Musical Worship in the New Testament Church

by Phil Sanders

Many people do not understand why anyone would discuss the use of instruments in the worship of the church. Most folks believe that churches have always used instruments of music in their worship. They are surprised to find that some churches today don't use instruments, and they think them rather peculiar. Churches, however, did not always use instruments, and some churches have never used instruments. In fact, Christians for several centuries were adamantly opposed to using any instruments of music in worship. Not until the thirteenth century AD did churches begin using the instrument widely. Some might ask why one should return to the ancient practice and not adopt the musical instruments so popular today.

In asking this question, we are not asking about personal preferences or heritages. We are not interested in opinions or feelings. What we are asking is, what does God desire? The New Testament is God's written revelation to all, a faith once for all time delivered to the saints Jude 3). The New Testament scriptures provide for us all things that pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3) and fulfill Jesus' promise to guide the apostles into all truth John 16:12-13). The scriptures tell us what God desires in worship musically, but his instructions never include the use of instruments. Since we are charged to handle scripture accurately (2 Tim. 2:15), we should review the relevant passages pertaining to musical worship among Christians:

And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26).

But about midnight, Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:25).

And for the Gentiles to glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, ‘Therefore I will give praise to thee among the gentiles, and I will sing to thy name’ (Rom. 15:9).

What is the outcome then? I shall pray with the spirit, and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit, and I shall sing with the mind also (1 Cor. 14:15).

What is the outcome then, brethren? When you assemble, each one has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification (1 Cor. 14:26).

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:18-19).

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col. 3:16).

Saying, ‘I will proclaim Thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will sing Thy praise’ (Heb. 2:12).

Through him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to his name (Heb. 13:15).

Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises (James 5:13).

In every instance, the music described emphasizes verbal communication: singing, speaking, teaching, making melody in your hearts, confessing, giving thanks, and the fruit of lips.

The absence of a reference to instrumental music is startling. God desires music that is both of the mind and the spirit, not something irrational or nonverbal. God did not accidentally leave out instruments in these passages. There must have been a reason. When one considers the common use of instruments among pagans and in the Jewish temple, one is quite shocked to see Christian opposition to their use.

Instruments cannot speak, teach, admonish, give thanks, praise, proclaim, confess, or make melody on your heart. These are the things God wants us to accomplish in our singing. Instruments of music fail to do any of them. This is what makes them additions; they do something different from the instruction. They go beyond the instructions in the New Testament.

Jesus taught us in Matthew 7:21-27 that we must do what he says – obey his will- and enter heaven. The burden of proof for pianos and organs must be on the one who introduces them to show where Jesus has instructed this form of worship. There has never been any evidence from the Bible, from the language, or from history to show that instrumental music in Christian worship has won God's approval.

The Argument from Authority and the Absence of Instruments in New Testament Worship

All authority resides in Jesus Christ (Matt. 28:18). In any and every question of faith, Christians must ask what the Lord wills (Eph. 5:10, 17). The Lord Jesus must have first place in everything (Col. 1:18). It is only when we abide in his word that we are truly his disciples and know the truth John

8:31-32).

Jesus never taught his disciples to use machinery in worshiping God. No apostle ever gave an instruction to use them, and no church in the scriptures gives an example of their use. They were long in existence but ignored in the teaching and the practice of the entire church described in the New Testament. The New Testament contains God's complete will for our time, from Pentecost till the Second Coming. Had God wished that Christians use instruments in worship, he would have said so. Since God gave us his entire will for our lives, the fact that he intentionally left them out is quite remarkable. Surely God was aware of their presence, for they were used in the temple. We can only conclude that God left them out intentionally, because he did not want them. Men need to have authority from God for what they believe and practice. Like Jesus, we too should ask, "Is this from heaven or from men?" (Matt. 21:23-27). God requires that those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth John 4:23-24; 17:17). One must wonder how an unscriptural practice, begun centuries later by men, can be from heaven or according to the truth. Men have no right to change God's plan or his teaching on any matter. When they do so, they act on their own authority, not the authority of God.

