



Church Music

*Sing aloud to God our strength;
shout for joy to the God of Jacob.
Raise a song, sound the tambourine,
the sweet lyre with the harp.
Blow the trumpet at the new moon,
at the full moon, on our festal day.
For it is a statute for Israel,
an ordinance of the God of Jacob.
He made it a decree in Joseph,
when he went out over the land of Egypt.*

Psalm 81:1-5

*Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to
God with thankful hearts.*

Colossians 3:16

Music (both vocal and mechanical or instrumental) under the old covenant was an integral part of the temple worship ritual and it was commanded by God.

In the record of king Hezekiah's restoration of temple worship we notice: *"Then 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.** The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. 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. **So all the congregation worshipped,** the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded; all this continued until the burnt offering was finished"* (2 Chronicles 29:25-28 emphasis mine).

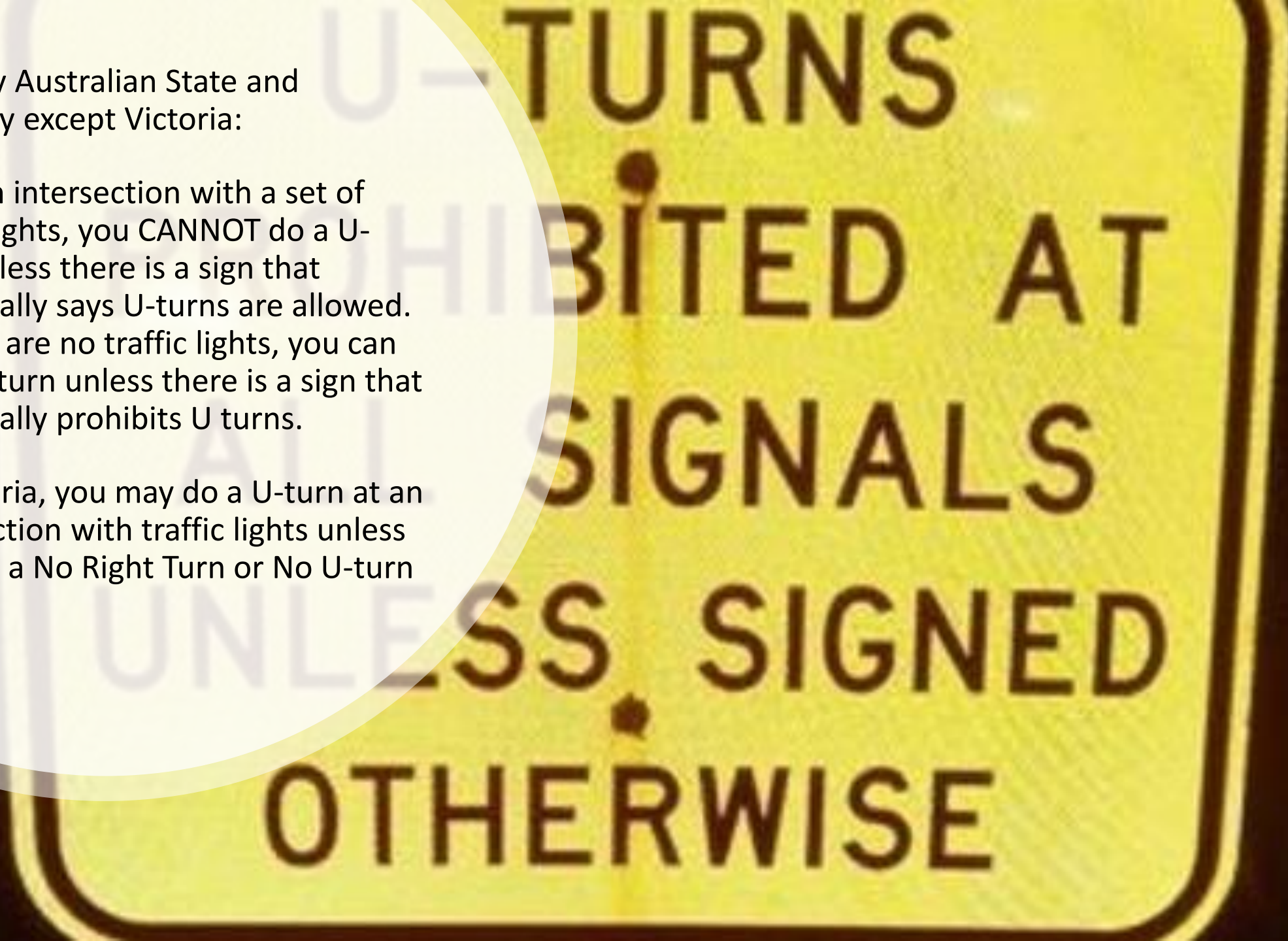
The use of instrumental music, as well as singing in Israelite worship, *was worship*. The instruments were an integral and necessary part of their praise. The Levites *"... praised the LORD with musical instruments, 'which I made,' said David, 'for giving praise'"* (1 Chronicles 23:5). Playing the instruments *was* worship, *not* merely an aid or expedient to their worship.

Music in worship, both instrumental and vocal, was practised by divine warrant under the old covenant. However, with the establishment of the new covenant, instrumental music became conspicuous by its absence and singing alone (*a cappella* praise) was practised. The New Testament Scriptures explicitly instruct and encourage Christians to sing praises to God, but there is no indication that the church used instrumental accompaniment with their sacred songs: ***The New Testament simply says nothing of instruments in Christian worship.*** In stark contrast to the prominent place of instrumental music in both pagan and Jewish worship, God's silence about its use in Christian worship is all the more striking. What do we make of this?

