

Free! Take one!

That They all May Be One



John 17:21

Chapter four
Instrumental music

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Instrumental Music

Singing

In our day singing with musical instruments is common place. Most religious groups today use a variety of musical instruments in their worship services, but in the beginning of Christianity things were quite different. Christians originally sang their praises to God without musical instruments. This type of singing is commonly referred to as *a cappella* singing. Musical instruments were not added to Christian worship until sometime after 650 A.D.

The Restoration

When the leaders of the restoration movement looked to the New Testament to see what to do about instrumental music they found no record of it in the New Testament. The Christians of the first century and for several hundred years to follow sang without instrumental music. The leaders of the restoration realized that if true New Testament Christianity was going to be restored, then musical instruments would have to be removed from their worship.

Many people today view our practice of singing without musical instruments as rather odd. They often become defensive when they learn that we believe it is wrong to use musical instruments in worship. To defend their use of musical instruments they come up with a variety of arguments. In this chapter we will look at their arguments. We will see whether or not they have a reliable basis for adding musical instruments to their worship.

But David...

Perhaps the most common defense made in favor of musical instruments is an appeal to David's Old Testament use of musical instruments. Psalms 150 is a popular reference to show the Old Testament use of musical instruments in worship.

- 1 *Praise the Lord!*
Praise God in His sanctuary;
Praise God in His mighty firmament!
- 2 *Praise Him for His mighty acts;*
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!
- 3 *Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;*
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
- 4 *Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;*
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
- 5 *Praise Him with loud cymbals;*
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!
- 6 *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.*
Praise the Lord!

It is absolutely true that David worshipped God with musical instruments. No one can deny this Biblical fact. It is also true that David worshipped God under the direction of the Levitical priesthood. His day of worship was Saturday, his worship ceremonies included animal sacrifices, and he was regulated by various dietary laws. Verse 4 of Psalm 150 also included dance as an acceptable part of Old Testament worship.

David lived and worshipped under the Mosaic system that ended with the beginning of Christianity. The Old Testament, while valuable to us in many ways, is not a buffet line from which we can select whatever items we like and add them to Christianity. We do not follow the Law of Moses, we follow Jesus. Jesus is our leader. He has all authority

(Matthew 28:20). Those who appeal to David as their authority for using musical instruments are appealing to the wrong leader.

It is also important to notice that David did not presume to add musical instruments on his own authority. The Bible tells us that God commanded musical instruments to be used in the Old Testament.

And he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets (II Chronicles 29:25).

David was directly commanded by God to use musical instruments under the Law of Moses. David did not presume upon his own authority to add musical instruments to the worship of God. He was commanded to use musical instruments. David did not have the option of not using musical instruments.

When the leaders of the restoration movement looked for a similar command or authorization in the New Testament, they found none. Christians were neither commanded nor authorized to use musical instruments in their worship. The leaders of the restoration movement did not dare presume upon their own authority to add musical instruments to God's New Testament pattern. They would no more dare to add the Old Testament musical instruments than they would presume to add the Levitical priesthood, new moon festivals, or Sabbath regulations.

It is also important to notice that in II Chronicles 29:25, not just any body could play musical instruments in the worship service. The text clearly states that David,

...stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment.

The Levites were the ones specifically assigned this duty. The use of musical instruments under the Old Law was not like the common modern practice where any member who desires can make arrangements to play an instrument or sing a song. The use of musical instruments in the worship was limited to the Levites. The popular modern practice of having a solo or quartet entertain the audience is not what the Jews practiced under the direction of the Levites. The popular modern practice is not authorized by the Old Testament or the New Testament.

Those who appeal to David as their authority for adding musical instruments to their worship need to consider also the attitude David expressed in Psalms 19:13,

*Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins;
Let them not have dominion over me.
Then I shall be blameless,
And I shall be innocent of great transgression.*

God Doesn't Care

Another argument that is commonly put forward is that God doesn't care whether man adds musical instruments or not. It is surprising that anyone would make this argument given the fact that the Bible clearly warns against making any changes in the Biblical pattern. This casual attitude that would tinker around with God's divine pattern is condemned beyond question. Consider the following verses.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to

you than what you have received, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:6-9). How could anyone advocate making changes in the light of this passage?

Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it (Galatians 3:15). The covenant of the New Testament has been confirmed by the blood of Christ. We dare not tamper with that divine covenant.

Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or epistle (II Thessalonians 2:15). It is clear from this verse that God intended for the pattern of New Testament Christianity to continue on unchanged. The leaders of the restoration movement chose to respect this divine teaching. They removed musical instruments from their worship and thus restored the original *a cappella* tradition.

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Revelation 22:18,19). In the light of these two verses it is rather astounding that anyone would approach the Scriptures with a cavalier attitude and make changes to suit themselves. Such changes are clearly forbidden.

