

there is no justification for treating them as unimportant or subject to the will of man.

If any, or none, of the above listed items are necessary to worship, what purpose do they serve? Are we to believe that man can improve on true worship as ordained by God? Jesus did not say, the Father was seeking those who would worship Him in new and exciting ways, but who would worship “in spirit and truth”.

Worship As Entertainment

We live in an entertainment driven society. With TV, movies, video games, sporting events, etc., we have plenty to amuse us. No matter how pure our motives, it is almost inevitable that the desire to be entertained would find its way into our worship. While worship can be, and should be enjoyable, we should not measure the success of our worship experience by how entertaining it was, but whether we have truly honored God in a way that is pleasing to Him. And, at the risk of sounding redundant, the only way for us to know what pleases God is for Him to tell us. “Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name (Heb. 13:15).” Whether we are singing, praying or simply offering praise to God, we know God is pleased with the fruit of our lips.

Justifying Additions To Worship

When it comes to justifying their actions, not many people are as honest as the lady who freely acknowledged that instrumental music is not authorized in the New Testament, and that the early church didn't use it; but it sounded so pretty she didn't think God would mind. ? Besides “I don't think God will mind”, or its equivalent, there are three common arguments used to support worship for which there is no New Testament command or example.

They had it in the Old Testament: The old covenant has been nailed to the cross (Col. 2:14). Today God speaks through His son (Jo. 1:17; Heb. 1:1, 2). The priesthood being changed there is a change of the law (Heb. 7:12). The former covenant has been set aside (Heb. 7:18). We live under a new covenant founded on better promises (Heb. 8:6). The old covenant is obsolete (Heb. 8:13). Those who seek to be justified by the law have fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). These, and other New Testament passages teach that the old law, having served its purpose, is no longer binding today. There is no support for adopting Old Testament worship in the church. Jesus did not come to ‘put a new patch on an old garment’.

It doesn't say not to do it: By that reasoning, we could add donuts and coffee to the Lord's Supper (that is not a suggestion). In fact, we could add anything we wanted to worship as long as it was not inherently sinful or expressly forbidden.

They have instrumental music in heaven: See Rev. 5:8, 14:2 and 15:2. Revelation is full of symbolism. For example, 5:8 tells us that the golden bowls of incense are the prayers of the saints. So, should we light a bowl of incense every time we pray? Whatever the harps stand for, they are not proof that we should have instruments of music in worship. If they are, it was unknown to the early church for several hundred years after it was established. There is disagreement among church historians of just how long before instruments were used in the worship of the church, but scholars of many different persuasions agree that the music of the early church was strictly vocal. In fact, vocal music, is referred to as ‘*a capella*’, which literally means ‘*in chapel style*, or the ‘style of the church’. Earlier, we defined *traditional* as ‘singing unaccompanied by any mechanical instrument of music’. It is important to understand that the reason this was the tradition of the early church is because it is the music commanded in the New Testament.

We Can Only Agree On What The Bible Says

We will never have the unity Christ prayed for (Jo. 17:20, 21) if we are guided by what the Bible doesn't say instead of the what it does say. According to Eph. 4:3, we are to endeavor to “keep the unity of the spirit”. So we don't create unity, it flows from the Spirit; and we keep it by being led by the Spirit inspired word of God. To depart from the Spirit's teaching, and be guided by “it doesn't say not to do it”, invites division. Paul said, “as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God”(Rom. 8:14). There is only one reason for insisting on any practice in worship, and that is because God commanded it. Even that which is indifferent (permissible, but not required) should not be practiced if it offends a weak brothers conscience. That is why Paul said, “if food causes my brother to stumble, I will never eat meat again” (1 Cor. 8:13). There is almost universal agreement⁴ among believers that pure, unaccompanied vocal music is acceptable worship to God. So why not worship in a way that we can agree on based on what the Bible says.

ENDNOTES:

¹ *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* (electronic edition)

² *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, W. E. Vine, Fleming H. Revell Company, USA (1966)

³ *Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, James Burton Coffman, A.C.U. Press (1984)

⁴ There is a small minority who claim the Greek word *psallō*; translated “making melody” in Eph. 5:19, always means to play on an instrument. If so, it was unknown to the early church. It would also mean playing an instrument was a command for all Christians to obey, regardless of ability. It is noteworthy that none of the Greek scholars that produced any of the 14 English versions that I checked translated *psallo* to play on an instrument. These versions ran from the Tyndale New Testament of 1526, up to today's popular versions. Even, if for the sake of argument, it was admitted that *psallō* meant play on an instrument, the instrument is named, i.e. the heart.

Music In Worship: Traditional or Contemporary?

By Dean Cave



Due to popular demand, many churches are altering their *traditional* worship to appeal to those who are seeking a more *contemporary* style of music. Because the terms *traditional* and *contemporary* are subject to different interpretations, we will define them as follows:

1. *Traditional* refers to 'singing unaccompanied by any mechanical instrument of music'; since history tells us that was the practice of the primitive church.
2. *Contemporary* refers to 'singing accompanied by everything from rhythmic clapping to rock bands'.

When it comes to worship, our main concern should not be whether to hold on to the traditional or go contemporary, but to please God. After all, worship is supposed to be directed toward Him. Jesus gave the two primary requirements for "true worship" in his discussion with the Samaritan woman in John 4:23, 24: "23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (NKJV)

What Does It Mean To Worship In Spirit?

