

Musical Instruments in the Church

“Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you.”

Deuteronomy 4:2

“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

Matthew 28:20

Introduction:

1. This is a great subject to test your faith to submit to Scripture against feelings and modern tradition.
2. It is a fact of church history that musical instruments and spirituality have an inverse relationship.
3. Musical instruments make a lifeless sound that affects the body to replace true spiritual worship.
4. We probably listen to more instrumental Christian music per person than any other church we know, but we do it in private rather than in the house of God, when and where we are worshipping God.
5. We love musical instruments and the pleasure they bring, and we respect their considerable power.
6. This practical issue is very plain, and was always considered plain, when Bible study is understood.
7. As a church, we have plenty of funds to buy instruments and qualified musicians to play them.
8. We love to praise the Lord Jesus Christ by song as much as any church we have encountered.
9. But we also are committed to apostolic religion based on solid authority from plain Bible precepts.

Music in General:

1. Cain’s grandson, Jubal, is listed in the human family tree as the father of musicians (Genesis 4:21).
2. David invented musical instruments for the worship of God (II Chron 7:6; Neh 12:36; Amos 6:5).
3. Nebuchadnezzar used musical instruments in the worship of his golden image (Daniel 3:5,7,10,15).
4. The Bible does not say anything for or against instrumental music at home, so we allow it as liberty.
5. We have pianos at home, pay for piano lessons, listen to instrumental accompaniment to hymns, etc.
6. Instrumental music can be very beautiful and enjoyable, but this is totally irrelevant to the point.
7. Handel’s “Messiah” has to be one of the most beautiful works of praise to God known among men.
8. The popular music of the world can be measured by its fruit – it is anti-Christ and anti-authority.
9. The psychology of instrumental music is important for us to understand indirect consequences of it.
 - a. **Psychology.** The science of the nature, functions, and phenomena of man’s soul or mind.
 - b. Music has a definite and significant affect on men (Exodus 32:17-18; I Sam 16:23; Dan 6:18).
10. The practical effects and consequences of musical instruments should be kept in mind by wise men.
 - a. Music creates feelings and moods, which are often misinterpreted for the Holy Spirit of God.
 - b. Marches prepare men for battle; dirges prepare men for funerals; rock prepares men for sex.
 - c. Where do you stop with musical instruments: instrumental solos, orchestras, and rock bands?
11. The actual nature of instrumental music should be wisely considered, compared, and analyzed.
 - a. Instrumental music is carnal and appeals to natural man (Heb 9:10; I Cor 14:6-9; II Cor 4:18).
 - b. Instrumental music cannot communicate understanding or knowledge (I Corinthians 14:15-26).

Bible Authority:

1. Any idea or opinion contrary to the Word of God indicates a total lack of understanding (Is 8:20).
2. David counted all God’s precepts about all things to be right and hated everything else (Ps 119:128).
3. The Pastoral Epistles were given to show the minister of God how to behave in church (I Tim 3:15).
4. God inspired all Scripture to make the minister of God perfect in all good works (II Tim 3:16-17).
5. The only tradition to be accepted in the New Testament is pure apostolic tradition (II Thess 2:15).

6. All things in the New Testament church are to be done decently and in apostolic order (I Cor 14:40).
7. We are commanded to follow apostolic tradition and reject any contrary action as sin (II Thess 3:6).

Bible Examples:

1. Cain offered a beautiful sacrifice to the right God at the right time, but it was rejected (Gen 4:3-5).
2. Nadab and Abihu were the right priests at the right place for the right God, but died (Lev 10:1-2).
3. Moses used God's rod on God's rock and got great results, but he was rejected (Numbers 20:7-13).
4. Saul saved the best of the animals to sacrifice to the LORD, but he was rejected (I Sam 15:22-23).
5. David moved the Ark of the Covenant with great zeal and joy, but he was rejected (I Chron 15:13).

Old Testament Music:

1. David used many musical instruments moving the Ark of the Covenant, including instruments of fir wood, harps, psalteries, timbrels, cornets, and cymbals (II Sam 6:5).
2. The worship of God in the tabernacle did not use any musical instruments.
3. The use of musical instruments were by commandment (Nehemiah 12:36; II Chron 7:6; 29:25-26).
4. The musical instruments used in the temple were appointed by God (I Chronicles 16:42).
5. Musical instruments were used apart from worship for national celebration (I Samuel 18:6).