The Christians of the first century under the teaching of the apostles sang *a cappella*. Christians continued to respect this practice for several hundred years. This is an undisputed historical fact. Even historians who worship with musical instruments agree that in the beginning of Christianity musical instruments were not used. Musical instruments were available to the Christians of the first century, yet

musical instruments were not used. (I encourage you to verify the historical facts for yourself by referring to Shaff's History of Christianity, or the Americana Encyclopedia, or the Encyclopedia of Britannica, or any other historical material available to you through your local library.)

The argument that God does not care is a careless and dangerous argument. It directly contradicts the Bible. It provides absolutely no Biblical basis for the use of musical instruments.

But It Doesn't Say That You Can't

It is true that the New Testament does not specifically state *Thou shall not play musical instruments in thy worship to God*. But, the New Testament **does specifically state** that we are not to add to or take away from the Word (Rev. 22:18,19). It **does specifically state** that we are to stand fast and hold the traditions just as we were taught "*whether by word or our epistle*" (II Thess. 2:15). The absence of a specific prohibition against musical instruments does not automatically authorize musical instruments. God has told us what He desires. Our duty is to respect His will without assuming that He also desires something else in addition to what He said.

Those people who insist that a specific prohibition must be given before something is wrong, would turn the Bible into an impossible monstrosity. Can you imagine how many volumes it would take to specifically list everything that is not allowed? The depth of detailed required to assure that someone did not presume to find a loophole would be mind boggling. Fortunately, God did not pursue such an overwhelming course. He simply told us what He wanted and then told us to, "*stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or epistle*" (II Thessalonians 2:15).

If everything that is not specifically forbidden is allowable, then II Thessalonians 2:15 is essentially meaningless. Consider the Lord's

Supper. It is observed using unleavened bread and grape juice. This is our Christian tradition as taught in Matthew 26:26-30. There is never a specific statement in the Bible that say we can't use something else in the Lord's Supper. There is not a prohibition against using cookies and soda pop in the Lord's Supper. According to the *But It Doesn't Say That You Can't* argument we must conclude that cookies and soda pop are acceptable because there is no specific prohibition against cookies and soda pop. Once this way of thinking is accepted, then the door is open to absolutely any change that men desire, and II Thessalonians 2:15 means nothing. Most people will reject the *But It Doesn't Say That You Can't* argument in connection with the Lord's Supper, but gladly receive it as their authority for using musical instruments.

Let's approach it from another angle. Imagine that you are taking a sewing class and the teacher gives you a shirt pattern. Your assignment is to make a shirt according to that pattern. Let's suppose that along the way you decide that two pockets on the shirt would be much better than just the one pocket that the pattern calls for, and so you add another pocket. Will the teacher be pleased? That depends on the teacher. Some teachers might give you extra credit for being creative. Some teachers will take away points because you did not follow the pattern. In Christianity the New Testament is our pattern. God has clearly told us how He will judge anyone who makes changes in His pattern (Rev. 22:18,19; II John 9-11; Gal. 1:6-9; 3:15). We are not at liberty to change the pattern that God has provided.

Perhaps you are thinking that if we had a direct statement forbidding musical instruments, then the matter would be easier to settle. Actually, a direct statement would not settled the matter. If the New Testament specifically said, *Thou shall not use musical instruments in worship*, we would still have to deal with this issue. The problem is that people ignore the direct statements of the Bible. The Bible directly states that *baptism doth also now save thee* (I Peter 3:21), and yet many deny this truth. The Bible directly states that homosexuality is wrong (I Cor. 6:9),

and yet more and more religious people are denying this truth. The Bible directly states that women are not to teach over men (II Tim. 2:12) and yet many deny this truth. So, if we had a direct statement forbidding musical instruments, we would still have to study and defend the *a cappella* tradition.

The fact is that musical instruments are not in the New Testament pattern. A specific prohibition is not required to exclude musical instruments from the pattern. For over six hundred years this aspect of the pattern was respected even though the Bible did not specifically forbid musical instruments during this time. The leaders of the restoration movement realized that musical instruments were an unauthorized addition. They also knew that it did not matter how long ago man had made this change, musical instruments had to be removed if the Biblical pattern was to be truly respected.

Greek Scholars Say It's OK

Chances are that you are not a Greek scholar. Chances are that you are not even a student of the Greek language. If you were, it still would not resolve the instrumental music question. There are Greek scholars and students on both sides of the debate. So, what do we do? Let's do what the restorations leaders suggested, let's use Bible words in Bible ways. This will provide us with a solid and irrefutable answer that not even a Greek scholar can argue against.

The apostles and first century Christians are the absolute best experts on the New Testament Greek. They spoke and wrote the language. It was a part of their daily life. So, when they heard or read,

Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to

the Lord (Ephesians 5:19).

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 (Colossians 3:16).

What did they do when they heard these verses? Did they gather musical instruments to play in worship? Or, did they worship God without musical instruments? The people who spoke, wrote, and lived in the language of the New Testament listened to the apostle's teaching and then sang without musical instruments. The Greek can be just this easy to understand if we will let it.