Let us first look at what it does not mean. Although it is true that worship must be as directed by the Holy Spirit, that is not the meaning here. Jesus told His disciples that when the Holy Spirit came, he would guide them into all truth (Jo. 16:13). So the direction of the Holy Spirit is included in the charge that worship must be in truth. Neither did Jesus mean in worship we were to be guided by our own spirit. That would be contrary to scripture (Jer. 10:23; Mt. 15:8, 9). If I can be guided by my own spirit in worship, then anything and everything is permissible, because almost anything and everything has been done in the name of worship.

Worshipping God in spirit means with the proper attitude. True worship must come from the heart and cannot be found by merely keeping certain forms. It must be done out of a sense of genuine reverence for God and his will. Psalms 2:11 says, "Worship the LORD with reverence, and rejoice with trembling." Jesus said, "It is written, you shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only" (Lk. 4:8). True worship is about God and not about us. To approach it with the attitude of 'what is in it for me?' instead of 'what does God want from me?' is to miss the point entirely.

What Is Worship In Truth?

Worship in truth simply means according to the truth. What is truth? "Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth (Jo. 17:17)." God's word is the only truth in matters of religion. Anything that is not in accordance with that word has no part in true worship. Paul

warned the Colossians about the precepts and doctrines of men: "20 If ye died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do ye subject yourselves to ordinances, 21 Handle not, nor taste, nor touch 22 (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men? 23 Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body; but are not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh." Col. 2:20-23 (ASV)

What Is Will-Worship?

Paul is discussing abstaining from certain foods, false humility, worshiping of angels and other practices not a part of New Testament doctrine. While those are the problems he is dealing with at Colosse, the same thing that made them wrong, makes anything else man introduces into worship not authorized by God wrong. The things mentioned did not appear wrong to many of Paul's readers, or to many today. In fact, Paul says they "have indeed a show of wisdom in will-worship". Even though they appeared wise, they weren't. Instead, they were will-worship.

A look at some other versions may be helpful in understanding what the KJV & ASV refer to as 'will-worship. Notice self in the following: "self-imposed worship" (NIV); "self-made religion" (NASB); "self-imposed piety" (NRSV); "self-imposed religion" (NKJV). According to Thayer, will-worship refers to "worship which one prescribes and devises for himself, contrary to the contents and nature of faith which ought to be directed to Christ."¹ Vine defines it as "voluntarily adopted worship, whether unbidden or forbidden, not that which is imposed by others, but which one affects."² Each of these definitions include expressions of worship that originate, not in the mind of God, but in the mind of man. Notice, Vine says will-worship includes not just that which is forbidden, but also that which is unbidden. That is Biblical. The charge against Nadab and Abihu wasn't that they had offered that which was expressly forbidden, rather they had offered that which "He (God) had not commanded them." (Lev. 10:1)

Coffman says, "Will-worship means the kind of actions engaged in because they please the worshiper, and not because they were commanded by the Lord."³ And I believe that gets to the heart of the matter. In spite of Jesus plainly stating that worship must be in spirit and truth, there are those who see no harm in introducing forms of worship that are foreign to the scriptures. They even cite such motives as "making worship more meaningful." The question is, more meaningful to who, them or God? Do we know better than God how to make our worship more meaningful or acceptable? What could be more meaningful than offering heartfelt praise in the manner God has directed?

The Spirit Or Letter?

Sometimes, people say things like, "it is the spirit that matters in

worship"; or that "the spirit is more important than the letter". One churches website had this to say, "'Jesus' description of worship "in spirit in truth" had nothing to do with adhering to rules and everything to do with being honest and sincere in our praise."⁴ Such statements are the equivalent of saying "our attitude is more important than God's truth". The fact is, when Jesus said true worshipers "**must** worship in spirit and truth", He made both equally important. They are not mutually exclusive terms. It is not spirit **or** truth, but spirit **and** truth that define true worship.

Elements of True Worship

When we turn to the New Testament, we find authority for the following: (1) Prayer (Acts 2:42; Eph. 6:18); (2) Singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16); (3) Teaching (Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 4:17); (4) Communion (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7) and (5) Giving (1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:7).

Unless you can find scripture either directing or permitting it, anything else introduced into the worship of the church is: (1) not of faith (Rom. 10:17); (2) does not pertain to life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3); (3) cannot pass the proof test (1 Thess. 5:21).

What Is Necessary To "True Worship"?

- Burning incense
- Candle lighting
- Rosaries
- Rolling in the aisles
- Instrumental music
- Rock bands
- Choirs
- Hand clapping

Many, if not most, professing Christian's would object to at least some of the things listed above, while accepting others. For example, most protestant denominations have adopted the use of instrumental music in worship, but do not use rosaries or roll in the aisles. Among those that reject instrumental music are some who clap rhythmically while singing. They may even see any objections to the practice as 'Pharisaical' or 'straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel'. No right thinking person wants to be guilty of either. But, our desire should be to worship God in the way that **we know** is pleasing to Him. And the only way for us to **know** what is pleasing is for Him to tell us. And He has told us to sing and make melody in our heart (Eph. 5:19), not with our hands or on some instrument.

Speaking of being 'Pharisaical', it is a common misconception that Jesus condemned the Pharisees because of their attention to detail. In fact He condemned them for leaving undone the weightier matters of the law. As far as the details are concerned, He said, "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone (Mt. 23:23)." So, regardless of whether you consider the 'details' in worship a 'weighty' matter or not,