**Why Don’t We Use Instruments? A Study on Instruments in Worship**



One of the “hot button” topics within the church involves determining acceptable worship to God. There are those who support the idea of instrumental use in worship; however, there are also proponents of a cappella singing only. This issue has cause divisions within the church of Christ and among other fellowship groups. Is there common ground within the pages of the New Testament?

**Before We Start**

**Approaching the Study**

Anytime one mentions doctrine and the study of the Bible it is best to follow the following rules.

1. The Bible is God’s infallible, inspired word.
2. The Bible gives necessary truth for a fellowship relationship with God.
3. Whatever the Bible says regarding worship, (specifically in this case instrumental worship) is binding.

**PREMISE**

The purpose of this paper will be to show that instrumental music is not authorized Biblically. The premise and the paper will follow the following basic outline.

1. The Bible teaches Where God specifies in one area he eliminates all others.
2. Under the New Covenant, *a cappella* singing is the only music mentioned in worship.
3. Therefore, God has specified a cappella singing as the only music authorized for New Testament worship, thus eliminating instrumental music from being used in worship.

**PART 1: Where God specifies in one area he eliminates in all others**

There is an argument among those within the church about how one interprets the Bible. There are two schools of thought regarding the topic of biblical interpretation. The first line of thinking (Since, worship is the topic under discussion let us use it as an example) would go something like this, “The Bible doesn’t say I shouldn’t use the instrument therefore, I can.” The second line of thinking would state something like, “Because the Bible states “sing” I cannot use the instrument.” See the difference? One believes liberty is given due to lack of scripture, the other states they are bound only by what the Bible says. So who is right? Let us let the bible be the judge.

What better place to begin then in the book of Genesis, specifically Cain and Able. In Genesis 4 Cain and Able bring forth their offerings to God; Cain brings offerings of fruit and Able brings the firstborn of his flock ([Gen. 4:3](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen.%204.3)). God approves of Able’s offering and disapproves Cain’s gift ([Gen. 4:4-5](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Gen.%204.4-5)). By necessary implication, one can deduce that God commanded a meat sacrifice, specifically the firstborn of the flock. Thus, it demonstrates that God specifically made an announcement regarding what he wanted for worship. Therefore, everything else regarding sacrifice/offering was eliminated.

This principle is consistent throughout the Bible. For instance, the appointment of the Levites as priests in the Old Testament is seen in [Numbers 3:5-10](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Numbers%203.5-10),

“*And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Bring the tribe of Levi near, and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may minster to him. They shall keep guard over him and over the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister at the tabernacle. They shall guard all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, and keep guard over the people of Israel as they minster at the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the people of Israel. And you shall appoint Aaron and his sons, and they shall guard their priesthood. But if any outsider comes near, he shall be put to death*.’”

God specified who would be priest and from what tribe they would originate. Note, neither here, nor in any other place in Old Testament does God give a specific list of who, “wasn’t supposed to be priests.” Thus, God’s silence regarding all other tribes did not give those tribes permission to assume the priesthood, but rather, his identifying the Levites eliminated all other tribes from assuming the role of priest (Miller, Authority).

This rule even applied to Kings of the Old Testament. In 1 Samuel 14, God commands King Saul of Israel to utterly destroy the Amalekites ([1 Sam 4:3](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Sam%204.3)). However, Saul spared the Amalekite king, Agag and the best of the sheep, oxen, fattened calves, and lambs and presumed to offer sacrifices ([1 Sam. 14:15](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Sam.%2014.15)). However, God rejected Saul for two reasons; 1) He did not follow through on the specific command to utterly destroy the Amelekites and 2) presumed to offer sacrifices on his own accord without God ever mentioning such instructions. Thus, is disregard for the specific and presumption over the silence of God led to his rejection by God (Miller, Authority).

This principle holds true even in the New Testament. Jesus, commands his followers to “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation” ([Mark 16:15](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Mark%2016.15)). What would Jesus think, if, on the day of judgement, we say, “Well you didn’t say not to? In Acts 1, Jesus commands his apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father ([Acts 1:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%201.4)). None, of the apostles spoke up and said; “I really like Bethlehem better, besides Jesus didn’t say not to go to Bethlehem.” They knew that once Jesus identified Jerusalem as the place to stay, all other cities were eliminated.

Interestingly enough we practice the same principle in our day-to-day lives. What if went to the doctor because of sickness and he wrote you a prescription of an antibiotic and the pharmacist gave you the antibiotic, and as you read the label you find the antibiotic had been laced with an undetectable poison? In a fit of anger you shout to the pharmacist, “Why in the world would you do that!” Would you accept the answer, “Well the doctor didn’t say anything about not giving you the poison, so I figured it was ok”? Or what if the pharmacist said, “Well the doctors orders are neither prescribe nor prohibit poison, so I figured I’d give it a go” (Miller, Authority).

Therefore, through a careful study of the Old Testament, New Testament, and even appealing to everyday application, the bible student can understand that premise 1 holds true. Where anyone, in this case God through the Bible, specifies in one area he eliminates in all other areas.

