

Notes on Musical Instruments in Worship

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Perhaps the most often asked question about the belief and practice of churches of Christ concerns this issue. This subject relates to our acceptable worship of God. Let's review the questions and contentions offered on this subject.

1. **"Why do you not use instruments in worship?"** The burden of proof is upon the users, for they are not found in the New Testament church nor in church history until about the tenth century. The appropriate question is, "Why do people **use** the instruments in worship?"
2. **"The New Testament does not forbid their use, so are they not permitted?"** This question Reflects a fallacious principle of Biblical interpretation. The New Testament does not forbid ice cream and cake on the Lord's Table, but only the most liberal interpreter would argue that they are thereby allowed. Just as gopher wood in the ark's construction excluded all other kinds of wood, and bread and fruit of the vine excluded all other elements on the Lord's Table, so the command to sing excludes all other kinds of music. To permit everything that is not specifically/explicitly condemned is to invite unlimited innovation, which is the unhappy state of most of modern professed "Christianity."
3. **"Instruments were acceptable in worship in the Old Testament, so why not in the New Testament?"** Granting that they were acceptable (which some question), this has nothing to do with their acceptability for those under the New Testament. Christ took the Old Covenant "out of the way" on the cross (Col. 2:14), enacting a better Covenant with better promises (Heb. 8:6). The Sabbath, animal sacrifices, circumcision, and 1,000 other things that were required by the Mosaic Law rest upon much stronger authority than do musical instruments if one seeks authorization from that obsolete Covenant. Paul warns that we are obligated to keep the whole Law if we claim its authority in one practice (Gal. 5:3). He further warns that to revert to the Law is to fall from grace (Gal. 5:4).
4. **"There will be harps in Heaven, so why not on the earth?"** This contention is based upon three references in the Revelation (5:8; 14:2; 15:2). It must be remembered that this book is filled with symbolic, figurative language, as indicated by John in Revelation 1:1. It is as unlikely that the harps are literal as it is that the white horse (6:2) is literal. However, if there could and should be material harps in the spiritual realm of Heaven, such would not justify their use upon earth. Whatever things there are in Heaven, I will never be able to enjoy them if I disregard God's will for me on earth.

5. **"We play instruments in our homes, why not in worship?"** The discussion of what God allows in our homes does not concern what He has ordained for His worship in the church. I am at liberty to place ice cream and cake on my table at home. By this argument, I could also place it on the Lord's Table in worship.
6. **"Instruments are just an aid to worship."** This is not so practically; congregational singing has never been improved by addition of an instrument. Neither is it so logically; their use is an addition and innovation, not an aid. Playing is a different act from singing, which is the New Testament requirement (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). It is not at all in the same category as song books, communion cups and baptistries, which truly are aids and which add nothing to what the Lord requires. One may as well argue that ice cream and cake would be an "aid" to the Lord's Supper.
7. **"Instruments are optional, a matter of personal choice."** First, the New Testament does not so teach. Second, those who so teach do not really believe it. They would much sooner give up the fellowship of those who cannot conscientiously worship with the instrument than to give up the instrument itself.
8. **"The Greek word for *sing* (*psallo*) means to play or pluck."** Not so. Such is a half-truth at best and is a contradiction of Greek scholarship all over the world, spanning many centuries. There is not a reputable New Testament translation in print that renders *psallo* to include an instrument; but, for the sake of argument, assume that the term includes playing an instrument. Such would therefore require that every Christian play some kind of instrument or be in rebellion to a direct command. Oddly, the same person will sometimes advance both of the above arguments. Using instruments in worship is not optional if required and vice versa.
9. **"I like it, and I see nothing wrong with it."** This statement may indicate the most prevalent basis of the practice. It surely is apparent that if mere mortals are the authority for what pleases God in worship, then we may as well discard the New Testament. Each man becomes his own authority. God and His Word may as well not exist. This issue is truly a test of our respect for Jesus Christ and His New Testament.

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