

THE MUSIC OF THE CHURCH

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A sincere young Christian submitted the following question regarding how the Scriptures teach concerning the music of the church.

Since God did not give us a direct command on where we should worship whether it be in a building or outside and we can do either, why can't we use pianos or organs since he did not give us a direct command not to use instruments in the Bible?

A clear understanding of **how** the Scriptures teach is a matter of paramount importance in determining the answer to this question. The Bible is the inspired, immutable, and infallible verbal expression of God's will for mankind (II Tim. 3:16, Heb. 6:17, Psa. 19:7), and it is to its pages we must look for understanding on this matter.

God authorized an assembly for Christians (Heb. 10:25). A meeting place is implied in that command, but observe that no direct statement is given in that passage or any other regarding the details of the meeting place. Yet, on the subject of music in the church the Scriptures do give a direct statement about details of what kind of music (Eph. 5:19). In regard to the meeting place Christians infer that they have the option of meeting out in the open, under the shade of a tree, in a tent, in a rented hall, or they may purchase or build a suitable place to meet for worship. Their needs and judgment are the guidelines in making the selection from among these and other possible options. They have this liberty because the command was simply to assemble. They are expected by God to infer appropriate details in carrying out this charge.

Instead of searching for a direct command from God about what **not** to use in producing the music of the church the Christian must evaluate what God positively commanded. The reason the subject must be approached in this way is because that is how the Scriptures teach on this particular point. The concern here is "how do the Scriptures teach along the line of the music of the church?" The Scriptures teach in a positive way to the elimination of instrumental music in the worship of the church. To illustrate, take for an example election time where several candidates are running for the same office. It is not necessary once all the ballots are counted to announce all the ones that lost. That could be done, and the only

candidate not named as having lost would obviously be the winner. But, the same information could be, and is, stated positively. When the winner is named, all others running for that office know they have been defeated. Similarly, the Bible does not list all the prohibitions from the music of the church. God speaks positively about what he requires.

Members of the church of Christ are often confronted by members of other churches who cannot understand why objections are raised to instrumental music in worship. They say, "God said, 'Make a joyful noise,' and we certainly do that!" A preliminary consideration which is actually beyond the scope of this present article is: Which covenant was in force when the principle, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands," was stated? (Psa. 100:1). Briefly, the answer will reflect a discerning of the difference between the Old and New Testaments. Christians learn from the Old but are not bound by it as they are the New (Gal. 3:24; Rom. 7:4, 15:4; Col. 2:14). So, a more specific way of addressing how the Bible teaches positively the type music the church must produce in worship involves the teaching of the new covenant of Christ, not the old law of Moses.

Under the new covenant music is called for in worshipping God. There are only two types of music in the world: Instrumental and vocal. Does the New Testament call for instrumental or vocal, or does the New Testament offer an option of either instrumental and/or vocal music? Provided authorization can be found for instrumental music in general, the type of such music would be left up to the worshipper. Whether pianos, organs, drums, guitars, etc., in an orchestration or singularly would depend upon the means and judgment of the congregation because all fall under the heading of "instrumental music." However, the Scriptures narrow down the available options from instrumental and/or vocal to instrumental or vocal all the way down to vocal. A crucial text here in proof of this is Ephesians 5:19, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." The type of music God calls for is vocal, "singing"; the melody is not to be made on a mechanical instrument but in the heart of the worshipper as he or she sings.

A further consideration of vocal music points up several possible alternatives under this heading. A solo, a choir, and an entire congregation can each produce vocal music. Does the Bible specify further into the category of vocal music by calling for one of these types of vocal music? The answer is *yes*. Remember Ephesians 5:19 where it said, "Speaking to yourselves"? Colossians 3:16 is a parallel verse which says, "Teaching and admonishing *one another* . . . singing." If there must be a "speaking to yourselves" or to "one another," then the solo and choir

arrangements are both out. Only congregational singing fits the description of these passages and is, therefore, the type of singing ordained of God in Christian worship.

In keeping with the sentiment of the young person's question at the beginning of this article, it should be observed that Christians are at liberty to select the place in which they will assemble according to the implication of the command in Hebrews 10:25 and in that same way are at liberty to select the type of congregational singing in which to be engaged according to the implication of the command in Ephesians 5:19. Types of congregational singing are: Singing in unison, four part harmony, chants, and antiphonal singing. All are allowable under the heading of "congregational singing." The type and/or types of congregational singing utilized in worship is left up to the collective judgment, interest, and ability of the congregation.

Aids in fulfilling this command of God would be things like having printed song books and a director to keep time and get the right pitch using a pitch pipe or tuning fork. An instrument of music is not an aid to congregational singing because it imposes an additional kind of music into the worship for which there is absolutely no authorization. An absence of authorization for instrumental music in Christian worship condemns its being used according to Colossians 3:17.

In summary, being able to Scripturally distinguish between matters of faith and matters of liberty or opinion in relation to the command to sing requires thoughtful study and prayerful deliberation by the sincere and honest seeker of God's truth.