



## **“Innovations and the Divine Pattern”**

### **Part V: Instrumental Music**

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So many people incorporate instrumental music into their worship today that most take it for granted. But is it scriptural? That is, does God’s word authorize it? Did the early church use it or did they sing *a cappella*? Those are some of the questions I want us to investigate in our study today. Churches of Christ have long been known for NOT using mechanical instruments of music in worship. Why is that? Is there a Bible reason for that fact?

Over the past few weeks, we’ve been talking about innovations and the Bible pattern. God has always revealed His plan for worship to man, never leaving it to man to offer whatever kind of worship he pleased, so it matters what the Bible says about worship and how we worship. The apostle Paul said that all that we say and do must be *in the name of or by the authority of Jesus (Colossians 3:17)*. Paul also instructed the Ephesian brethren:

**Ephesians 5:19 “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,”**

What was Paul instructing us to do? Does that instruction include the use of a mechanical instrument of music? You may be surprised by the answers we find when we search the and scriptures together. Singing has been a hallmark of God’s people throughout history—Old and New Testaments. God’s people have always been a singing people. Music is a beautiful gift from God and is one of the most sincere expressions of the human soul. Through our singing, we praise God, we edify each other, and we express the deep feelings of our hearts toward God. Music can be an outpouring of joy or a solace in our sorrows, as well as an encouragement in our endeavors for the Lord. Therefore, it is given a place of great prominence in our spiritual lives and in the work of the church. But we should note that every time singing is mentioned in the New Testament, there is no mention of anything except singing. There is not one word in the New Testament that would authorize or encourage the use of the mechanical

instruments in the worship of the church. In fact, it doesn't take very long to read every New Testament passage that says anything about the disciples of Christ singing. Let's just do that very quickly. When the disciples had their final meeting with Jesus before His crucifixion, He instituted the Lord's Supper and the scripture tells us this:

**Matthew 26:30** "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

**Acts 16:25** "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God..."

**Romans 15:9** "...I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name."

**I Corinthians 14:15** "...I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also."

**I Corinthians 14:26** "...when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm..."

**Ephesians 5:19** "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;"

**Colossians 3:16** "...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

**Hebrews 2:12** "...in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee."

**James 5:13** "...Is any merry? let him sing psalms."

The absence of instrumental music from all those passages is rather conspicuous. After all, instruments had been around for hundreds upon hundreds of years when the church was established and the New Testament was written. Yet, the New Testament record of the early church NEVER mentions them being used in the worship of the church—not even one time. Have you ever stopped to wonder where their use originated in the work and worship of the church? It wasn't among the disciples of the first century. So, if they didn't come from the New Testament, where did they come from?

Believe it or not, it was more than 630 years after the Lord established the church before mechanical instruments made their way into the worship. You have a 600+ years period of time where the church did not use them. When they finally made their appearance, they did so under a great cloud of controversy. It doesn't take a great deal of research to find that they were first proposed by the roman catholic church and pope Vitalian I in southern Europe in about the year 670. Then it was removed for a while because it threatened to divide the catholic church, but it was finally reintroduced about 100 years later. As a result, the Greek Orthodox church refused it, and by the way still refuses it today.

Some historians argue that it was hundreds of years after that before the practice was commonly accepted throughout the world. In fact, Thomas Aquinas was a priest in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and he said, "Our church does not use musical instruments as harps and psalteries to praise God withal, though she may not seem to Judaize." In other words, mechanical instruments belonged to the era of the Jewish temple and many religious leaders opposed them in their churches, even after some roman catholic churches adopted them. Later, during the Reformation era, instrumental music didn't find a lot of sympathizers among the leading theologians of that time. In fact, it may surprise you to hear what some of the founders of modern-day denominations which now embrace instrumental music thought about it at the time.

In his commentary on the **33<sup>rd</sup> Psalm**, John Calvin, the Protestant Reformer and one of the precursors of the Presbyterian church, said, "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law." According to Calvin's conclusion, there would be just as much authority for burnt offerings and sacrifices and other practices of the Old Testament law as for the use of mechanical music in Christian worship.