Someone may say, "The Bible doesn't say we can't play the organ! Therefore, it must be all right." But neither does the Bible specifically condemn burning incense, praying to Mary, roast lamb with communion, sprinkling for baptism, infant baptism, or a mourner's bench. How can we justify organs and reject these? These, just like using an instrument of music in worship, come not from God but from men. The right question is not "Where does the Bible condemn an instrument in worship?" but "Where does the word of God authorize using instruments of music in Christian worship?"

If the Bible were to include everything that God did not want, it surely would be too large to carry. God has chosen to tell

us in positive terms what his will is for our lives and our worship. He has shown us the way, which rules out all other ways. “One baptism” (Eph. 4:5) means there can not be other approved baptisms, and “one church” (one body, which is the church, [Eph. 4:4; 1:22-23]) means there cannot be other approved churches. The specific instruction to sing means one should sing. There is no authority for other forms of music. When God instructs us through his word, he has authorized only that which he has identified. God does not have to exclude all other possibilities with a series of prohibitions. Laws only authorize what they authorize; they do not have to detail everything they do not authorize.

If something must be specifically condemned for it to be wrong, then God wrongly put Nadab and Abihu to death (Lev. 10:1-2), unjustly denied Moses entrance into Canaan (Num. 20:6-12), unfairly removed Saul as king (1 Sam. 10:8; 13:8-14), and irrationally put Uzzah to death (1 Chron. 13:7-13; 15:2-15; 2 Sam. 6:7). In each of these cases, men acted on their own authority rather than listen to the instructions of God. When men act on their own authority, they greatly err. These examples show that God expects men to follow his expressed will and not follow their own desires.

The Silence of the Scriptures

Since the New Testament says nothing about the use of instruments of music in worship, Christians must consider how they will understand the silence of the scriptures.

If God requires an action, we all agree that it is necessary for us to do what God commands. If God forbids any action, we all agree that it can never be acceptable to do what God prohibits. It is when God has not spoken on a matter that there is disagreement. One group holds that if God is silent, then every man is free to believe and practice his own opinion. The other group argues that it is necessary to have

scriptural authority for all we believe and practice; otherwise, it is forbidden. We hold that this second view is the biblical one. In dealing with silence, we must be careful neither to act beyond what the scriptures teach nor to make laws where God has not made them.

The scriptures throughout the Old and New Testaments teach emphatically that men should carefully follow God's teachings, lovingly, completely, and accurately. Jesus said, "So that the world may know that I love the Father, I do exactly as the Father commanded Me" John 14:31). Paul urged Timothy, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15).

If silence were permissive, men could easily introduce any number of corrupt ideas and practices in the church. We would enter a slippery slope leading to certain destruction. But if men maintain what has been taught in the scripture and carefully observe everything Jesus commanded, they will remain in his word as true disciples John 8:31-32). To go beyond the things that are written (1 Cor. 4:6) is to add to the word of God. Moses taught Israel, "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add to nor take away from it" (Deut. 12:32).

John said of false teachers who were corrupting the teaching about Christ, "Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). What is true of this doctrine is also true of other doctrines. No one can go beyond what Christ teaches on any number of subjects and maintain favor with God. Men tread upon dangerous ground when they presume to add to the worship of the church a practice never authorized in the New Testament. Worshiping according to the teachings of men is called "will-worship" in Colossians 2:18-23 and condemned. This self-made religion is offensive to God in that it goes beyond and

outside the teaching of the New Testament to pursue its own desires.

The Bible itself uses the argument from silence in its prohibitive sense. In Hebrews 1:4-5, the Hebrew writer demonstrates the superiority of the Son to the angels by the fact that God did not say at any time that the angels were his sons, begotten by him.

In Hebrews 7:13-14, the same writer says, “For the one concerning whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no one has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.” God’s specific instructions to take priests from the tribe of Levi excluded every other tribe.