**Part 2: Under the New Covenant a cappella singing is the only music mentioned regarding worship.**

[**Ephesians 5:18**](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ephesians%205.18)**,** [**19**](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ephesians%205.19)

As an example of a deplorable lifestyle Paul says do not get drunk because it is debauchery, but rather, “be filled with the Spirit.” The term “be filled with the Spirit” consists of a present imperative (command). In other words, Paul is saying, one should not get drunk with wine, but be full of the Spirit. Yet, the question arises, how could Christians obey this command? Paul explains with four more participles which show how one is to be filled with the Spirit; “singing, speaking, making, melody, giving thanks. Therefore, the issue of instrumental use in worship is not a discussion surrounding “silence,” but, an issue surrounding a biblical command. Therefore, whatever “sing” and “make melody” means, we are commanded to do those things. (Petrillo,6)

The word for “singing” is the Greek word ado, which literally means, “to sing, producing a musical sound with the voice” (Petrillo,6). The word in no way suggest the use of an accompanying instrument; just the voice. “Making melody” is the third participle. BDAG states, that this word means “sing exclusively.”(Petrillo,6). Therefore, Paul is essentially saying sing with your voice and sing with your heart. Anyone can go through the monotonous motions of singing words from the page or off the screen. God wants the heart to be involved!

[**Colossians 3:16**](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Colossians%203.16)

Furthermore, [Colossians 3:16](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Colossians%203.16) states, “Let the words of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hears to God.” Interestingly enough Paul, uses the same word for sing (*adontes*) in Colossians as he did in Ephesians. Why is this important? Because if Paul had a desire for music in worship to be ambiguous he would have used “*sympheneo*” which, is the term for harmonious sounds of musical instruments; (Theological Dictionary of The New Testament, vol 9, 303). Yet, he does not, thus, ambiguity regarding what God wants in worship is eliminated. God wants singing from the heart, nothing more nothing less when His people worship (Petrillo,6).

Thus, premise two is firmly rooted in the writings of Paul the apostle. Therefore, logic demands that since premise 1 & 2 are true premise 3 (Therefore, God has specified a cappella singing as the only music authorized for new testament worship, thus eliminating instrumental music from being used in worship) is valid. Henceforth, the bible student can know completely and totally exactly what God wants when His people worship!

**Part 3: Objections**

**Silence of the Scripture**

Yet, proponents of instrumental worship would still cling to the notion of silence being permissive. To those brothers and sisters I would humbly ask, does God have to give a “thou shalt not” for every directive? Certainly not. No one would suggest sprinkling and pouring as acceptable means of baptism because God never said “Thou shalt not sprinkle or pour!” Why? Because we know the specific use of baptism ([1 Pet. 3:21](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Pet.%203.21); [Col. 2:12](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Col.%202.12); [Rom. 6:3-4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Rom.%206.3-4)) eliminates the other possibilities (Petrillo,6). If such a standard is good enough in deciphering God’s standard for man to accept his terms of salvation, why is such a standard not good enough in deciphering what God desires in worship? In order to be a workman of the word, consistency is required, with passages we like or do not like.

**It Doesn’t Prevent Me from Singing and Making Melody**

Objection: There are honest brothers and sisters who suggest the use of the instrument in worship does not prevent them from singing and making melody in their heart.

Answer: Certainly, at face value, the statement is true. However, the wrong question is being asked; the question is not “Does the instrument prevent me from singing and making melody in my heart?”; the question being asked is “What does God authorize as acceptable worship to Him?” The wrong question may have a logical answer but still be biblically inaccurate. We must ask the right questions and discover the right answers in order to please God.

**The Use in the Old Testament**

Objection: References to the Old Testament are often cited as evidence of God accepting instrumental worship.

Answer: However, several points should be made regarding instrumental worship in the Old Testament:

**There was a command given to use instruments**

The LORD said to Moses: 2 “Make two trumpets of hammered silver, and use them for calling the community together and for having the camps set out…10 Also at your times of rejoicing—your appointed feasts and New Moon festival you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and they will be a memorial for you before your God. I am the LORD your God.” ([Numbers 10:1](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Numbers%2010.1),[10](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Numbers%2010.10" \t "_blank)).

What is often overlooked is the fact that in the Old Testament God gave a command for instrumental worship, whereas in the New Testament no such command exists.

**A place was designated for their use**

“*David, together with the commanders of the army, set apart some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals. Here is the list of the men who performed this service: … All these men were under the supervision of their fathers for the music of the temple of the LORD, with cymbals, lyres and harps, for the ministry at the house of God. Asaph, Jeduthun and Heman were under the supervision of the king*.” (1 Chronicles 1-6).

“*He stationed the Levites in the temple of the LORD with cymbals, harps and lyres in the way prescribed by David and Gad the king’s seer and Nathan the prophet; this was commanded by the LORD through his prophets. So the Levites stood ready with David’s instruments, and the priests with their trumpets. Hezekiah gave the order to sacrifice the burnt offering on the altar. As the offering began, singing to the LORD began also, accompanied by trumpets and the instruments of David king of Israel. The whole assembly bowed in worship, while the singers sang and the trumpeters played. All this continued until the sacrifice of the burnt offering was completed. When the offerings were finished, the king and everyone present with him knelt down and worshiped. King Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness and bowed their heads and worshiped*” ([2 Chronicles 29:25-29](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/2%20Chronicles%2029.25-29)).

