

Can We Sing *and* Play?

by Bryan Gibson

“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” (Colossians 3:16).

The above passage gives a command: sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. The same passage tells us *what* to sing: psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. But consider this question: When we sing these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the Lord, can we use an instrument of music to accompany us, like a piano, organ, guitar, etc.? Would it be pleasing to God for us to play on these instruments while singing these songs?

First, we need to figure out where to go to find the answer to this question. Obviously, to find out whether or not something is pleasing to God, we need to look in God’s word—the Bible. From reading passages like Psalms 150 and 2 Chronicles 29:25, it would *appear* that God *does* want us to play as well as sing. But not so fast. The problem with these two passages is that they are in the Old Testament and have to do with Old Testament worship. Are we prepared to restore Old Testament worship, with the daily animal sacrifices, the burning of incense, the separate priesthood, etc.? Of course, the reason we can’t restore any of this is that the Old Law, or the Law of Moses, has been taken out of the way. While we can certainly benefit from the many lessons taught in it, it is no longer a source of authority for us today. Please read Galatians 3:23-25; Ephesians 2:14-16; Colossians 2:13-14, 16-17; Hebrews 9:16-17. So to find out whether or not we can use instruments in our worship today, we must look to the New Testament.

When we look through the New Testament, we do find at least four different instruments mentioned: the trumpet, the flute, the harp, and the cymbal (see 1 Corinthians 13:1; 14:7-9, 15; 15:51-52; Revelation 8:2, 6, 13; 9:14; and others). But here’s what else we find. There is nothing said in any of these passages about the use of these instruments in the worship we are to offer to God. We are *not* asking whether or not it is right to ever play these instruments. We are concerned with whether or not we can use them in worship to God, whether or not we can use them when we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to the Lord.

When we look at the passages in the New Testament that have something to say about the worship we are to offer to God today, specifically the music we offer in worship, we find no mention of an instrument. Read the following passages for yourself: Acts 16:25; Romans 15:8-9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:11-12; Hebrews 13:15; James 5:13. We’ve already seen that instruments are mentioned throughout the New Testament, so they were readily available. But in the passages that have to do with what we are to offer to God, we are simply taught to sing. To use an instrument, we would have to go beyond God’s word, or add to it, and we cannot do that (2 John 1:9; Revelation 22:18-19). Jesus said, “Follow Me,” not, “Run ahead of Me.”