

# The Case for A Capella Worship

## I. Instruments in Worship - Historically

There is no reference to instrumental music in early church worship in the New Testament, or in the worship of churches for the first six centuries. Instruments in worship were not widely practiced until 18th century and are generally considered a Roman Catholic innovation.

We may be the minority now, but was not always the case!

## II. Instruments in Worship - Scripturally

DPW 2.8 *"They (Psalms) are to be sung without the accompaniment of instruments, since these are not authorized for New Testament worship."*

### A. Old Testament Instrumental Worship

2 Chron 7:4-6 4 Then the king and all the people offered sacrifices before the Lord. 5 King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand bulls and one hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated the house of God. 6 And the priests attended to their services; the Levites also with instruments of the music of the Lord, which King David had made to praise the Lord, saying, "For His mercy endures forever," whenever David offered praise by their ministry. The priests sounded trumpets opposite them, while all Israel stood.

- Only Levities were commanded to play instruments
- Not just any instruments, but directly ordained by God via King David
- Instruments were directly connected with Temple/ceremonial worship.

2 Chron 29:25-30 25 And he stationed the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets. 26 The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. 27 Then Hezekiah commanded them to offer the burnt offering on the altar. And when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord also began, with the trumpets and with the instruments of David king of Israel. 28 So all the assembly worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. 29 And when they had finished offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed and worshiped. 30 Moreover King Hezekiah and the leaders commanded the Levites to sing praise to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshiped.

There are numerous additional passages throughout 1 and 2 Chronicles which affirm instruments connection to ceremonial worship.

### B. New Testament Instrumental Worship

- Matt 26:30 - And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.
- Acts 16:25 - But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God
- 1 Cor 14:15 - What is the conclusion then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.
- 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.
- Heb 13:15 - Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.

### **To summarize the case for a capella worship:**

OT instrumental accompaniment was always connected to the Temple worship and was tied to ceremonial aspects of old covenant worship, which Christ has fulfilled. OT instrumental accompaniment was always connected to Levitical priests, as they were the only ones commanded to play instruments.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit calls us to worship God in Spirit and in truth with the fruit of our lips, making melody in our hearts.

*"It is sometimes said that the New Testament is silent about the use of musical instruments. This is true if we mean that it gives no evidence of their use in the apostolic church. About one thing, however, the New Testament is not silent. It is not silent about the termination of the ceremonial worship of the Old Testament. Our Lord himself announced that true worship would henceforth require no visible geographic center (John 4:21). Soon men would be able to worship God "in spirit and in truth" (4:24). What did He mean? Clearly, He did not mean that Old Testament ceremonial worship had been false. No, the contrast here intended is a contrast between two types of true worship, one of which was now passing away and the other of which was now coming into existence. True worship had previously been in the temple and in types: but now it would be in Spirit and in truth. "For the law" (that is, the law expressed in these Old Testament ceremonies and ordinances) was "only a shadow of the good things to come" (Heb. 10:1). And the coming of these very good things themselves of necessity terminated the anticipatory shadows! This can be seen in the particular shadowy ordinance of instrumental music, if we compare the form of expression found in the Old Testament and the New. In the Old Testament, Levites are called to worship in the temple with instruments of music (II Chron. 5:11-13, Ps. 81:1-3, 98:4-6, 149:2-3). In the New Testament, believers are called to worship in the Spirit with heart and lips (Heb. 13:15, and cf. 12:22-23, Eph. 5:18-19, Col. 3:16)." – G. I. Williamson*

## **The Case for Exclusive Psalmody**

### **I. Exclusive Psalmody – Historical Support**

*"As Christianity spread in the early years, it seems always to have been accompanied by psalmody. If one could have visited the congregations scattered around the Mediterranean during the second century, one would have found corporate and private worship living out of this book. Psalmody was virtually a mark of the church, one of the constants that constituted the distinctiveness of this new religion." – Dr James L. Mays*

Uninspired or man-inspired hymns gradually crept into the church. Uninspired hymn-singing as a practice was not widespread in the church until the 4th century. Uninspired hymnody was introduced via heretical groups first; heretics spread error by writing hymns and introducing them into worship.

Several early church councils rejected man-inspired hymns and recognized they did not have a place in worship.

- Council of Laodicea (AD 364) – forbade singing of man-inspired hymns and reading on non-canonical books of scripture
- Council of Chalcedon (AD 451) – confirmed above decree
- Council of Braga (AD 561) – decreed that poetic compositions (man-inspired) were not to be used in the "divine service of praise"
- Fourth Synod of Toledo (AD 7<sup>th</sup> C) confirmed above decree

*"Those who contend for the exclusive use of the Scripture Psalter in the direct and normal praise of God, find in the history of the Early Church signal confirmation of their position." – Rev James Harper*

### **What led to decline in Psalm singing in the modern church?**

Likely connected to rise in revivalism, which placed emphasis on technique and pragmatism.

Revivalism encouraged "decisionalism" including aiding in emotional manipulation.

## II. Exclusive Psalmody – Practical Support

### A. Psalter is Inspired

- Regarding songs, Psalms alone are inspired and inerrant
- The Psalms are “above suspicion”. We never have to fear if we might be singing error.
- Singing to God in worship is “returning praise”. When we sing/meditate on Psalms we are “thinking God’s thoughts after him”

*“The Scriptures preached and the Psalms sung provide an ideal curriculum for shaping the faith of the church.” – Michael Lefebvre*

### B. Psalter is the King’s Praise

1 Chron 25 David appoints hymn-writers for God’s worship. David directly oversees this work as verse 2 states the appointed men “prophesied according to the order of the king” and verse 6 reads they “were under the direction of their father for the music in the house of the Lord”.

*“In biblical worship it is the king who leads the congregation into worship, and it is the king’s own songs that the congregation sings with him.” – Michael Lefebvre*

Heb 2:11-12 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: “I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.”

### C. Psalter is universal and ecumenical

- No Christian can rightly oppose the Psalter. At worst, they might oppose exclusively singing the Psalms
- Regarding the RPW, singing God’s inspired Word is freeing for His people

*“The practice of (man-inspired) hymn singing is inherently schismatic. It’s impossible to bring a new song into worship and avoid controversy.” – Rev J. Scott Wilkinson*