Divine revelation gives bounds, both positive and negative, to the worship of God. God himself condemned Israel for worshiping in a way that he had not commanded, a way that never entered his mind (Jer. 7:31). “Transgression” is “going beyond the prescribed limits.” It always denotes a breach of the law. The Hebrew writer, in pointing out the superiority of Jesus to angels and the Law, said:

For this reason, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Heb. 2:1-3).

How can we escape if we have such little respect for the teaching of our Lord Jesus that we add our own forms of worship, which he did not command? Is this not transgression, i.e., “going beyond the prescribed limits?”

Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit stayed within the bounds of what the Father told them to speak and to do. Jesus said in John 12:48-50:

He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father himself who sent Me has given Me commandment, what to say, and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me."

Jesus was very careful to speak only that which the Father told him to speak. He also delivered to us that message with great accuracy and fidelity. I, for one, am thankful that Jesus took such great care to tell me precisely the will of the Father, for I shall one day be judged by that message.

In the same way, the Holy Spirit never dared to speak on his own initiative. Jesus describes the work of the Spirit in John 16:12-13:

I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak; and he will disclose to you what is to come.

If Jesus and the Holy Spirit were unwilling to speak or act on their own initiative, then how dare we speak or act on ours? If they never innovated, then what right have we to innovate?

To use instruments of music in the worship of the church is to go beyond what we have been instructed in the New Testament. It is to act on our own initiative rather than listening to what God wills for us.

God has spoken to us in his word. He has revealed all the truth (John 16:13), and there is no more truth. The silence of the scripture is not merely a gap, as if God had forgotten something. The silence of the scripture is an intentional hush after God had revealed all the truth. Since all the truth has been revealed, God did not need to say any more. For us to add

more information or to pursue additional practices says to God that his teaching was not sufficient for us. To speak in this kind of silence is to correct or become an editor to God. Paul said in Romans 11:33-36,

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and unfathomable his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became his counselor? Or who has first given to him that it might be paid back to him again? For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.

God does not need an editor, and his ways are superior to our ways. It is presumptuous to think that we must change God's instructions on any matter by adding our own will. Like David, we should pray:

Also keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins;
Let them not rule over me;
Then I shall be blameless,
And I shall be acquitted of great transgression
(Ps. 19:13)

If God had wished us to use the instrument, he would have told us so. The silence of the scriptures in this instance is prohibitive, because the scriptures are complete and all-sufficient. Should we go beyond what is written, we act presumptuously on our own initiative. For this reason, the use of instrumental music in worship to God is sinful.

The Argument from History

The history of the church conclusively shows that instrumental music was an innovation. For many centuries, no church used instruments of music. The use of the instrument is of human origin and not of Divine instruction.

The general introduction of instrumental music can certainly

not be assigned to a date earlier than the fifth or sixth centuries; yea, even Gregory the Great, who towards the end of the sixth century added greatly to the existing Church music, absolutely prohibited the use of instruments. Several centuries later, the introduction of the organ in sacred service gave place to instruments as accompaniments for Christian song, and from that time to this, they have been freely used with few exceptions. The first organ is believed to have been used in Church service in the 13th century. Organs were, however, in use before this in the theatre. They were never regarded with favor in the Eastern Church, and were vehemently opposed in some of the Western churches.

Everett Ferguson noted:

It is quite late before there is evidence of instrumental music, first the organ, employed in the public worship of the church. Recent studies put the introduction of instrumental music even later than the dates found in reference books. It was perhaps as late as the tenth century when the organ was played as part of the service. This makes instrumental music one of the late innovations of the medieval Catholic church. When introduced in the Middle Ages, the organ was still not part of the liturgy proper. That is, it did not initially accompany the hymn service, but was a separate item in the service. The type of chant employed left no place for instrumental accompaniment until new styles of music developed.

“Both the Jews in their temple service, and the Greeks in their idol worship, were accustomed to sing with the accompaniment of instrumental music. The converts to Christianity accordingly, must have been familiar with this mode of singing…. But it is generally admitted that primitive Christians employed no instrumental music in their religious worship,” says Lyman Coleman.