New Testament Music:

1. We should first consider every reference in the New Testament to any form of music in worship.
 - a. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives* (Matthew 26:30).
 - b. *And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives* (Mark 14:26).
 - c. *And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God* (Acts 16:25).
 - d. *For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name* (Rom 15:9).
 - e. *I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also* (I Cor 14:15).
 - f. *Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord* (Eph 5:19).
 - g. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord* (Co 3:16).
 - h. *In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee* (Heb 2:12).
 - i. *Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms* (James 5:13).
2. Every occurrence of music in the gospel and epistles of the New Testament church describe singing.
 - a. This is the direct result of being filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 5:18).
 - b. The singing results in speaking, teaching, and admonishing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
 - c. The chief melody is generated internally by a heart walking with God, not a mechanical piano.
 - d. The singing was to consist of singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16).
 - e. Psalms are those short pieces of Hebrew poetry in the book of Psalms (Acts 1:20; James 5:13).
 - f. Hymns are songs of praise to God adapted to be sung in a religious service, directed to the Lord.
 - g. Spiritual songs are any other spiritual song about our religion not fitting the above definitions.
 - h. We reject the Presbyterian idea that all three words are merely redundant references to psalmody.
 - i. The Scottish Psalter of 1650 assists singing KJV psalms to English common meter tunes.
 - j. Singing "Happy Birthday," "The Star Spangled Banner," and other such songs do not qualify.
 - k. The objective is to do everything with the understanding (I Corinthians 14:15-16).
 - l. Instrumental music and extreme vibrato singing are in the same category as unknown tongues.
 - m. The outlet for a merry heart now is to sing psalms (James 5:13; I Corinthians 14:26).
3. The Old Testament has many references to musical instruments, but the New Testament has none.
4. The Old Testament identifies the difference between singing and playing, but the N.T. states singing.

5. The Old Testament lists many kinds of musical instruments, who invented them, and who played them; but the New Testament is totally silent as to any reference to all three of these factors.
6. Instrumental music is strictly incompatible with the nature of the New Testament worship of God.
 - a. Jesus told the woman of Samaria that worship was changing from the carnal, sensual, outward worship of the Old Testament to an internal, spiritual worship of God in truth (John 4:20-24).
 - b. A reformation took place between AD 30 and AD 70, dropping the beggarly and carnal elements of the Old Testament that were mere childish shadows of the true (Heb 9:10; Gal 4:9).
 - c. If you must pray and sing with the spirit and understanding, how will you bang on a piano with both the spirit and understanding (I Cor 14:15)? The ignorant noises of the 88 keys use neither!
 - d. If we can fulfill singing by playing a machine (piano, organ, or other instrument), we can also fulfill praying by playing a machine (tape recorder)!
 - e. The Old Testament ceremonial law had “weak and beggarly” elements in comparison (Gal 4:9).
 - f. The O.T. was external and visible; the N.T. is internal and invisible (Luke 17:20; Rom 14:17).
 - g. The O.T. was carnal work by carnal men; the N.T. spiritual work by spiritual men (Eph 5:18-19).
 - h. The O.T. was carnal and sensual; the N.T. is spiritual and internal (Heb 7:16; 9:10; Gal 3:3).
 - i. The O.T. was complex and ritualistic; the N.T. is simplistic and sincere (II Cor 11:3; 1:12).
 - j. Paul taught against ceremonial practices of the law and temple (Ac 21:28; 6:13-14; Col 2:14-16).
 - k. Since Christ stopped the ceremonial customs, why didn’t He salvage musical instruments?

The Bible a Complete System:

