

Music In Worship

One of the most frequently asked questions of Christians is, “Why do you not have a piano or organ in your worship?” These folks deserve a Bible answer. Most of the denominations use instrumental music and a member of a denominational church would naturally be interested in this particular subject.

While traveling this “route” we will examine every passage that has anything to do with the kind of music used in the Church by the first Christians.

Music In Worship (Route 10)

John 4:24 This text says nothing specifically about music in worship; however, it does address a principle that needs consideration whenever we study the worship of God - **Acceptability**. Jesus states two essential characteristics which worship must possess to be acceptable: (1) spirit and (2) truth. To “*worship in spirit*” is to worship from the heart, the inner man (cf. **Romans 1:9**). To “*worship in truth*” is to do so in the way which truth marks out. This principle applies to everything we bring to God as worship. It takes both attitude and action for worship to be acceptable. We must be careful to follow what God has instructed. **2John 9; Revelation 22:18-19; 1Peter 4:11**

Colossians 3:16-17 We introduce this text at this juncture because it is the only text that directly connects the music question to the need for Bible authority. Certainly, singing is right! It would be nice if the advocates of musical instruments in music could present as much authority. Singing is defined as “to render in tones with musical inflections of the voice, to utter a series of words in musical tones” (The American Heritage Dictionary). In order to accomplish what this verse commands does not require any musical instrument. As a matter of fact, what this verse enjoins **cannot** be accomplished by a musical instrument. What instrument ever “taught” (gave instruction to) anyone? How does one “admonish” (reprove or warn) by playing an instrument? This can only be done by **singing the words of the Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs** from a heart in which dwells the **Word of Christ**.

Matthew 26:30 This is the first time we have an indication of the kind of music the apostles of Christ used. What did they do before they departed? No instrument here. (If your student objects that this is not the Church, agree and make the point that these events and actions were associated with the coming kingdom and its worship [**26:29**]). The parallel is **Mark 14:22-26**.

Acts 16:25 Paul and Silas were singing. Some might ask, “What does this have to do with music in the church?” While this may have not been an assembly of the saints, it is Christians worshipping God with music. Here in the midst of trouble they sang. There is no instrument here.

Romans 15:9 Paul quotes **Psalm 18:49; Deuteronomy 32:43; Psalm 117:1** and **Isaiah 11:10** in **Romans 15:9-12**. The passage talks about the joy of the Gentiles by their inclusion in the dispensation of God’s grace. The interesting thing is that it says the writer will **sing** among the Gentiles. There is no instrument here in describing any music associated with the Church.

1Corinthians 14:15-16 Paul says he will sing in the same manner that he prays, “*with the spirit and the understanding*.” Instrumentation will not accomplish this objective in music worship. Notice Paul tells us that in order for the spirit to so worship, it must be *edified* (see: **Acts 20:32**) and those that are present must *understand* what is said (cf. **1Corinthians 14:7-8**). Here is no place for instrumental music in this text. The word says, “*Sing*.”

1Corinthians 14:26 “*Every one of you hath a psalm...*” This word properly means a song of the class of those Old Testament songs in the book of Psalms. The word does not necessitate an instrument in order to give it. Remember **Colossians 3:16** above, “*Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs singing...*” Furthermore, this text establishes clearly that this singing was done in the assemblies of the saints, “*when ye come together...*” Here is the congregational activity of the Church at Corinth.

Ephesians 5:19 It is often observed that the Greek verb *Psallo* is found in this text. Literally it means to “twitch or twang” a line or a string. This may be anything from a carpenter’s line to the string of a lyre. However, in this text it is the “*strings of the heart*” (remember **John 4:24**). Obviously, a figure parallel to “*speaking to yourselves...*” This text presents the same problems as **Colossians 3:16** and **1Corinthians 14:15**. How can “*speaking*” (to talk, to utter words) be accomplished by an instrument? The action here is singing. If this passage authorizes instrumental music, it necessitates that *all* play *while* they *all* sing. This is absurd. Whereas, when singing is understood as the action involved, it is easily seen that congregational activity, congregational singing, accomplishes the desired result of edifying all that sing as in **Colossians 3:16**.

Hebrews 2:12 Here the writer quotes **Psalms 22:22**. This is the “*fruit of the lips*” which can only be singing (vocal). Isn’t it amazing that of all the verses that the writer could quote from the Old Testament Psalms, he never quotes one that would imply a mechanical instrument of music?

Hebrews 13:15 This passage does not use the word sing, but clearly shows God cannot be worshipped with machinery. God is praised by the “*fruit of the lips*” from the human heart.

James 5:13 This passage also indicates singing is to be done. The reason for this singing is a *merry heart*. A piano does not have a heart with which to be merry.

Revelation 14:2-3 Sometimes the advocates of instrumental music will go to the book of Revelation, especially this section, to justify instrumental music. Here the writer is describing a song. Note that “*the voice from heaven*” is “*as the voice of many waters*” and “*as the voice of a great thunder*” and “*as the voice of harpers harping with their harps.*” What is done is **singing**.

Revelation 15:1-3 These are all symbols of praise (cf. **Revelation 5:8**) and not to be taken literally. Furthermore, they are said to be the “*harps of God.*” What kind of “literal” harps are those? We don’t know what they are like. Let alone how to play them. Finally, all these events took place in heaven, does that authorize anything for the Church? What about the censers, vials of odors, altars, temples, etc. that are mentioned? Should all of these be included in the worship because they have appeared in Heaven? There is much about Revelation and the activities of Heaven of which we are ignorant, but we understand what Paul said in **Colossians 3:16** & **Ephesians 5:19**.

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