“Only singing, however, and no playing of instruments, was

permitted in the early Christian church."

"There can be no doubt that originally the music of the divine service was everywhere entirely of vocal nature."

"Indeed, all evidence points to the chant and music of the primitive church as practically identical with the customs and traditions of the synagogue (vocal)."

James W. McKinnon, in his 1965 doctoral dissertation at Columbia University, shows that the early church music was wholly vocal, and that the opposition of the church fathers to instrumental music in worship was both monolithic and vehement.

The Early church fathers opposed instruments of music in Christian worship.

Justin Martyr (ca. A.D. 150) condemned any association with musical instruments as worldly.

Tertullian (A.D. 150-222) mentions only vocal music in worship.

Clement of Alexandria (A.D. 200) severely denounced the use of instruments among Christians even at banquets.

Augustine (A.D. 354-430) displays the general attitude of the early church against instruments of music for any purpose. "Let no one's heart revert to the instruments of the theatre."

Gregory of Nazianus (A.D. 330-390) mentions instruments, but not in any way to approve them. He believed their only use was the arousement of sensuousness.

Jerome (A.D. 347-420) speaks only of vocal music and

emphasizes that the heart is the source of songs.

Theodoret (ca. A.D. 400) says the use of the instrument is a “childish” relic of the Old Testament and is excluded from the worship of the church.

Chrysostom (4′” century A.D.) says of the instruments of the Old Testament allegorically look forward to the pure worship of the lips.

What Various Men Have Said Through the Centuries

Thomas Aquinas (A.D. 1250): “Our church does not use instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize.”

Martin Luther: “The organ in the worship to God is an ensign of Baal.”

John Calvin: “It is no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of tapers, or revival of other shadows of the law. The Roman Catholics borrowed it from the Jews.”

John Wesley: “I have no objection to the organ in our chapels, provided it is neither seen nor heard.”

Adam Clark: “I am an old man and an old minister, and I here declare that I have never known instrumental music to be productive of any good in the worship to God, and have reason to believe that it has been 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 corruptions in the worship of that infinite Spirit who requires his followers to worship him in spirit and truth. “

Charles Spurgeon: “I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery.”

John Knox called the organ: “a kist (chest) of whistles.”

Alexander Campbell: “To the really spiritually minded, it (using instruments in worship) would be like a cowbell in a concert.”

J.W. McGarvey: “And if any man who is a preacher believes that the apostle teaches the use of instrumental music in the church, by enjoining the singing of psalms, he is one of those smatterers in Greek who can believe anything he wishes to believe. When the wish is father to the thought, correct exegesis is like water on a duck’s back.”

Our purpose is to restore the New Testament church, which never used and greatly opposed the use of instruments of music in worship.

Scripture Shows That God Condemns Innovation

In Leviticus 10:1-2, the scripture tells the sad story of the two sons of Aaron who offered up strange fire to the Lord. For eight days, Aaron and his sons had consecrated themselves and had obeyed every instruction “just as the Lord had commanded Moses.” On the eighth day, the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering. When the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.

Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord (Lev.

10:1-2).

Their offering of strange fire came of their own initiative. While we are not sure exactly what they offered, we do know it was “strange,” i.e., offered in a way not prescribed by the Law. We have no doubt that Nadab and Abihu had good intentions of accompanying the shouts of the people with their offering, but their offerings were self-willed, not God-willed. Leviticus 10:3 says, “By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored.”

Self-willed worship does not honor God, because it arises from the will of men rather than the will of God. Colossians 2:23 describes this kind of worship as “will-worship” or “self-made religion” (NASB). God has always demanded that men follow his teachings rather than innovate their own doctrines or practices John 8:31-32; 2 John 9-11).

The prophet Samuel anointed Saul as king over Israel. In 1 Samuel 10:8, Samuel told Saul, “And you shall go down before me to Gilgal; and behold, I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice peace offerings. You shall wait seven days until I come to you and show you what you should do.”