1. The Holy Scriptures provide a complete system of religion denying manmade additions or deletions.
 - a. God may command things, prohibit things, or leave things to our own liberty and judgment.
 - b. If God commands something, we do precisely what is commanded without any additions.
 - c. If God prohibits something, we strictly avoid anything related to the thing or things forbidden.
 - d. If God leaves something to our choice, we neither require nor prohibit that thing as religious law.
 - e. God teaches this rule by way of specific precept (Deuteronomy 4:2; 5:32; 12:32; Matt 28:20).
 - f. In Matt 28:20, Jesus condemned taking from His Word: “Teaching them to observe all things.”
 - g. He condemned adding to it: “Teaching them to observe... whatsoever I have commanded you.”
 - h. Inspired Scripture is enough by itself to thoroughly perfect the minister of God (II Tim 3:16-17).
2. The argument from silence is invalid. A positive Bible command negatively prohibits anything else.
 - a. This is the logical fallacy of “burden of proof” or “appeal to ignorance.” It goes like this: since you cannot show me that God specifically condemns musical instruments, then they are allowed.
 - b. Some argue from Bible silence: if the Bible does not condemn it, then we are allowed to do it.
 - c. Really? God did not condemn Coke and chips at communion. Should we try it? Such a use of the Bible creates interpretational folly and leads to the perversion of what God intended and wrote.
 - d. Really? Baptism involves water. And God didn’t condemn squirt gun fights for baptism. Would a squirt gun fight be good enough, as long as everyone got a little wet? Presbyterians think so!
 - e. Allowing anything the Bible does not specifically condemn would open every sort of invention.
 - f. God teaches this rule by at least two plain examples in the Scriptures (Heb 7:13-14; Mat 12:3-4).
 - g. Why could not a man from Judah be a priest? The Bible excluded the tribe of Judah by making a positive command for the tribe of Levi. God did not have to specifically deny Judah.
 - h. Why couldn’t David lawfully eat the shewbread? The Bible excluded others from the shewbread by a positive commandment for the Levites. God did not have to specifically deny David.
 - i. God does not have to condemn every option; a positive command is to be obeyed exclusively.
3. This fundamental and plain fact of Scripture was enforced severely by direct judgment from God.
 - a. Cain brought an offering at the right time to the right place to the LORD, but God rejected his sacrifice in spite of intentions (Gen 4:3-5). How did God prohibit bringing fruit of the ground?

- b. Nadab and Abihu, lawful priests, brought incense at the right time to the right place to the LORD, but God rejected their service, because they offered a new kind of incense (Lev 10:1-7).
 - c. Moses, a very faithful man, using God's rod, smote the right rock at the right time at the Lord's command with great results, but he did not speak as God had commanded him (Num 20:7-13). We cannot modify part of a commandment and think that we are keeping it. God judged him!
 - d. Saul preserved the best of the Amalekites' animals alive for sacrifice to the LORD, which was a noble motive; but God seeks obedience much more than sacrifice (I Samuel 15:13-23).
 - e. David, the man after God's own heart, rejoiced with great zeal to move the Ark of the covenant for the LORD; and he even used a new cart to transport it (II Sam 6:1-10). But God killed a man for not following the due order, which was clearly known by a positive command (I Chr 15:13).
4. There are other names for this rule of Bible interpretation in the precise defining of commandments.
- a. The reformed daughters of Rome call this rule of Scriptural authority the "Regulative Principle."
 - b. Others call it the "argument from silence," meaning that Scripture's silence is an argument itself, which is correct, if you follow their improper use of reasoning terminology. But this contradicts the general usage of the expression, which falsely allows anything not condemned or proven.

The Doctrine of Circumstances:

1. **Circumstances.** The logical surroundings or 'adjuncts' of an action; the time, place, manner, cause, occasion, etc., amid which it takes place.
2. The doctrine of circumstances distinguishes between aids and additions in keeping God's precepts.
 - a. Circumstances not affecting the nature or character of a commandment are things allowed.
 - b. Conditions or means for proper performance of a command do not alter the performance.
 - c. An "aid" assists in keeping commandments without any modification of the commandment.
 - d. An "addition" is a modifying change to the substance and character of God's commandment.
 - e. Consider the result of what is done. Has anything been added? Or is a precise law easier to keep?
 - f. Noah was told to build an ark of gopher wood (Gen 6:14). While a hammer, saw, and glue are simple aids to this command, using spruce or cedar would be an addition and obvious change.
 - g. The Jews were told to use a lamb or kid in the Passover. While a fork and knife would be aids, a young pig would be an addition and change. How did God prohibit pigs? By requiring a lamb!
 - h. We are told to eat bread in the Lord's Supper. Consider the difference between passing the bread on a plate and using turkey sandwiches. One simply assists the precept, and the other changes it.
 - i. We are told to take a collection in the New Testament. Consider the difference between a collection plate or box in the back and fees to participate in the communion service.
 - j. We are told to assemble. Listening to tapes violates the precept; sitting on chairs only assists it; a roof to protect from rain only assists it; a time to meet only assists it; restrooms only assist it.
 - k. We are told to sing in the N.T. Consider the difference between using a hymnal to assist our singing and an orchestra to accompany our singing. Musical instruments are condemned by the positive command to sing, for they alter the music from singing to playing and singing.
3. There are other names for this obvious fact of interpretation and application of God's precepts.
 - a. It is described as the rule of things indifferent, for they make no difference in the commandment.
 - b. Or it may be called the "doctrine of circumstances," for it helps define the irrelevant circumstances of keeping a commandment.

Musical Instruments in History:

1. The Scriptures provide quite a few examples of musical instruments associated with false religion.
 - a. The descendants of Cain were the first proficient instrumental musicians (Genesis 4:21).
 - b. Israel's wickedness was associated with "excellency" and instrumental music (Amos 6:5,8).

