

## Music in Worship

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There are a lot of strange statistics which have emerged from the pandemic. At one point last year, sales of yeast increased by over 600%. The music industry also noticed increases in sales. Fender Musical Instruments Corporation sold a record number of guitars in 2020. Many people attempted to learn to play guitar while staying at home. As a guitar player, I can attest that playing guitar can also encourage people to leave the house! Surprisingly, almost 1/3 of guitar sales last year were purchased by people who play in praise and worship bands<sup>i</sup>.

Worship music has evolved in America in the last fifty years. Some have attributed the addition of guitars in worship to the 1970s in southern California. Hippies and Beatles fans took their style of music to church. There are other reasons guitars became popular instruments of worship. Guitars are compact and portable; much more so than an organ. They are relatively inexpensive. And, they are easy to learn to play.

Of course, music is an important feature of worship. But, how are we to determine the music of worship? There was a time when many churches used massive organs and played Baroque-style music. This style of music has largely fallen out of favor with people. This preference change gave rise to folk-rock guitar style music in worship during the 1970s. Today, rock music with light shows and smoke machines are used in worship by many churches. What will the trends be in the future?

When we approach the subject of worship, we must recognize that worship is not a matter of personal preference. We worship the Creator. He alone has expressed how He wants to be worshipped. Here are some important considerations to make when determining the music of our worship.

**1. How we worship matters.** Some think that God is indifferent towards methods of worship. How we choose to express ourselves to God is not important. All that matters is that we worship. This perspective is misguided. For example, consider the conversation between Jesus and the woman at the well in John chapter four.

The woman at the well was not ethnically Jewish. She was a Samaritan. After the Assyrian conquest of Israel, Sargon II repopulated Samaria with non-Israelites. The Assyrians used repopulation as a means to suppress the cultures of the nations they conquered. As a result, the non-Jewish population of Samaria developed religious practices which were different from Israel. This Samaritan woman asked Jesus about these religious differences.

The Samaritans worshipped at a temple at Mt. Gerizim; whereas the Jews worshipped at a Temple in Jerusalem. The woman wanted to know whose worship was accepted: the Samaritans or the Jews. Jesus told her, "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews" (John 4:22). The Samaritans worshipped in ways never

commanded by God. Acceptable worship was to be offered at the temple in Jerusalem, not Samaria.

**2. The authority of the apostles.** Concerning the worship practices of churches today, they must appeal to the authority of the apostles. Jesus exclusively delegated authority to the apostles to establish doctrine and worship practices in local churches.

Jesus promised to give the apostles the “keys to the kingdom.” They would have the authority to “bind and loose” (Matt. 16:19, 18:18). The Holy Spirit would guide them in this important work (John 16:13). These promises began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit descended on the apostles (Acts 2:1-4). They taught the Gospel. Those who obeyed the Gospel, looked to the apostles for further guidance: “So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching...” (Act 2:41-42).

As the Gospel spread and sinners obeyed, Christians began to assemble in places far away from Jerusalem. These gatherings of Christians became local churches. The apostles organized these groups. They were arranged with elders, deacons, and teachers. The apostles ensured specific teaching was communicated within these groups. They also ensured certain worship practices were installed. While these churches were located in different places, the apostles created uniformity among them by teaching them the same things (Acts 14:23; 1 Cor. 4:17, 16:1).

Local churches were not at liberty to determine their worship practices independent of the apostles. Today, we must appeal to the teaching of the apostles for our beliefs and worship practices. This will ensure we are walking in the truth and that our worship will be accepted by God.

**3. A *cappella* music in worship.** There are several passages in the New Testament that reference music. Each of the passages identifies “singing.” For example, Paul wrote, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:18-21).

Singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in worship is one way we teach and edify one another. Only vocal, *a cappella* music fits the description of this and other passages in the New Testament. Our singing is to be an expression of our hearts. There is not a single passage in the New Testament that instructs us to play musical instruments to worship. The lack of mentioning instrumental music in the New Testament is not a valid reason for their use in worship. Silence is not permissive. Silence is always prohibitive.

For these reasons, generations of Christians rejected musical instruments in worship. Scholars estimate musical instruments did not begin to be incorporated in worship until

sometime between the sixth and tenth centuries. For hundreds of years, Christians used *a cappella* music to worship God.

### **Conclusion**

The music of worship is an important feature of the local church. Sadly, the topic has often been divisive. We must remember that we can only worship in keeping with the authority of the apostles. Whatever we do in word or deed, we must do all in the name of the Lord (Col. 3:17).

More fundamentally, though, our Creator seeks to restore His image within us. He offers us complete transformation of heart and mind through obedience to Jesus. Our worship is to be a collective reflection of His image. From this perspective, there is nothing more pure and human than singing that comes from our hearts and off our lips.

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<sup>1</sup> Sillman, Daniel. "1 out of 3 New Guitars Are Purchased for Worship Music." [www.christianitytoday.com](http://www.christianitytoday.com). Accessed August 17, 2021.