Saul, however, became anxious before the battle with the Philistines, because the Philistines were so numerous and the Israelites were beginning to scatter (13:1-8). Consequently, Saul presumptuously offered up a burnt offering. Samuel told Saul:

You have acted foolishly; you have not kept the commandment of the Lord your God, which he commanded you, for now the Lord would have established your kingdom over Israel forever (1 Sam. 13:13).

Saul had gone beyond his authority and acted on his own to offer up the burnt offering. God rejected Saul as king that day and gave his kingdom to a man after his own heart. We

cannot act on our own initiative and maintain a pleasing relationship with God.

When the Pharisees bound traditions of men upon others, they acted beyond the will of God (Matt. 15:8-9).

When Judaizers corrupted the gospel by binding the Law upon Gentiles, they went beyond their authority and were accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

When the false teachers of Jesus day said that Jesus Christ did not come in the flesh, John, by inspiration, said:

Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

Men have never had the right to develop new doctrines or initiate new practices in the worship and work of the church. To perform any action without divine authority is sinful. To offer a strange offering, which is not prescribed or commanded by God, even with the best of intentions, fails to honor God as holy. We treat God as holy when we listen to his instructions and do them (Matt. 7:24-27). Only by listening to his words and by acting upon them can we please God.

Arguments used by those who favor instruments:

- **The use of psallo in Ephesians**

5:19

Over time, psallo has gradually changed in meaning. It first meant “to touch, twang, strike strings.” Next, it meant “to touch or play the strings of a harp.” Later, it meant “to sing with the harp.” At last, it meant, “to sing praises” (without any thought of any instrument of music). The only time in the LXX that psallo meant play was when the instrument was specified in the context; otherwise, it meant to sing (LXX 150 B.C.). In the New Testament psallo is used four times. It meant:

• “sing” (Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; James 5:13)

• “make melody or make music” (Eph. 5:19).

The maker of the music or melody is to be the heart. No instrument is even considered here except the heart itself.

Everett Ferguson said of psallo, “If the precise meaning of certain verses may be in doubt, what is dear is that an instrument did not inhere in the word psallo in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, dating 150-250 B.C.). Psallo could translate a word meaning ‘play’ (nagan), or a general word (zamar). The meaning which would cover all occurrences is ‘make melody.’ This could include making melody on an instrument, but in the preponderance of occurrences, it clearly refers to making melody with the voice. “

F.F. Bruce said of psallo in Ephesians 5:19: “Nor should the etymological force of the terms be pressed, as though psalmos inevitably meant a song sung to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument … while such plucking of the strings is the original sense of psallo; … it is used in the NT with the meaning ‘to sing psalms. ‘”

In confirmation of this view, the Greek Orthodox Church (who

knows Greek better than anyone) has never used instruments of music in worship.

While some have abandoned the idea that psallo requires the use of an instrument, they today suggest that it permits the use of the instrument in Ephesians 5:19. If this were so, the first readers of the epistle of Ephesians and early churches did not know it. If Paul indeed was permitting the use of instruments, we are at a loss to explain why early churches so adamantly and uniformly opposed them. Actually, no ancient writer ever made the argument that psallo and psalmos permitted the use of instruments in worship. In fact, George P. Slade in 1878 was the first ever to argue that psallo or psalmos permitted the instrument even if the instrument is not mentioned. Early Christians never understood the context of Ephesians or Colossians to demand or permit instruments.

The first rule of hermeneutics in the study of words is that a word does not and cannot mean what the author and the first readers did not understand it to mean. Whatever the words psalmos and psallo meant to them, it could not have demanded or permitted the use of instruments. The universal opposition to the use of instruments among the early church fathers makes it clear they understood the epistles of Ephesians and Colossians to teach vocal music only.

• The use of instruments in the Old Testament

Psalm 150 and 2 Chronicles 29:25-27 show that the use of instruments in Jewish worship is a command from God. However, Christians are not bound to and do not live under the Old Covenant that God made with the Jews. We are under a new covenant ratified by the blood of Christ and taught in the New Testament. For this reason, we don’t offer incense, dance, or make animal sacrifices. The New Testament is a better covenant than the Old and is a spiritual covenant (Heb. 8:6-13;

10:1-10).

