

DOES THE NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORIZE CHRISTIANS TO
USE INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP?

Text: Ephesians 5:19

INTRO: Most churches & religious denominations use mechanical, instrumental music in their worship services. A few do not. We are NOT questioning the sincerity of those who have adopted that practice. But we believe we MUST question whether that practice is soundly rooted in God's revealed will for those who live & worship God in this gospel age.

I. WE DO NOT WORSHIP UNDER O.T. GUIDANCE.

A. The use of instrumental music in worship was clearly commanded & exemplified in O.T. times. It was an integral part of the Levitical system of worship, 1 Chron. 16:4-5; 2 Chron. 29:25; 30:21.

B. But the Levitical priesthood with all its trappings, has served its Scriptural purpose, & has long since been taken away & replaced by the priesthood of Jesus & of His "kingdom of priests."

C. Neither Moses nor David set the pattern for N.T. worship.
Heb 7:12-14, For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood.

Heb 8:4, For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law;

II. THE WORDS PSALLO & PSALMOS.

A. It is sometimes argued that the words PSALLO and PSALMOS by definition authorize the use of a mechanical instruments. Let us note their NT uses.

1. The word PSALMOS is used 7 times in the N.T.

either in the singular or plural form. Four times it is used as the name of the book of the O.T.
Luke 20:42, Now David himself said in the Book of Psalms, "The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand..."

Luke 24:44, Then He said to them, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me."

Acts 1:20, For it is written in the book of Psalms: 'Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it'; and, 'Let another take his office.'

Acts 13:33, God has fulfilled this for us their children, in that He has raised up Jesus. As it is also written in the second Psalm: 'You are My Son, Today I have begotten You.'

2. Three times the word PSALMOS is used to command or exemplify the songs Christians use in praise.

1 Cor 14:26, How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.

Eph 5:19, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

Col 3:16, Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

3. If playing an instrument is inherent in the word PSALMOS, then every Christian needs to play an instrument in service to God.
4. Early Christians obviously did not believe that all were required to play a musical instrument, for they did not do so, & no one was ever rebuked for failing to do so.

B. The word PSALLO in its earliest form DID mean to pluck. In the LXX, it is used in only one passage, Ezra 9:3-5.

Ezra 9:3, So when I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked out some of the hair of my head and beard, and sat down astonished.

1. Eventually, the word did come to be used to describing plucking the strings of a harp or similar musical instrument.
2. By the time the N.T. was written, scholars are almost unanimous in saying the word had simply come to mean sing. Thayer: "In the N.T., to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song." Vine: "denotes in the N.T. to sing a hymn, sing praise."

It is used five times in the N.T. In our standard translations it is translated "sing" 4 of those 5 times.

Rom 15:9, And that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy, as it is written: "For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And **sing** to Your name."

1 Cor 14:15, ...I will **sing** with the spirit, and I will also **sing** with the understanding.

James 5:13, Is anyone among you suffering?
Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him **sing psalms.**

1. The one other time the word is used in the N.T., it is translated “make melody.” It is obvious the translators chose this rendering because the passage already had a word for sing, ADO.

Eph 5:19, Speaking to one another in psalms & hymns & spiritual songs, singing & **making melody** in your heart to the Lord

NOTE: In this passage & its parallel, Col. 3:16, there are three different words for songs: psalms, hymns, & spiritual songs. There are two different words for sing: sing (ADO) and make melody (Psallo).

New Jerusalem Bible: Sing psalms & hymns & inspired songs among yourselves, singing and chanting to the Lord in your hearts,

Several translations render the word PSALLO in Eph. 5:19 with the word “praise,” including Williams, Goodspeed, Moffat, Knox, Contemporary Eng., & the New American Version (Catholic). Most translations say “make melody” or “make music.” If we chant, if we sing, if we praise, we are making music. Only one translation I could find uses the word “play,” and one said “striking the strings,” obviously with virtually no basis in the text itself.

CONCLUSION: There is no passage that clearly commands or exemplifies the use of mechanical music in N.T. worship. Ancient history helps to verify that conclusion. Even among Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches, mechanical instruments in the worship of God came into use only after the apostles had been dead for centuries. We have no biblical assurance that God is pleased with its use.

Susquehanna, Marietta, PA, January 19, 2003