) from the heart.

We must worship in song as He directs us in the New Testament. To add instruments to the worship is not authorized by Him. The apostle John wrote, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9-11). When a congregation is using instrumental music, it has gone "too far" and is not abiding in the teaching of Christ. That means if we fellowship with that congregation, we are participating in their evil deeds (2 John 11). This article was written to expose the evil deeds that are contrary to God's word. Paul wrote "Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them" (Eph. 5:11).