The Old Testament had a temple building; in the New Testament, Christians are the temple of God. Our laws are written on our hearts, not on tablets of stone. Our worship is not outward and showy but inward and spiritual (John 4:21-23).

• There are harps in heaven (Rev. 5:8; 15:2).

Each of these passages refers to a vision John had of the throne of God in heaven, not Christian worship in the church. Each reflects Old Testament literature where the worship of the temple is considered ideal. But Christians do not worship in the Jerusalem temple; instead, they are the temple of God. Incense is burned in heaven as well; are we to burn incense? Saints in heaven wear crowns and cast them toward God? Are we to do the same? Our task is not to imitate what is done in heaven but to be obedient to Jesus and his teachings for us. If Christians should play harps, why didn't the church do it in the New Testament? Why didn't they understand they were to imitate what is done in heaven? Heaven is heaven, and earth is earth.

• The use of instruments is an aid to singing.

Some say, "Instrumental music is justified as an aid to worship in song in the same way a song book is an aid. What is the difference in having a songbook aiding in following the words of the song and a piano aiding in following the music of the song?"

Expedients or aids must first be lawful, i.e., they must aid in doing that which is instructed by God. Nothing more than singing is done when a songbook is used. The words of a book

help all the singers to sing in harmony with each other. A piano, however, involves something more than singing, speaking, teaching, or admonishing. Songbooks aid in accomplishing the purpose of singing. Pianos make a different kind of music. Expedients must truly aid. Organs and bands often hinder the singing, which must compete to be heard. Expedients must edify. Pianos produce musical sounds that are meaningless to the mind, but the songbook has words. Organs may stimulate the emotions, but they do not instruct the mind.

Expedients must not divide, but the instrument has been a source of division for many churches. Hundreds of thousands of Christians have parted ways, because men have introduced into the worship an unscriptural practice.

Playing an instrument adds a new form of worship. The instrument is not merely an aid but was itself a means of praising God in the Old Testament, but is unauthorized in the New Testament (2 Chron. 5:13; 29:25). Playing lyres and psalteries were themselves forms of worship, not merely aids. An expediency aids in the performance of an instruction, but an expediency does not change the instruction. An addition changes the instruction so that people do something different than the instructions require. Expedients are lawful, whereas additions are not lawful.

Most people understand these differences in other areas. It is one thing for Noah to use tools to build the ark; it is another matter for Noah to add floors or windows to the ark. While we do not know how many rooms the ark had, we know that it had three floors and one window. God did not specify the number of rooms but left that up to Noah to decide; but God specified the number of windows and floors. If Noah had acted beyond his authority and made a second window or a fourth floor, the Bible could never have said that Noah “according to all that God had commanded him, so he did” (Gen. 6:22).

When God gives specific instructions, he expects his people to

do precisely what he commands; but when God gives general instructions, he permits men to use their wisdom to fulfill those commands. We may use a tray or cups to serve the Lord's Supper of bread and fruit of the vine. Trays and cups aid in doing what God wills. Adding roast lamb to the Lord's Supper, however, goes beyond the instruction and is of human design. It can never please God to pursue self-made religion.

It matters not whether a person is baptized in a baptistry, pool, river, lake, sea, or bathtub. Any one of these places contains enough water to fulfill the instruction to baptize (immerse). What the command to baptize does not enjoin, however, is a different action. Immersion is not sprinkling or pouring. And when one substitutes one action for another, one violates the commandment of God. Fulfilling the commandment through an expedient is not equivalent to changing the commandment.

The singing God asks of us comes in the form of speaking, teaching, admonishing, giving thanks, confessing, and offering the fruit of our lips. A songbook or a pitch pipe can help us fulfill these instructions, doing exactly what God wills. A piano or instrument of music, however, adds a different kind of music and a different means of praise. Instruments cannot speak, teach, admonish, or give thanks. They offer their own form of worship, different from what the Lord specified for musical worship.