John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist church and according to Adam Clarke's commentary, when Mr. Wesley was asked about the use of instrumental music in worship, he replied, "I have no opposition to the organ in our chapel, provided it is neither seen nor heard." Adam Clarke himself was a Methodist and one of the most respected Bible commentators. He said in volume IV of his commentary: "I am an old man and a minister, and I declare that I never knew them (speaking of instruments) productive of any good in the worship of God and I have reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. Music as a science, I esteem and admire. But instruments of 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 in the worship of the Infinite Spirit, who requires His followers to worship Him in spirit and in truth."

In his book Christian Theology, Mr. Clarke—again, a Methodist—said this: "The singing, as practiced in several places, and heathenish accompaniments of organs and musical instruments of various sorts, are contrary to the simplicity of the gospel and the spirituality of that worship which God requires as darkness is contrary to light. And if the abuses are not corrected, I believe the time is not far distant when singing will cease to be a part of divine worship. It is now, in many places, such as cannot be said to be any part of that worship which is in spirit and according to truth. May God mend it." Think about what he says. First of all, he says it's unscriptural in being practiced in the first place. Then, he predicts that because of the introduction of instrumental music, singing would cease to be a part of Christian worship. Now, singing has not been eradicated from Christian worship today, but can we not see that it has taken a back seat? Are there not many churches today that rely upon a "praise team" or "praise band" in order to get up and entertain the crowd or to offer musical worship on behalf of the congregation? The idea of congregations merely singing together seems like a dusty relic of the past. Mr. Clarke predicted a long time ago that that would be the case because of instrumental music, and we have seen a great emphasis on music as almost an entertainment venue as opposed to a vehicle for every child of God to lift up His voice in praise to the Lord. That's a pretty strong indictment against instrumental music from a Methodist preacher.

An equally influential minister from the Baptist religion was Charles Spurgeon. For twenty years, he preached in the Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle in London to thousands of people every Sunday and mechanical instruments were never used in the service as long as he occupied the pulpit there. He was asked one time why they didn't use an organ and he first quoted this passage:

**I Corinthians 14:15 "What is it then? 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."**

Then he said, "I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery." Now, I don't quote all these men to prove that it's wrong to use instrumental music. Those men are fallible, just as you and I are. They had opinions about Bible subjects and various views about Bible teachings, just as you or I might have various views. What they said within itself doesn't make it right or wrong. But it is a powerful argument that instrumental music was rejected for so long in so-called Christian worship, and it begs the question—why? Friend, it is a relatively modern innovation in church worship. It certainly does not come close to dating back to the days of the apostles and the early church. I not only oppose instrumental music in the church for historical reasons, but churches of Christ oppose it for scriptural reasons. Christians are commanded to ***sing and make melody in our hearts*** and are never commanded to use an instrument in worship. Musical instruments are never mentioned in the worship practices of the early church. The only credible effort that some can make to authorize instrumental music in worship is from the Greek word *psallo*, which Paul used in **Ephesians 5:19**.

**Ephesians 5:19 “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;”**

The phrase “**making melody**” is translated from the Greek word *psallo* and the basic definition of that word is *to touch the surface* or *to pluck*. Some conclude that the phrase, therefore, means ‘to pluck the strings of a mechanical instrument’ and that that is what Paul was referring to. Well, think about what that implies. That necessarily implies the use of an instrument, that we’re commanded to use an instrument, and that it would be wrong NOT to use an instrument. But no one that I’ve talked to believes that it’s wrong to sing *a cappella* or *without instrumental accompaniment*. But, friends, if Paul commanded singing, and if “**making melody**” means playing an instrument, then he also commanded us to play an instrument. If *psallo* only means *to play an instrument*, then we’re commanded to do so, and it would be wrong NOT to play an instrument in worship to God.

Not only that, but we would ALL have to play an instrument because we’re ALL commanded to make melody just as we’re all commanded to sing. That is not what’s being taught here. The word *psallo* is a generic word that can have a number of implications. It simply means *to pluck*. We must allow the context or circumstances of the word’s usage to determine what kind of *psallo*-ing is under consideration.

