

## **Acceptable Music in Worship to God**

The music God wants and finds acceptable in our worship to Him is the music from our hearts. Here are ten key teachings He would have us know regarding a cappella music vs. instrumental music (Scriptures for each one follow):

- 1) God's Will: He Wants and Deserves Our Unified Voices to Praise and Worship Him**
- 2) New Covenant: Christians Live and Worship under the New Covenant, Not the Old**
- 3) Worship in Spirit and Truth: from the Heart**
- 4) God Commands Us to Sing**
- 5) Christ and His Apostles Give Us Examples**
- 6) Biblical Guides to Interpretation**
- 7) Silence**
- 8) History**
- 9) The Human Voice Is a Beautiful Instrument of Praise without Additions**
- 10) Objections and Problems**

### **SCRIPTURE REFERENCES AND ADDITIONAL NOTES**

#### **1) God's Will: He Wants and Deserves Our Unified Voices to Praise and Worship Him**

Romans 15:5-6 Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 13:15 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.

Revelation 19:5 And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great."

#### **2) New Covenant: Christians Live and Worship under the New Covenant, Not the Old**

Hebrews 8:13 When He said, "A new covenant," He has made the first obsolete. But whatever is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to disappear.

In the book of Acts, we learn what are the modes of worship that God desires and finds pleasing and acceptable:

Acts	2:42	apostles' teaching
		breaking of bread
		prayer
	2:45	sharing
	2:47	praising God

### **3) Worship in Spirit and Truth: from the Heart**

John 4:24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth"

### **4) God Commands Us to Sing**

God's commands are true, positive and life giving. Jesus and John tell us that we show our love for God by abiding in His word and obeying His commands.

John 15:7 and 10 "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. . . . If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love.

1 John 5:2, 3 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not burdensome.

In this positive spirit, God commands us to sing:

Ephesians 5:19 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.

Colossians 3:16 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.

The command to do one thing excludes others. For example, when we say "Stop at the red light," we don't have to say "Don't stop at the green light," it is understood.

In other words, commands function in the "principle of noncontradiction." Contradictory statements cannot both be true at the same time. A command or statement must have limited meaning. In terms of meaning, it must include itself and exclude its opposite. This is a proper view of inclusive-exclusive patternism, for "it contradicts what it is not and includes no more than it is." What is forbidden is what subverts an explicit command that is rooted in a normative theological principle. The inclusion of one is the exclusion of another. Commands have meaning because they direct us in a clear and positive way to do what is essential. To do this they do not have to expand on what is not essential to obeying the will of God in a specific matter.

### **5) Christ and His Apostles Give Us Examples**

Matthew 26:30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

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

Also, see above on Acts 2.

## **6) Biblical Guides to Interpretation**

Please see the attachment on Biblical Guides to Interpretation

## **7) Silence**

The New Testament has absolutely no examples of instrumental music in worship

The New Testament has examples that show silence is authoritative: Hebrews 7:14 For it is evident that our Lord was descended from Judah, a tribe with reference to which Moses spoke nothing concerning priests.

Silence on a matter in one passage works with commands in other passages to guide us to proper interpretations, for:

The sum of Your word is truth (Psalm 119:160).

Whenever a positive Biblical principle provides a rationale for silence, then we may consider the silence intentional (e.g., the silence of the New Testament regarding instrumental music may reflect a principle of spiritual [pneumatic] worship that is inconsistent with mechanical instruments).

A key idea in the dynamics of command and silence is what some call the “regulative principle.” It basically states that whatever the Bible commands is included and to be obeyed and what is not expressly commanded is to be left out. In terms of worship, article 5 attached says true worship follows the principle that “Only what God commands in His word is allowed.” False worship twists this to say “Whatever is not expressly condemned in the Bible is allowable.” Another way it has been put is “True worship is only commanded by God; false worship is anything not commanded.” In other words, those willing to stray from God’s commands will allow anything which God does not specifically forbid. Obviously if God had to specify everything He forbids in worship the Bible would have to be a huge and unmanageable book.

A fine example is J. W. Shepherd's comment on the phrase "singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). Instead of discussing what impact this phrase has on its own context, or vice versa, Shepherd's entire concern was more contemporary: What constitutes acceptable singing? The cue for this question comes from the phrase "with your heart" (as opposed to anything other than your heart, viz., instrumental music). But is the point of this text to establish the means of acceptable music? This question is never addressed. Because of Shepherd's concern, he ends up drawing the following conclusion:

No performance of an instrument can possibly grow out of the word of God in the heart; a mechanical instrument cannot speak that word either to praise God or to teach and admonish one another. The sound of the instrument drowns the words sung and hinders

the teaching and admonition. The use of the instrument hinders and destroys the essential purpose of the worship in song. It works an entire change in the song service; it sooner or later changes it from a service of praise to God into a musical and artistic entertainment that pleases and cultivates the fleshly and sensual nature. A more hurtful change could not be made in the worship than this change in its spirit and purpose. If it was a sin to change the appointments of God in the patriarchal and Jewish dispensations, which were sealed by the typical blood of animals, much more is it a sin to change the ordinances and appointments of the Christian dispensation, sealed by the Son of God (Hebrews 10:28, 29).

Shepherd does not call his conclusion a "necessary inference," but that it has this force for him can hardly be missed. His conclusion is quite pointed: to use instruments in worship is a sin. There is little doubt that this is a question of contemporary significance, but Shepherd never asked why or how the phrase was significant for its own context, or what its function was in its own context.

## **8) History**

A cappella means "according to the chapel" and refers to singing with just the human voice unaccompanied. (I have history on the origins of this word if you are interested.) Church history shows that a cappella singing was the way the early church sang and how Christians worshiped for the first millennium. The Eastern Orthodox tradition has sung a cappella in worship continuously from its beginning until today.

See articles 1) , 6), 7), 8) and 9) by Fergusson (from *The Churches of Christ and Early Christians Speak*), Lard, Lewis and McGarvey for more on the long and solid history of a cappella singing.

## **9) The Human Voice is a Beautiful Instrument of Praise without Additions**

See the comments by Shepherd above.

## **10) Objections and Problems**

Some objections stem from a weak unbiblical approach to interpretation and from the pressures of entertainment and postmodern culture. In the postmodern worldview choices are often made on the basis of personal desire vs. God's desire and will. Please see attachment on nominalism, modernism and postmodernism for the history of these worldviews and how they impact people's understanding of God and His Word.

*Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, so that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Romans 15:5-6

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