

# Why We Sing A Cappella

(For the same reason we don't sacrifice sheep, bulls, or goats in our worship!)

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One of the things you will notice when you worship with us is that we sing *a cappella*, that is, without instrumental accompaniment. We don't use instruments in public worship because they were part of the *ceremonial Law* and *Levitical Priesthood* that were abolished when Jesus died on the cross,

*"The priestly sons of Aaron, moreover, shall blow the trumpets; and this shall be for you a perpetual statute throughout your generations.*

*"When you go to war in your land against the adversary who attacks you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, that you may be remembered before the LORD your God, and be saved from your enemies.*

*"Also in the day of your gladness and in your appointed feasts, and on the first days of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings, and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be as a reminder of you before your God. I am the LORD your God." (Numbers 10:8-10; emphasis added)*

With the death of Jesus, the ceremonial law and Levitical Priesthood have ended and we are now commanded to sing with the instrument of the heart,<sup>i</sup>

*For when the **priesthood is changed**, of necessity there takes place a **change of law** also. (Hebrews 7:12)<sup>ii</sup>*

*For, on the one hand, there is a **setting aside of a former commandment** because of its weakness and uselessness. (Hebrews 7:18)*

*And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.** (emphasis added; Ephesians 5:18,19; cf. Colossians 3:16)*

By not using instruments in public worship the church declares that the sacrificial work of Jesus Christ is finished (Mark 15:38 [the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to

bottom]; John 19:30 ["It is finished!"). The church is now listening for the trumpet of God when Jesus returns and the dead are raised and we will be changed,

Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

To summarize, our not using instruments in the public worship of God has to do with our beliefs about the first and second coming of Jesus.

*A cappella* singing was the practice of the apostolic church and it was the unanimous practice of the post-apostolic church. In fact, it wasn't until A.D. 560 that bells were first used in a church and the approximate year an organ was first used in worship was A.D. 730. <sup>iii</sup>Below are remarks and reasons by well-known Christians as to why instruments should not be used when the church gathers to offer sacrifices of praise:

#### **Justin Martyr A. D. 150**

Plain singing is not childish, but only the singing with lifeless organs, with dancing and cymbals, etc. Whence the use of such instruments and other things fit for children are laid aside, and plain singing only retained.

#### **Clement of Alexandria A. D. 190**

We [Christians] make use only of one organ or instrument, even the peaceful Word, with which we honor God; no longer with the old psaltery, trumpet, drum, cymbal, or pipe.

#### **Cyprian—A. D. 240**

Such organs, or instruments, were then permitted them (the Old Testament Church) for this cause, even for the sake of their weakness, to stir up their minds to perform their external worship with some delight.

#### **Chrysostom A. D. 396**

It [Instrumental Music] was permitted to the Jews, as sacrifice was, for the heaviness and grossness of their souls. God condescended to their weakness, because they were lately drawn off from idols; but now instead of instruments we may use our bodies to praise him withal. Again, let no man deceive you, these, [instruments] appertain not to Christians; these are alien to the Catholic Church; all these things do the nations of the world seek after.

#### **Thomas Aquinas—A. D. 1260**

In the old law, God was praised both with musical instruments and human voices. But

the Church does not use musical instruments lest she should seem to Judaize. Nor ought a pipe, nor any other artificial instruments, such as organ, or harp, or the like, be brought into use in the Christian Church, but only those things which shall make the hearers better men. Under the Old Testament such instruments were used, partly because the people were harder and more carnal, and partly because these bodily instruments were typical of something.

### **John Calvin—1545**

Instrumental Music is not fitter to be adopted into the public worship of the Christian Church than the incense, the candlestick, and the shadows of the Mosaic law... We know that our Lord Jesus Christ has appeared, and by His advent, has abolished these legal shadows... For instruments of music in Gospel times, we must not have recourse to these, unless we wish to destroy the evangelical perfection, and to obscure the ...light which we enjoy in Christ our Lord.

### **John Wesley 1703-1791**

I have no objection to instruments being in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen.

### **Charles Spurgeon 1834-1892**

We should like to see all the pipes of the organs in our ...places of worship either ripped open or compactly filled with concrete

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<sup>i</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith states:

Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; (Heb. 9, Heb. 10:1, Gal. 4:1–3, Col. 2:17) and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. (1 Cor. 5:7, 2 Cor. 6:17, Jude 1:23) All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the New Testament (Col. 2:14,16,17, Dan. 9:27, Eph. 2:15–16)” (19:2).

<sup>ii</sup> Commenting on Hebrews 7:12 John Owen wrote:

And this I look upon as the greatest trial the faith of men ever had in the concerns of religion; namely, to believe that God should take away, abolish, and leave as dead and useless, that whole system of solemn worship which he had appointed in so glorious a manner, and accepted for so many generations (*Exposition of Hebrews*, p.430).

The priesthood was changed, in that one kind of it was utterly abolished, and another introduced (ibid, 431).

It is the highest vanity, to pretend use or continuance in the church, from possession or prescription, or pretended benefit, beauty, order, or advantage, when once the mind of God is declared against it (ibid, 435).

<sup>iii</sup> “The custom of organ accompaniment did not become general among Protestants until the eighteenth century” (The New Shaff-Herzogg Encyclopedia, 1953, Vol 10, p. 257).