Through observation of Old Testament passages we can see that the instruments were not only commanded to be used, but God regulated where those instruments should be used and for what purpose they should be played. Once again, no such command is given in the New Testament regarding instrumental worship.

**Instruments where not used outside the temple**

**During Captivity**

“*Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. You are God my stronghold. Why have you rejected me? Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy? Send forth your light and your truth, let them guide me; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell. Then will I go to the altar of God, to God, my joy and my delight. I will praise you with the harp, O God, my God*” ([Psalm 43:1-4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Psalm%2043.1-4)).

“*By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget [its skill]. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy*.” ([Psalm 137:1-6](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Psalm%20137.1-6))

“*As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God? My tears have been my food day and night, while men say to me all day long, “Where is your God?” These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God,with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God*.” ([Psalm 42:1-6](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Psalm%2042.1-6)).

**Outside the Temple after Captivity When the Temple was Rebuilt**

“*I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.” When they had sung an hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives*” ([Matthew 26:29-30](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Matthew%2026.29-30)). (Passover meal-institution of the Lord’s Supper)

“The one presiding rises and sings a hymn composed as an address to God, either a new one of his own composition or an old one by poets of an earlier day who have left behind them hymns in many measures and melodies… After him all the others take their turn as they are arranged and in the proper order while all the rest listen in complete silence except when they have to chant the closing lines or refrains, for then they all lift up their voices, men and women alike (Philo, The Contemplative Life, 80). (Philo of Alexadria recalling a private Jewish observation of the Passover).

Whether the temple was destroyed (Babylonian captivity) or present (post exile/temple restoration) the Jewish did not use instrument outside of temple worship? This begs the question, why? The only answer which can be deduced is, God had not authorized such use of the instrument outside of temple worship.

**Part 4: Consideration of Hebrews 10:1-9**

Hebrews 10 drives home the point regarding the cessation of the old covenant as the means of salvation. One should note the Hebrews writer’s statement in verses 1-9,

“*For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near… He does away with the first in order to establish the second*.”

This statement, by virtue of inspiration, shows, 1) The Old Law was not sufficient to save anyone; 2) Christ’s covenant has made the old obsolete in every way possible. This would include every ordinance connected with sacrificial worship, e.g. temple, levitical priests, sacrifices, instrumental worship.

**Part 5: For Everything?**

But what about the things in worship which aren’t mentioned in the bible? Must we have authority (Book chapter and verse) for Church buildings? Trays? Communion cups? Pews? Lighting? Bible study at Chick-fil-a?

Consider the great commission from Mark 16 which has been previously mentioned; Jesus commanded His disciples to “go” into all the world, yet set no specific regulation on how one is to fulfill the command to go. An observation of the book of Acts reveals that many disciple fulfilled the command to “go” by chariot ([Acts 8:31](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%208.31)), rope and basket ([Acts 9:25](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%209.25)), and by ship ([Acts 16:11](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2016.11))(Miller, Authority). So what about going to Chick-fil-a, it is clear from scripture that the means of transportation is optional, thus the Bible student must conclude the same holds true today.

Furthermore, we see an example in the Old Testament; specifically Noah’s building of the ark. The principle of authority definitely applied to Noah! God specifically told him to build a giant wooden ark to navigate the coming flood. God laid out the dimensions, type of wood, a door and a window. He was not authorized to build a different mode of transportation (Miller, Authority). He was told what type of material, gopher wood, but was not authorized to use some other material. However, there was no specification as to what tools he could use to build the ark, therefore, he was authorized to use any time of hammer, nails, saw, hired hands to fulfill the command (Miller, Authority).

The Bible commands believers to assemble together for worship ([Acts 20:7](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2020.7); [1 Cor. 5:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor.%205.4); [Heb. 10:25](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Heb.%2010.25)). Yet, it is impossible for a plurality of people to gather without an assembly place. We see in the text of the New Testament that Christians met in a third-story room ([Acts 20:8-9](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2020.8-9)), in private residences ([1 Cor. 16:19](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/1%20Cor.%2016.19)) and public ([Acts 20:20](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Acts%2020.20)). Thus church buildings, chairs, pews, restrooms, lights are all acceptable in fulfilling the command to assemble (Miller, Authority). Once again, the place in which people gather, and what is used to accommodate the assembling is optional (Miller, Authority).

Therefore, anything which is enjoined with fulfilling the command is authorized. Unfortunately, God has specified singing as the music of the New Testament church, instrumental music is not enjoined with the command but supplemental; another form of music in the same way that emailing and calling are two different ways in communicating. Typing does not aid calling in supplements one form for the other Miller, Authority).

The evidence surrounding worship for the New Testament church is clear. God authorizes through specification in one area, thus eliminating all other areas. God specified vocal singing in the New Testament as a form of music he wants in worship. Therefore, all other forms of music have been eliminated, thereby making them sinful. Let us all seek to please God in word, deed, and especially in worship.

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