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Conducted by  
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**“Could you please give scriptural reasons against the use of musical instruments in church worship?”**

THIS is a question that has been debated many times, and the debates have been fierce and long, but we must not forget that new members are always coming into the church and many of them, who may have come from denominations which do use musical instruments in worship, cannot understand why Churches of Christ do not favour this practice. The plea of Churches of Christ has always been for a return to N.T. christianity as it was in the beginning, and the assertion “We speak where the Bible speaks, and are silent where it is silent”, has been and still is a unique and uncompromising stance against the defamation and textual vivisection which God’s word has been subjected to. This always prompts us, like the Bercans of old, to search the scriptures to see if there is any authority for those practices which well-meaning, but sometimes misguided, christians would want to introduce into the church. It is in this spirit that we shall attempt to answer this very important but sometimes emotive question.

### History

Departure from God’s word in the realm of worship took place quite early in the history of the church. It would seem that the first organ introduced into the worship by people who claimed to be christians was by Pope Vaialian 1 and was some 670 years after Christ. The introduction threatened the unity of the Catholic Church at that time and so the offending instrument was removed, only to be re-introduced at a date some two hundred years later. The Greek Catholic Church rejected it at this later date and continued to oppose it subsequently.

When John Wesley was asked about the use of the organ in church worship he was reputed to have said, “I have no objection to the organ in our chapels provided it is never heard nor seen”. John Calvin, the orginator of the Presbyterian Church, said of the use of the organ in worship. “It is no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of tapers or revival of the other shadows of the law. The Catholics foolishly borrowed it from the Jews.”

Bringing the question into line with the great restoration movement, Alexander Campbell said when asked about the inclusion of musical instruments in worship, “to all spiritually minded christians such aids would be as a cowbell in a concert”. J.W. McGarvey also said, “We cannot adopt the practice without abandoning the only ground upon which a restoration of New Testament Christianity can be accomplished”. These men were great Bible scholars and they realised that the mechanical aids used in worship where in no way authorised by the Bible.

### The New Testament pattern.

The use of musical instruments is nowhere mentioned in the N.T. as an aid to worship. In Rev. 5:8 we have a picture of the four and twenty elders who fell down before the Lamb, "having each one a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints". People have used this scripture to advance the argument, "Well, instruments of music are used in heaven to worship God, so what is good enough for heaven is good enough for the church". Fair enough: if God allows harps in heaven then it is His prerogative to do so, but He has never authorised the use of musical instruments in the Church! We must be consistent. If we want the harps of heaven in the church, and we appeal to the Revelation passage to support this, then we must also have the incense; but many who would support instrumental music in the church draw the line at burning incense. If the words are to be taken literally then let's have the incense with our prayers, but I think the passage is figurative anyway.

In his letter to Ephesus, Paul appeals for understanding of God's word, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:17-19). This passage specifically indicates speaking and singing and nothing else. Words alone are used both to speak and to sing; according to Paul the melody is to be made in the heart, and this is fully consistent with those who are 'filled with the Spirit'.

Speaking and singing we understand, but the making of melody, some say, can only be accomplished by the addition of a musical instrument, so in order to fulfil something that God has never commanded in the first place, they add something to His word. Paul's appeal to the Corinthian brethren was "that you may learn by us to live according to the scripture" (1 Cor. 4:6). Would that many today would live according to that teaching.

The expression 'making melody' is the Greek word PSALLO, and this means to pluck a stringed instrument with the fingers; in the O.T. this referred to the harp, and so they psalloed the harp. In the passage of scripture under consideration Paul tells christians to psallo, and what he means is that when christians sing they psallo the heart - they make melody in their hearts by the singing. This is the spiritual use of the word. Quite often in the New Testament we find the literal contrasted with the spiritual so that the spiritual meaning can be shown. Literal circumcision was a cutting of the flesh; spiritual circumcision is of the heart. The Lord mentioned the eating of his flesh and the drinking of his blood; what he meant, of course, was the spiritual feeding on him. Consequently here, literal psalloing is plucking a literal object; spiritual psalloing is the action on a spiritual object - the heart; we sing and make melody in the heart unto God.

All that the christian is commanded to do is to sing. In the N.T. we read, "And when they had sung a hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives" (Matt. 26:30) "And at midnight. Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God" (Acts 16:25). "I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Cor. 14:15). "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly. In all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God" (Coll. 3:16). Singing is the limit of the command. It ought also to be the limit of the practice.

When we sing, we sing songs. The Greek word ODE is always used in the N.T. and is in praise of God or Christ. W.E. Vine in his Expository of N.T. words explains that the word 'song' is generia, i.e., we can sing any kind of song. In Eph. 5:19 and Coll. 3:16 the adjective 'spiritual' is used to describe the sort of song which the christian should sing. The spiritual song given voice in praise unto God from a spirit-filled life will lift the heart to heights of melodic ecstasy; surely this is what the Bible teaches. Can you recall those all-too-rare occasions when you have come from a meeting and said "The singing was great tonight, wasn't it"? It was then that the melody of God had blended with the voices to produce something almost divine. That is enough, isn't it?

**The very fact that the N.T. is absolutely silent on the use of musical instruments in the worship of God should be enough to convince everyone that God never intended them to be used for this purpose. He does not want the mechanical aid; what He requires is the praise from spirit-filled lives which speak His name. Let us give this to Him.**