When we ask, what did they do? The answers are usually fairly easy to find. But when we ask, what will we do? That is when the arguing and debating begins. To answer the question, what will we do? I simply suggest that we, "*stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or epistle*" (II Thessalonians 2:15).

God's Plan of Salvation

Hear the Gospel: Romans 10:14-17

Believe: John 3:16; Hebrews 11:6

Repent: Luke 13:3, Acts 17:30,31

Confess: Romans 10:9,10; Matthew 10:32,33

Be united with Christ in baptism: Romans 6:3-5

None of the above steps save in and of themselves. It is the grace of God that appointed these as steps leading to the saving blood of Jesus. To get to the saving blood each step must be taken just as it is presented in the Bible. These steps only have value because God's grace has so granted. Without God's grace these steps would be worthless. Have you followed these steps to the saving blood of Jesus?

It's Just an Aid

An true aid would not change the original *a cappella* singing into something else. For example, whether you sing from memory or use the aid of a song book, you still sing *a cappella*. Whether you pitch a song from memory or from a pitch pipe, you still sing *a cappella*. An aid does not add to or change God's pattern. It is obvious that a piano is not merely an aid like a song book or pitch pipe. When musical instruments are played, then something has been added to the worship and the original *a cappella* style of singing is changed.

Let's look at what the Bible says about musical instruments in worship. Let's see if the Bible say instruments are just an aid or a part of the worship. We will start with Psalms 150.

- 1 *Praise the Lord!*
Praise God in His sanctuary;
Praise God in His mighty firmament!
- 2 *Praise Him for His mighty acts;*
Praise Him according to His excellent greatness!
- 3 *Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet;*
Praise Him with the lute and harp!
- 4 *Praise Him with the timbrel and dance;*
Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes!
- 5 *Praise Him with loud cymbals;*
Praise Him with clashing cymbals!
- 6 *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.*
Praise the Lord!

In this Psalm we see that musical instruments are not merely aids, but rather a part of the worship.

Next, let's consider II Chronicles 29:25-28,

And he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets. The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord also began, with the trumpets and with the instruments of David king of Israel. So all the assembly worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished.

In this passage we see that *all the assembly worshiped*. The musical instruments were not merely an optional aid, but were actually part of the Old Testament worship *for thus was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets*.

In the eyes of God musical instruments are not just an insignificant detail. When God desired instrumental music He made His desire clearly known. We believe that if He wanted to carry that Old Testament practice over into New Testament worship, He would have likewise make His desire clearly known. We dare not presume to add musical instruments based upon our own wisdom and authority.

The Jewish converts of the first century knew better than to just assume that God would accept musical instruments in their worship. They had the example of Nadab and Abihu as a warning to those who would dare make changes in God's pattern. The account of Nadab and Abihu is as follows,

Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them. So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the Lord

(Leviticus 10:1,2).

The thing that Nadab and Abihu thought was just a small matter that they could take some liberty with, cost them their life.

For over six hundred years Christians respected the New Testament pattern and sang without using musical instruments. They simply offered God the melody of their hearts (Eph. 5:19) and the fruit of their lips (Hebrews 13:15). We believe this same New Testament practice should still be respected today.

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But the Angels have Harps

In Revelations 14:2 John records, “...*And I heard the voice of harpists playing their harps.*” If there are musical instruments in heaven, then that is fine. There were musical instruments in the Old Testament, and so if God puts them in heaven, we will certainly not oppose Him, but we are not currently in heaven.

If everything that is in the book of Revelation is suppose to be a part of our Christian worship, then things are really going to change. According to this logic Christians should add writing the Father’s name on their foreheads to their worship (Rev. 14:1). We should add an altar to our worship (Rev. 6:9). There should be fire on the altar (Rev. 8:5). We should have a golden censer (Rev. 8:3). And, we should have incense (Rev. 8:4). If the mention of harps in Revelation 14:2 proves that God wants us to musical instruments, then the mention of these other things proves God wants us to use them also. Obviously, we must be careful about conclusions we draw from the book of Revelation. We must also ask, why didn’t the apostles and first century Christians understand from Revelation 14:2 that God wanted them to use musical instruments?

What Will We Do?

This issue is not an unsolvable mystery. Understanding the New Testament pattern is actually rather easy to do. When we ask, what did they do? The answers are fairly simply to find. In fact, there is complete agreement among scholars that Christianity began *a cappella* and remained *a cappella* for several hundred years. Controversy doesn’t get stirred up until we ask, what will we do? That is when people start

getting defensive and creating arguments to defend their man-made tradition. The Bible answer to the question, what will we do? is found in II Thess. 2:15 where Paul wrote, *Stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle.*

These simple facts stand undisputed

The church of Christ began *a cappella*.

It remained *a cappella* for over six hundred years.

We are clearly taught not to add to or take away from God's word (Revelation 22:18,19).

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COMING NEXT MONTH

That They all May Be One



Chapter five

Once Saved, always saved?

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