

Music in the Church

A. Christians are commanded to sing (Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16-17).

1. God has been specific regarding the music of the church. No other type of music is authorized.

B. Examples of music in the church:

1. Acts 16:25; 1 Cor. 14:15, 26; Ja. 5:13; cf. Rom. 15:9; Heb. 2:12; 13:15.

C. We are commanded to sing making melody with our heart to the Lord (Eph. 5:19).

1. "Making melody" means *to play strings, pluck strings*.
 - a. The strings that we are to play are the strings of our heart. We sing with grace in our hearts (Col. 3:16).
2. God has been specific regarding the "instrument" with which we are to accompany our singing — our heart. We are not authorized to accompany our singing with any other instrument.

D. Authorized types of songs (psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs) (Eph. 5:19):

1. Psalms are songs of praise.
 - a. In the New Testament, the Greek word is used in reference to the Old Testament Psalms (Lk. 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33) but is not limited to them (1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).
2. Hymns are sacred songs of praise.
 - a. The Old Testament Psalms are sometimes referred to as hymns in secular Jewish writings. Therefore, the difference between "psalm" and "hymn" is difficult to comprehend in Eph. 5:19.
 - b. It is probable that Paul uses "psalms" to specifically denote the Old Testament Psalms and "hymn" to denote other songs of praise.
3. Spiritual songs are songs of a spiritual nature, in contrast to songs of a secular nature.

E. Mechanical instrumental accompaniment is not authorized.

1. We are commanded to do the things God has authorized in His word (Col. 3:17; 1 Cor. 4:6; 2 Jn. 1:9; Rev. 22:18-19).
 - a. The apostle Paul and the Jews understood that God's silence is not authoritative (Heb. 7:11-14; cf. Acts 15:24).
2. God has not authorized instrumental accompaniment in the church. He has only authorized us to sing, accompanied by the string of our heart.
 - a. Mechanical instruments in worship were authorized by the Mosaic Law and the Prophets (2 Chron. 29:25f). But God changed the law (Heb. 7:12-14); we live under the law of Christ today (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2; Heb. 5:9; cf. 2 Jn. 1:9).
 - b. God has not authorized mechanical instruments in the worship of the church (Eph. 5:18-20; Col. 3:16-17).

1. If we try to worship God as prescribed under the Mosaic Law and use mechanical instruments in the church, our worship is vain (Gal. 5:4; cf. Matt. 15:8-9; Mk. 7:6-8; Col. 2:20-23).
2. E.g.: Moses disobeyed God by striking the rock at Meribah as prescribed by God in a previous command (Num. 20:8-12; cf. Ex. 17:1-7).
 - a. Moses disobeyed God because He did not believe (Num. 20:12).
 - b. Moses was punished for his disobedience (Num. 20:12).
 - c. If we use mechanical instruments in the church based on the Mosaic Law, we are disobeying God as a result of our disbelief.
3. New Testament styled music in the church, led to the creation of a new word, *a cappella*.
 - a. "A cappella" is an Italian word meaning *in chapel style: without instrumental accompaniment*.
 - b. Music in the Lord's church is a cappella (singing without instrumental accompaniment).
 1. Instrumental accompaniment was add to denominational worship around the twelfth century.

F. History from the second century forward:

1. Early Christians:

- a. **Justin Martyr (ca. 110-165 A.D., philosopher who converted to Christianity)**
 1. "Simply singing is not agreeable to children, but singing with the lifeless instruments and dancing and clapping; on which account the use of this kind of instrument and others agreeable to children is removed from the songs in the churches, and there is left remaining simply singing" (*Justin's Questions and Answer to the Orthodox*, Ques. 107, pg. 462).
- b. **Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-200 A.D.)** taught that the use of instrumental music which aroused carnal passions was sinful not only in the church but in everyday activities.
 1. "Let Revelry keep away from our rational entertainments, and foolish vigils, too, that revel in intemperance. For revelry is an inebriating pipe, the chain of an amatory bridge, that is, of sorrow. And let love, and intoxication, and senseless passions, be removed from our choir. Burlesque singing is the boon companion of drunkenness. A night spent over drink invites drunkenness, rouses lust, and is audacious in deeds of shame. For if people occupy their time with pipes, and psalteries, and choirs, and dances, and Egyptian clapping of hands, and such disorderly frivolities, they become quite immodest and intractable, beat on cymbals and drums, and make a noise on instruments of delusion; for plainly such a banquet, as seems to me, is a theater of drunkenness. For the apostle decrees that, "putting off the works of darkness, we should put on the armor of light, walking honestly as in the day, not spending our time in rioting and drunkenness, in chambering and wantonness." Let the pipe be resigned to

the shepherds, and let the flute to the superstitions who are engrossed in idolatry. For, in truth, such instruments are to be banished from the temperate banquet, being more suitable to beasts than men, and the more irrational portion of mankind. For we have heard of stags being charmed by the pipe, and seduced by music into the toils, when hunted by the huntsmen. And when mares are being covered, a tune is played on the flute - a nuptial song, as it were. And every improper sight and sound, to speak in a word, and every shameful sensation of licentiousness - which, in truth, is privation of sensation - must by all means be excluded; and we must be on our guard against whatever pleasure titillates eye and ear, and effeminates. For the various spells of the broken strains and plaintive numbers of the Carian muse corrupt men's morals, drawing to perturbation of mind, by the licentious and mischievous art of music" (Edited by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson; Revised and arranged with notes A. Cleveland Cox, *Ante-Nicene Fathers; Volume 1; The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus*; Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, Inc., 1994; p. 248-9).