Instrumental music in the Old Testament was not merely an aid to worship; it was itself a form of worship (Pss. 81:2-3; 92:1-3; 150). David made arrangements with the Levites, who "shall offer praises to the Lord with instruments which I have made for praise" (1 Chron. 23:6). David "stationed the Levites in the house of the LORD with cymbals, with harps, and with lyres, according to the command of David and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for the command was from the Lord through his prophets" (2 Chron. 29:25; cf. 28). To suggest today that it is merely an aid ignores that it was

used for a different purpose in the Old Testament.

As an aid, a pitch pipe or a tuning fork does not operate during the singing and is not designed to be heard by all. They give the pitch and then remain silent. Instruments, on the other hand, are designed to be played loudly enough to be heard by all throughout the song. Pitch pipes and tuning forks do not play tunes; their only function is to give a pitch, so that the leader may know the correct pitch on which to begin a song.

• There are no laws in the New Testament regulating corporate worship.

That God takes the worship of Christians seriously can be seen quite clearly in 1 Corinthians 11. When the Corinthians were abusing the Lord's Supper (11:17-34) by taking their meals before one another and some getting drunk, Paul called a halt to their unloving behavior. He pointed them to the original instruction to remember the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. Because they had failed to discern the body, some were weak and sick, and others asleep spiritually. The Lord's Supper was a corporate activity, a means of worship in the assembled church. Failure to worship properly led to spiritual disapproval before God. Because the Corinthian church failed to keep God's regulations of the Lord's Supper, Paul had to rebuke them. Paul both received and delivered instructions regulating the Lord's Supper. These instructions were Divine tradition and were taught widely throughout the church. This shows there are indeed laws in the New Testament regulating corporate worship.

Colossians 3:16 should not be interpreted out of the context of Colossians 4:16, where Paul said, "And when this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the

Laodiceans; and you, for your part, read my letter that is coming from Laodicea." While the letter was written specifically to Colossae, its teaching was also meant for other churches. It is important to know that both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 were first read to an assembled church.

• Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 do not apply to worship assemblies.

Some are saying today that there are no laws in the New Testament that apply to the corporate musical worship of the church. The argument is that Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 were to be fulfilled by an individual in his daily life and did not speak to the corporate worship of the church. This is an odd argument, considering that both Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 are verses in cyclical epistles to be read in assembled congregations. These two verses, by their very nature, show that neither can be fulfilled by an individual but requires a group of people to fulfill.

Ephesians 5:18-21 has a series of five masculine plural participles ("speaking," "singing," "making melody," "giving thanks," and "submitting yourselves"), all of which have imperative force agreeing with the verb "be filled," which is itself imperative. This sort of Greek structure can be seen in Matthew 28:19-20, where the imperative "make disciples" is followed by participles "baptizing" and "teaching." The actions designated by such a construction are not optional. To fulfill the command, "speaking to one another," there has to be mutual communication between at least two people. I know of no way in which one can distinguish in a plural imperative between two people and a much larger group. 10 The Ephesians' letter is addressed to the saints [in Ephesus] who are also faithful in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 1:1). The imperatives of 5:19

should be no less inclusive than the people to whom the letter is addressed.

Ephesians 5:19 says, “Speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.” The pronoun one another used in this passage is reflexive, used reciprocally. It indicates that the subject of the action is also the object of the action of the verb. The “speaking to one another” is from each and to all the others. In this instance, the pronoun is not singular but plural. Since most versions translate the term “one another,” this reflexive pronoun is used reciprocally to indicate an exchange between two or more groups.

Speaking, teaching, and admonishing are actions that require speakers and listeners; it demands a plurality of people. These verses are not speaking about private singing but functions of groups, where pluralities of people are present. Singing was a means of mutual edification as well as praise. Everett Ferguson said:

Although Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16, which provide rich sources for the discussion of early Christian singing, have as their literary context the Christian life in a larger sense, the statements are drawn from practices of the church. The practice of the assembly is to influence the entire Christian life. Other texts make dear the presence of song as a congregational activity (Matt. 26:30; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26).

