

Singing in the Worship Service of the New Testament Church

Scriptural References: Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, 1 Corinthians 14:15, Hebrews 2:12, Matthew 26:30, Romans 15:9, James 5:13

The above verses of Scripture provide for us the entirety of references in the New Testament regarding singing as it relates to the worship service of the church. After Christ' ascension back to Heaven, the Holy Spirit was given to the apostles to lead them into all truths. The apostles were described as being the foundation of the Church, Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. They were given the knowledge and wisdom to lay the foundational principles of the church, including both doctrine and practice. The absence of any mention of instruments in the New Testament should, in itself, present a very convincing argument that the practice was not originally observed in the church. For some however, silence on the matter is taken to mean allowance. Let's examine both sides of this argument. At the heart of the issue is whether musical instruments are simply an aid in fulfilling a command, and therefore permissible; or they are an addition to a specific command and therefore not authorized by Scripture.

There are two kinds of commands given in Scripture. There are specific commands and there are general or generic commands. When a general command is given, God gives us the liberty to discern the most wise and honorable manner by which to follow that command in light of the remainder of Scripture. We are told to love our neighbor. There are multitudes of ways we can manifest our love to one another. Many examples are given for us to follow but even these examples are general in nature. We are commanded to pray, and Jesus provided a model for us to follow, but the exact words and occasions differ with every prayer we offer. We are commanded to assemble for worship and are given the pattern of assembling on the first day of the week, but the time, place, and duration are not specified. Paul instructed Timothy to study to show himself approved of God, but he did not specify to the young minister how he should do this, that is, the specific method he should employ in his studies. We are told that pure and undefiled religion consists of visiting the fatherless and the widows: an implied command if we are interested in maintaining such purity. But, we are not told how many orphans and widows to visit, how often we should visit, for what length of time our visits should be, or exactly what we are supposed to do when we visit. Within the bounds of the remainder of Scripture, much liberty can be given as to how we fulfill general commands such as these.

On the other hand, when a specific command is given, everything else not included in the command is excluded. For example, we are commanded to observe the Lord's Supper. We are told what elements to use: bread and wine, by both precept and example. Bread and wine are specified, so everything else that might be used is excluded, such as meat or vegetables, grape juice or milk. We are commanded to baptize and to be baptized, and we are shown the pattern: immersion in water in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. The specific example and command excludes all other modes, such as sprinkling, or to do so in someone else's name. Noah was told to make an ark out of gopher wood. The type wood was specified, to the exclusion of every other type of wood such as pine, oak or poplar. Even when specific commands are given, we

still must consider whether the means by which we fulfill these commands constitutes an aid or an addition. For example, we may use a table, a plate, or a cup in the Lord's Supper. Or, we may use a baptistery, a pond, or even a pool for baptizing. These would simply constitute aids, not additions. The specific command, no more and no less, has still been fulfilled.

In the verses quoted above, the command and example to sing is given. The command was not 'make music', but is 'sing'. The command 'make music' would have allowed for many various ways in which to fulfill the command. We could have included a piano, a guitar, drums, or a whole host of various musical instruments to 'make music'. But the specific command is 'sing'. To fulfill this specific command, we simply sing. A man-made instrument cannot sing; it can only produce musical tones. The only 'instrument' that can fulfill the command to sing is the human voice. Further, we are told that singing is to be used as a means to teach and admonish one another, and should be done with understanding. A musical instrument, whether stringed or percussion, cannot teach, nor admonish, nor convey understanding. Our singing and making melody should originate from the heart, and is to be offered unto the Lord. We are to sing with the spirit. God can see inside the heart even if we don't sing, but the feelings of the spiritual heart can only be expressed or conveyed through the human voice, not through man-made instruments.

One might ask why the New Testament is silent on music in the worship service. It is not silent regarding music. The silence only pertains to musical instruments! The music we are to make in the worship service of the New Testament Church is to be produced by the instrument God gave us, the human voice. We have the liberty to use songbooks, notes, even a tuning fork to reach an appropriate pitch. These are used to aid us in fulfilling the command to sing, whereas musical instruments are an addition to a specific command; an addition not sanctioned by the Scriptures. The following chart may help:

Command	Aid	Addition
Lord's Supper Use Bread & Wine	Table, Plate, Cups	Meat, Vegetables, Milk
Baptize Immerse in Water	Baptistery, Robes, Pool	Sprinkling, Pouring
Preach The Bible	Podium, Pulpit, Microphone	Book of Mormon
Build an Ark Use Gopher Wood	Hammer, Saw, Ruler	Pine, Oak, Steel, Plastic
Assemble Worship	Building, pews	Social Events
Sing and make melody in your heart; teach, admonish	Hymnals, Notes, Tuning Fork	Instruments
Passover Lamb	Knife, wood, fire	Any other animal

The argument has been made that surely instruments are allowed in the worship service today because they were used in the Old Testament. Actually, instruments were never part of the pattern given to Moses. Trumpets were used to announce the beginning of feasts and Sabbaths, but instruments in the Old Testament worship service were never

commanded by the Lord. David wrote in the Psalms about praising the Lord with various instruments and was the first to bring instruments into the worship service. No doubt, a person who has a natural talent in the field of music should use that talent in a God-honoring and beneficial way. We have to distinguish between the activities we carry out within the worship service and those in which we participate outside the service. Only created human beings, in possession of a soul, heart, mind and spirit, are able to truly worship God. All of creation is capable of praising God simply by its existence. Man-made instruments are capable of being used to praise God; only human beings can worship the Lord. Surely this was part of the intended design of the New Testament Church, where God seeks those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. We must also take note of the fact that every time the Bible speaks of instruments being commanded, it specifically says those commands came from David. In fact, in Amos chapter 6, God speaks of David having invented those instruments unto himself. Any time something new is introduced, even with the best of motivations, human tendency is to shift the focus to the emotions and feelings inspired by that new invention, rather than the object of worship for which it was intended.

Let us see and appreciate the beauty of the pattern given to us in the New Testament, a pattern designed by God; a pattern that is to be pure and simple, giving all people the same opportunity to participate in every aspect of worship, as a congregation, to His glory alone, without the inventions of men. “By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”

Additional Notes:

- The first appearance of instrumental music in church worship came in the 6th century, was not in general use until the 8th century, and resisted by most Baptist congregations until the 18th century, perhaps even until the 19th century in America
- John Calvin said, “musical instruments in celebrating the praise of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, the restoration of the other shadows of the law”
- John Wesley stated, “I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen”
- Charles Spurgeon, Baptist preacher for 20 years at the Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle, a congregation of thousands, preached against and did not allow instrumental music
- Martin Luther called the organ and ensign of Baal
- Adam Clarke, Methodist commentator, said, “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 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”