For example, the word *baptize*, which we studied last time, means *to immerse*. But it can be used to refer to different elements in the Bible: baptism in water, or there was a baptism of fire where the judgment of God fell upon the Jewish nation, or there was the baptism of the Holy Spirit which the apostles received on the Day of Pentecost. The word *baptize* can refer to all of those because the word itself simply means *to immerse*.

The word *psallo* is the same way. You don’t have to look far to see what Paul had in mind here in **Ephesians 5**. He says to *psallo* or make melody where? *in our hearts*. In other words, Paul is using a metaphor to illustrate what is taking place in our hearts when we sing. We are making melody on the strings of our hearts, as it were, and that melody is being heard as we sing. So, **Ephesians 5:19** is not instructing the church to use an instrument because again, if it is, then an instrument is commanded and not optional, just as singing is commanded and not optional. In fact, nowhere does the New Testament instruct the church to use an instrument and history testifies to the fact that the early church DID NOT use mechanical instruments of music.

That brings us to another point. Some argue that instrumental music is not an addition to the pattern for worship but is merely an aid or help. Many sincere worshippers have been led to believe that the piano or organ is really not a part of the worship itself but is just a help in fulfilling the command to sing. Just like a song book would be an aid, and the Bible doesn’t mention song books or projecting words up on a screen either. But very few people question the use of such in the church. So why do we turn around and question the use of instrumental music? What’s the difference?

The difference is that an instrument produces music whereas a hymnbook doesn’t. We can use a hymnbook or not use a hymnbook and either way, we’re still doing just what God said: we’re singing. We’re fulfilling God’s commandment, His expectation, and His requirement. He requires that we worship him through singing. If I use a book, don’t use a book, read the words off a projector on the wall, I’m still doing what God asks. If I play an instrument, I am doing something besides singing or something in addition to singing. Therefore, I am offering a different kind of worship to God that He did not ask for. I am adding something that the divine pattern did not call for.

It's wrong to suggest that playing an instrument is only a help and not an act of worship in and of itself. Tell that to those who play instruments of music in worship. It was certainly an act of worship under the Old Testament. That's how it was considered when it was used then.

**II Chronicles 29:26-28** "And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering upon the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the LORD began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt offering was finished."

**Psalms 150:3-5** "Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals."

So, playing an instrument IS an act of worship. The question is, is it a form of worship that God employed for the church in the New Testament dispensation? Does God want us to worship with instruments today? Many will argue that if God's people used instrumental music in the Old Testament temple, then why can't we use them today? What's the difference? Wouldn't the instruction of the psalmist in the last passage we read, as well as other Psalms, give us the authority to use instruments in the worship of the church regardless of the change in dispensations?

It is worth noticing that the Jews did not use instrumental music in the original tabernacle. It came later. And they did not use it in the synagogue. It was later used in the temple. However, it was not part of God's original design for Old Testament worship. The fact that it was used at all in the Old Testament system of worship doesn't mean that God intended for it to be used in the New Testament dispensation. There are many practices that belonged to the temple and the Old Testament system that have nothing to do with the worship of the church today, if you stop and think about it. We don't burn incense in the church today. We don't sacrifice lambs, bulls, or goats in the church today. We don't engage in all the various types of offerings and sacrifices that they did. We don't make circumcision a religious practice today. We don't observe the Sabbath Day in this dispensation. Nor should we observe any of the other rituals of the Old Testament economy today.

The question then is this: why can I borrow one thing from the Old Testament system of worship and not something else? The fact of the matter is that the old law was abrogated by reason of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary and the new law was established afterwards.

**Colossians 2:14** "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;"

**Hebrews 7:12** "For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law."

**Hebrews 9:15** "And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament..."

**Colossians 3:16** "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."

Here, Paul says that the purpose of music in the church today is to *teach and admonish one another and make melody in our hearts unto the Lord*. Our worship today is not like the ritualistic worship of the Old

Testament. Rather, it centers upon the heart and the mind. In our singing, we teach and we admonish. It is the outpouring of the soul in homage, love, and praise to God by means of words. Nothing more adequately does that than the human voice uplifted in praise to God. It was the most simple, sincere, and beautiful instrument ever devised when God created the human voice. He asks that every Christian employ their voice to worship His high and holy name in the church today.

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