Clearly, these passages include instructions to assembled congregations as clearly as to other situations in life.

• Christians worshiped with instruments when they went into the

Temple.

Some are suggesting that since Jewish Christians in the first century worshiped in the temple (Acts 2-3,21), and since instruments were used in temple worship, then Christians participated in musical worship with instruments.

What Jews did in the temple is not a model for what Christians are to do in the church. While some eagerly wish to employ instruments of music in the worship of the church, they ignore that in the temple, Jews also offered animal sacrifices and burned incense. Are they suggesting that we also practice these things?

It is clear that some participation took place, but there was a progression of change also taking place in the book of Acts. Until the conversion of Cornelius, all Christians were Jews or proselytes and participated in temple worship as Jews. Gentiles like Cornelius, however, were not required to keep the Law when they became Christians (Acts 15; Gal. 2:11-21). In fact, Paul condemned those who bound the Law on Gentile Christians (Gal. 5:1-4).

While the temple stood, Jewish Christians had the option of offering sacrifices as Paul did in Acts 21. Later. New Testament epistles, however, make it clear that Christians were not to offer such sacrifices any more (Eph. 2:13-16; Heb. 9:11-10:4). Jesus Christ is our sacrifice, once for all time. When the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecies in Matthew 24 and Luke 21, the Temple worship ceased.

Early church history confirms that churches saw no need to bring Jewish worship into their assemblies. If temple worship served as permission for Christians to use the instrument, why did the early church fathers oppose the instrument? Theodoret, in the fifth century, argued that the use of instruments is a childish relic of the Old Testament and is to be excluded from

the worship of the church.

The priests and Levites, not the congregation, carried on worship in the temple. At its center, temple worship was not a congregational assembly, although people customarily did gather in the courts at the time of sacrifice. The Levites did the singing.

The church seems to have kept more to the practices of the synagogue for its worship. Carl Kraeling and Lucetta Mowry said:

Both at home and abroad, the music of the early Synagogue was exclusively vocal, whether because of opposition to pagan custom or as a sign of mourning for the destruction of the Temple.

• Instrumental music is not a "salvation issue"; it is a non-issue.

Some suggest that whether or not one uses instrumental music in worship really doesn't matter. Since we all are imperfect and stand in the need of the grace of God, whether we use instruments is a moot question. They believe they can continue using the instrument without losing favor with God.

Any issue that involves sin is a "salvation issue." When people persist in sin and do not repent, they put their souls in peril {Heb. 10:26; 2 Pet. 3:9; Luke 13:3, 5). The question here, then, is whether the use of instrumental music in worship is sinful. Based upon the scriptural evidence we have examined, we believe it is sinful to go beyond the authority of the New Testament and use musical instruments to worship. Some might use it for a time and then repent; surely God's grace will forgive them in response to their repentance. What will happen to those who will not repent?

Today, some believe they may persist in doctrinal error without repentance. Paul said to the Romans, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?” {Rom. 6:1-2) We ought to be grateful for the grace of God. Presuming upon that grace is dangerous; it is building upon sand. Those who use the instrument must do so on their own initiative, for there is no command, approved example, or inference in scripture that the church ever worshiped that way.

Conclusion

We can only conclude based on the evidence that to play instruments of music in the worship of the church is to act beyond the authority of the New Testament. Self-made religion has in all times, found disfavor with God. God has told us what he desires from us musically. If we love him, we will please him and glorify in the way he instructs us. If we do otherwise, we are building our houses upon sand. We can give no assurance to those who practice self-made religion that their way will find the approval of God.

It is so much better to listen to the teaching of scripture and simply follow it. We know that singing is approved of God, but we cannot find any evidence that playing is approved. Is it not wiser to do that which we know God approves? Loving the Lord means that we will follow his teaching and obey his will John 14:15). We urge all men everywhere to follow the New Testament pattern of singing and to avoid adding an instrument to their musical worship.