

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs, Worship 101

A Look at the Music of the New Testament Church

Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16

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The congregational music for Jesus' church was for many hundreds of years unquestionably vocal in character. The entire early church, as did most of the reformers (Calvin and Luther, etc.), and even relatively recent notables in church history (Wesley, Spurgeon, etc.) rejected instrumentation as inappropriate for the New Testament kind of worship. History, however, does not determine truth. What does the Bible say on the subject?

1. There is no command for the church to use instrumentation in congregational music
 - a. Silence prohibits (Heb. 7:11-14)
 - b. The "But the Bible doesn't forbid it" argument is among the most potentially disruptive notions in religion.
 - i. Doughnuts and coffee for Communion would be among the least of our worries
 - ii. Once the door is opened, the negative possibilities are endless
 - c. Scripture is needed before acceptable service can follow (II Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17)
 - d. The Old Covenant, where instruments were a prominent feature of corporate worship, gives a clear reason for their inclusion (II Chron. 29:25)
2. *yallw* (psallo), is there a demand to play an instrument found in the Greek word?
 - a. The original meaning was 'pluck, play' (a stringed instrument); this persisted at least to the time of Lucian (cp. Par. 17). In the LXX frequently means 'sing', whether to the accompaniment of an instrument (Ps 32:2, 97:5 al.) *or not, as is usually* the case (Ps 7:18; 9:12; 107:4 al.). This focus on singing continued until Mod. Gk. means 'sing' exclusively; cp. *yalthj* =singer, chanter, with no reference to instrumental accompaniment
 - b. *Although the NT does not voice explicit opposition to instrumental music, "make melody" is best understood in the Ephesians 5:19 passage Those who favor 'play' (e.g. L-S-JM; A Souter, Pocket Lexicon, 1920; J Moffatt, translation 1913) are relying too much on the earliest meaning. of yallw. W Smith, Musical Aspects of the NT, '62; H Seidel, TRE XXIII 441-46.-DELG*
 - c. Additionally, the instrument is named in Ephesians 5:19, if the older meaning of "plucked" is intended—the **heart**

3. What about instruments as an aid?
 - a. Instruments are a form of music, thus requiring their own separate authority
 - b. Unlike a true aid (authorized to facilitate biblical commands), when singing stops an instrument still makes music.
 - c. A technicality, yes, but no less true.
4. The “why” of the change
 - a. The New Covenant is a fulfillment of outward shadows (Heb. 8:4-5; 10:1-2)
 - b. From almost endless outward symbols, types, and shadows in the Old Covenant to only two outward forms in Christianity—baptism and the Lord’s Supper (Rom. 6:3-4; Matt. 26:26-29)
 - c. Maturity of religious expression with a greater emphasis on the heart
 - i. Galatians 4:1-7
 - ii. Galatians 3:23-29
 - iii. The place of the heart (I Cor. 11:27-28; II Cor. 9:7; I Pet. 2:21; Eph. 5:19)
 - iv. The “deadness” of an instrument (I Cor. 14:7)

There are no commands or inferences in the New Covenant to authorize instrumental accompaniment in the worship of the church. Church history dramatically supports this conclusion. Explicit statements, principles of study employed to determine inferences, linguistics, history, and theology have found no conclusive argument for instrumentation in church music. In contrast, all point to vocal music, unaccompanied save by the heart.