- c. Nebuchadnezzar used instrumental music in the worship of his golden image (Daniel 3:5-7).
- d. Roman Catholicism (the Great Whore) is associated with instrumental music (Revelation 18:22).
- 2. Historically there is not much evidence of instrumental music prior to the late 13th Century (1200s).
 - a. The Roman Catholics had not even initiated this practice in their churches as of this late date.
 - b. The Puritans and reformers almost without exception considered it mere popish Judaizing.
 - c. Charles Spurgeon, a Baptist, revered by so many today, did not use a musical instrument.

Musical Observations:

1. Observation of religion today in America tells us much about instrumental music and its results.
2. As instrumental music and other carnal inventions increased, doctrine and holiness have declined.
3. The churches with the greatest emphasis on instrumental music are the weakest in Bible doctrine.
4. Women make the most fuss over preserving instrumental music (I Tim 2:14; I Pet 3:7; II Tim 3:5-7).
5. God prefers judgment and righteousness, as opposed to melody and songs (Amos 5:23-24).
6. As the Holy Spirit was withdrawn from churches, they filled the void with musical instrumentation.

Objections:

1. ***But ... musical instruments are plainly and often taught in the psalms and other Bible passages.***
 - a. Yes, they are. But God's approval for a certain time, place, and situation, does not apply to all.
 - b. The ceremonial law and things pertaining to it was ended (Luk 16:16; Col 2:16-17; Heb 9:1-10).
 - c. The argument from the Old Testament form of worship proves far too much to be logically valid.
 - d. If the music aspects of the Law still apply, why don't burnt offerings, priests, tests of jealousy, shewbread, polygamy, candelabras, scapegoats, brass serpents, pots of manna, Urim and Thummim, dancing, etc., etc?
 - e. If you want the Old Testament, you need to buy the whole church pipes for piping (I Kgs 1:40).
 - f. Psalm 150 is the classic example: WHERE should we DANCE with our CYMBALS? The problem today is that most contemporary churches would say, "Right here under the lights, bro!"
 - g. Psalm 81 is another classic: Should we blow our trumpets in the new moon (Colossians 2:16)?
2. ***But ... musical instruments assist us to do all things decently and in order (I Corinthians 14:40).***
 - a. This is first of all a subjective opinion, and it is contrary to God's revealed will in the matter.
 - b. For 1800 years God's saints did not consider instruments necessary to good apostolic order.
 - c. Paul's command was for all things to edify and comply, not to be fine or excellent to the world.
 - d. Fair parties hearing both will recognize greater order without clanging and banging instruments.
3. ***But ... the Bible includes musical instruments in the definition of singing (II Chronicles 30:21).***
 - a. Going here seems to miss that some men could be singing while others played, or that men were playing instruments by hand (as cymbals) while singing. Stevie Wonder can do both while blind!
 - b. Going here may miss the right use of the word "with," as in James 2:1. It means "in addition to."
 - c. The Bible distinguishes singing and playing as separate actions (Psalm 68:25; 87:7; etc.).
4. ***But ... instrumental music will accompany the singing in heaven (Revelation 5:8; 14:2-3; 15:2).***
 - a. This argument, like many before it, if it proves anything, proves too much to be logically valid.
 - b. Should we immediately cease marrying, since they do not marry in heaven (Matthew 22:30)?
 - c. Where are we instructed to look to heavenly practices to guide our behavior on earth?
5. ***But ... we ought to dedicate and use every talent we have to the worship of God (Matt 25:14-30).***
 - e. Observe again how an erroneous argument will always prove far too much for valid use.
 - f. Where does the argument stop? Should sculptors create statues for the public worship?
 - g. Should jugglers try juggling Bible or communion cups? This argument is a foolish question.
6. ***But ... the Bible does not condemn or prohibit musical instruments in New Testament worship.***
 - a. This objection depends completely on the argument from silence, which is invalid in Scripture.