2. The Catholic Encyclopedia, commenting on Clement's teaching in respect to music in the early church, says, "Clement of Alexandria severely condemns the use of instruments even at Christian banquets" ("Ecclesiastical Music," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*).

c. **Music of the early church was distinctly different from other religions.**

Pagan religions employed mechanical instruments to drown out the squeals of dying animals being sacrificed and to soothe their gods.

1. "Musical instruments were frequently played at sacrifices. Sculptured scenes depicting Roman and Greek sacrifices normally show a musician playing the *aulos*. The loud wailing of the pipe may have served the practical function of drowning out the squeals of the dying animal, as the incense did of sweetening the odor of the sacrifice. In origin, however, the practice is usually understood as apotropaic magic, to frighten evil spirits away. Another suggestion is that the music soothed the gods and made them more favorably disposed toward the worshiper. Regardless of its purpose, instrumental music normally accompanied animal sacrifice in the ancient world" (Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*; Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1993; p. 181-2).

2. **Roman Catholics:**

- a. For almost a thousand years Gregorian chant, without any instrumental or harmonic addition, was the only music used in connection with the liturgy. The organ, in its primitive and rude form, was the first, and for a long time the sole, instrument used to accompany the chant ("Musical Instruments in Church Services," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*).
- b. The organ, in the sense of a particular instrument (which dates from the time of St.

Augustine), is a development of the Syrinx or Pandean pipe, and in its earliest form consisted of a small box with a row of pipes in the top, which were inflated by the performer with the mouth through means of a tube at the end. It has in the course of time undergone considerable improvements. The use of organs in churches is ascribed to Pope Vitalina (657-672) Constantine Copronymos sent an organ with other presents to King Pepin in France in 767 Charlemagne received one as a present from Caliph Haroun al Rashid, and had it put up in the cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle. The art of organ building was cultivated chiefly in Germany. Pope John VIII. (872-882) requested Bishop Anno of Freising to send him an organ and an organist (Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, IV:439).

- c. "At all events, a strong objection to the organ in the church service remained pretty general down to the twelfth century ..." ("Organ," *The Catholic Encyclopedia*).

3. Leaders of Reformed Churches:

- a. **John Calvin (architect of the Presbyterian church):** "*Praise Jehovah upon the harp*. It is evident that the Psalmist here expresses the vehement and ardent affection which the faithful ought to have in praising God, when he enjoins musical instruments to be employed for this purpose. He would have nothing omitted by believers which tends to animate the minds and feelings of men in singing God's praises. The name of God, no doubt, can, properly speaking, be celebrated only by the articulate voice; but it is not without reason that David adds to this those aids by which believers were wont to stimulate themselves the more to this exercise; especially considering that he was speaking to God's ancient people. There is a distinction, however, to be observed here, that we may not indiscriminately consider as applicable to ourselves, every thing which was formerly enjoined upon the Jews. I have no doubt that playing upon cymbals, touching the harp and the viol, and all that kind of music, which is so frequently mentioned in the Psalms, was a part of the education; that is to say, the puerile instruction of the law: I speak of the stated service of the temple. For even now, if believers choose to cheer themselves with musical instruments, they should, I think, make it their object not to dissever their cheerfulness from the praises of God. But when they frequent their sacred assemblies, 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. 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 apostle is far more pleasing to him. Paul allows us to bless God in the public assembly of the saints only in a known tongue, (1 Corinthians 14:16.)" (*Calvin's Commentary on Psalm 33:2*).
- b. **John Wesley (founder of the Methodist church):** "I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels provided they are neither heard nor seen" (quoted, Adam Clarke's *Commentary*, Vol. 4, p. 686).
- c. **Adam Clarke (Methodist):** "I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them productive of any good in the worship of God; and

have had reason to believe that they were productive in 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 register my protest against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity" (Adam Clarke's *Commentary*, Vol. 4, p. 686).

- d. **Martin Luther (Lutheran):** "Martin Luther called the organ an 'ensign of Baal'" (McClintock & Strong's Encyclopedia).
- e. **Charles Spurgeon (Baptist):** "We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it" (*The Treasury of David*, comment on Ps. 42:4).