- b. A positive command of God excludes any modification, addition, or subtraction from that rule.
 - c. Where do we stop? If anything not expressly forbidden is allowed, we can do most anything.
 - d. The Bible does not say we cannot use Coke and chips for the Lord's Supper. Shall we try it?
 - e. Remember the severe punishment of those who modified God's worship in the Old Testament.
 - f. Where does this approach stop? May we add to God's commandments whatever we please?
7. ***But ... it is a matter of liberty, and it is left to our individual opinion (Rom 14:4-6; I Cor 10:23).***
- a. Does the law of liberty leave God's commandments to the judgment of each individual man?
 - b. Bible liberty frees us from the commandments of men and judgment of things indifferent; it does not allow us freedom to alter or modify God's commandments as we see fit. God forbid!
 - c. Remember those in the Old Testament, who took liberty in worshipping God (I Cor 10:11).
8. ***But ... it is one of those circumstances that "aids" and does not affect the nature of the singing.***
- a. If they cannot think of any other argument, they might use our own about "aids" and "additions."
 - b. This objection compares instruments with hymnbooks, sermon notes, meeting places, pews, etc.
 - c. Playing is not singing, and it changes the specified form of worship (Psalm 68:25; 87:7; etc.).
 - d. Instruments cannot sing, speak, teach, admonish, nor use Christ's word (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16).

Historical Positions:

CALVIN, John (1509-1564; Presbyterian). "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists therefore, have foolishly borrowed, this, as well as many other things, from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostles is far more pleasing to him. Paul allows us to bless God in the public assembly of the saints, only in a known tongue (I Cor. 14:16). What shall we then say of chanting, which fills the ears with nothing but an empty sound?" (John Calvin, Commentary on Psalms 33)

CLARKE, Adam (1766-1832; Methodist). "I am an old man, and I here declare that I never knew them to be productive of any good in the worship of God, and have reason to believe that they are productive of much evil. Music as a science I esteem and admire, but instrumental music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music, and I here register my protest against all such corruption of the worship of the author of Christianity. The late and venerable and most eminent divine, the Rev. John Wesley, who was a lover of music, and an elegant poet, when asked his opinion of instruments of music being introduced into the chapels of the Methodists, said in his terse and powerful manner, 'I have no objections to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen.' I say the same."

"But were it even evident, which it is not, either from this or any other place in the sacred writings, that instruments of music were prescribed by divine authority under the law, could this be adduced with any semblance of reason, that they ought to be used in Christian worship? No; the whole spirit, soul, and genius of the Christian religion are against this; and those who know the Church of God best, and what constitutes its genuine spiritual state, know that these things have been introduced as a substitute for the life and power of religion; and that where they prevail most, there is least of the power of Christianity. Away with such portentous baubles from the worship of that infinite Spirit who requires His followers to worship Him in spirit and truth, for to no such worship are these instruments friendly."

GIRARDEAU, John (Presbyterian Professor and Historian of Music in the Church). "The church, although lapsing more and more into defection from the truth and into a corruption of apostolic practice, had no instrumental music for 1200 years" (that is, it was not in general use until that time).

LUTHER, Martin (1483-1546; Lutheran). He called "the organ an ensign of baal."

RITTER, Frederic Louis (History of Music from the Christian Era to the Present Time). "We have no real knowledge of the exact character of the music which formed a part of the religious devotion of the first Christian congregations. It was, however, purely vocal."

SPURGEON, Charles (1834-1892; Baptist). "Praise the Lord with the harp. Israel was at school, and used childish things to help her to learn; but in these days when Jesus gives us spiritual food, one can make melody without strings and pipes. We do not need them. They would hinder rather than help our praise. Sing unto him. This is the sweetest and best music. No instrument like the human voice." (Commentary on Psalms 42:4) "David appears to have had a peculiarly tender

remembrance of the singing of the pilgrims, and assuredly it is the most delightful part of worship and that which comes nearest to the adoration of heaven. What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettiness of a quartet, bellows, and pipes! We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it." (Spurgeon preached to 20,000 people every Sunday for 20 years in the Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle and never were mechanical instruments of music used in his services. When asked why, he quoted 1st Corinthians 14:15. "I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the understanding also; I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." He then declared: "I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery."

WESLEY, John (1703-1791; Methodist). "I have no objection to instruments of music in our worship, provided they are neither seen nor heard."

For Further Study:

Instrumental Music in Worship; Zack Guess, Primitive Baptist: <http://www.pb.org/pbdocs/music.html>.

A Capella; the simple gospel: <http://www.watchmanmag.com/0209/020910.htm>

Music in the New Testament: <http://www.focusmagazine.org/Articles/musicNT.htm>

Origin of Instrumental Music; M.C. Kurfees: <http://www.piney.com/MuKurfees.html>

Reformed presentation of the subject: <http://www.reformed.com/pub/music.htm>

Dabney on the subject: <http://www.gty.org/~phil/dabney/organs.htm>

Simple Bible study: http://www.ccel.org/contrib/exec_outlines/top/musicnt2.htm

History of Instrumental Music: <http://www.piney.com/MuHistor.html>