In every Australian State and Territory except Victoria:

If it's an intersection with a set of traffic lights, you CANNOT do a U-turn unless there is a sign that specifically says U-turns are allowed. If there are no traffic lights, you can do a U-turn unless there is a sign that specifically prohibits U turns.

In Victoria, you may do a U-turn at an intersection with traffic lights unless there is a No Right Turn or No U-turn Sign.



Four Pillars of Spiritual Authority Influencing Interpretation

Scripture

Apostolic Authority

derived from the Apostles' witness, traditions and interpretations of the Christ Event preserved in the *inspired Scriptures* (hermeneutics)

The faith once for all (Jude 3)

Tradition

Ecclesiastical Authority

derived from the Church as the temple of the Holy Spirit and its **Bishops** as the custodians/sole interpreters of truth (sectarian loyalty)

Apostolic Succession

Reason

Human Authority

derived from objective human ingenuity and current science; vulnerable to modern rationalism and cultural conformity

Human Wisdom

Experience

Human Authority

derived from subjective human experience and will; vulnerable to recreating God and religion in one's own image (ego)

Mysticism, Pragmatism

How did the early church understand the teaching of the apostles on the matter of church music? What was the early church's practice? ... and why?

Eusebius of Caesarea [ca. 260-339], wrote the following comments on Psalm 92:2-3.

Of old at the time those of the circumcision were worshipping with symbols and types it was not inappropriate to send up hymns to God with the psalterion and kithara and to do this on Sabbath days ... We render our hymn with a living psalterion and a living kithara with spiritual songs. The unison voices of Christians would be more acceptable to God than any musical instrument. Accordingly in all the churches of God, united in soul and attitude, with one mind and in agreement of faith and piety, we send up a unison melody in the words of the Psalms

Lewis, Jack P., Ferguson, E., West, E. (1987). *The Instrumental Music Issue*. Nashville, Gospel Advocate Company, 93-94.

Niceta, bishop of Remesia in what is now Yugoslavia [ca. 370-414], wrote one of the first known treatises on church music. Apparently, some Christians had developed such a 'spiritual' view of music in worship they considered thoughts alone [i.e. 'silent singing'] as proper; rejecting vocal singing, as well as instruments, as remnants of old covenant worship. Niceta said:

It is time to turn to the New Testament to confirm what is said in the Old, and, particularly, to point out that the office of psalmody is not to be considered abolished merely because many other observances of the Old Law have fallen into desuetude. Only the corporal institutions have been rejected, like circumcision, the sabbath, sacrifices, discrimination in foods. So, too, the trumpets, harps, cymbals, and timbrels. For the sound of these we now have a better substitute in the music from the mouths of men. The daily ablutions, the new-moon observances, the careful inspection of leprosy are completely past and gone, along with whatever else was necessary only for a time – as it were, for children. Of course, what was spiritual in the Old Testament, for example, faith, piety, prayer, fasting, patience, chastity, psalm-singing – all this has been increased in the New Testament rather than diminished.

Lewis, *Instrumental Music*, 94.

Theodoret, bishop of Cyrus in Syria [ca. 393-460], wrote in his *Questions and Answers for the Orthodox*:

107. Question: If songs were invented by unbelievers to seduce men, but were allowed to those under the Law on account of their childish state, why do those who have received the perfect teaching of grace in their churches still use songs, just like the children under the Law? Answer: It is not simple singing that belongs to the childish state, but singing with lifeless instruments, with dancing, and with clappers. Hence the use of such instruments and the others that belong to the childish state is excluded from the singing in the churches, and simple singing is left.

In similar fashion, John Chrysostom [ca. 347-407], *On Psalms 149,2* says:

... that in olden times they [Jews] were thus led by these instruments because of the dullness of their understanding and their recent deliverance from idols. Just as God allowed animal sacrifices, so also, he let them have these instruments, condescending to help their weakness

Ferguson, Everett. (1972). *A Cappella Music in the Public Worship of the Church*.
Abilene: Biblical Research Press, 53, 55.

This common perspective shared by these early church leaders from different parts of the Roman Empire is significant – it represents the general, if not universal, understanding and practise of the early church. While the *singing* of the Psalms of the old covenant was continued in the church, instrumental music and the other corporeal ordinances of old covenant worship were rejected as being unspiritual and weak or childish. The early church recognised and upheld the distinction between the old covenant and the new covenant. *The Temple cultus of the Jews (including instrumental praise) was not carried over from the old covenant into the new covenant.*

Does the New Testament teach this distinction between the covenants? Is it part of the apostolic tradition; the faith once for all entrusted to the saints in the first century AD?

Now the main point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent that the Lord, and not any mortal, has set up. ³ For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. ⁴ Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. ⁵ They offer worship in a sanctuary that is a sketch and shadow of the heavenly one; for Moses, when he was about to erect the tent, was warned, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.” ⁶ But Jesus has now obtained a more excellent ministry, and to that degree he is the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted through better promises. ⁷ For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no need to look for a second one.

⁸ God finds fault with them when he says:

Hebrews 8:1-9:10

*“The days are surely coming, says the Lord,
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel
and with the house of Judah;
⁹ not like the covenant that I made with their ancestors,
on the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt;
for they did not continue in my covenant,
and so I had no concern for them, says the Lord.
¹⁰ This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel
after those days, says the Lord:
I will put my laws in their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.*

Hebrews 8:1-9:10

*And they shall not teach one another
or say to each other, 'Know the Lord,'
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.*

*¹² For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,
and I will remember their sins no more."*

*¹³ In speaking of "a new covenant," he has made the first one obsolete. And what is obsolete
and growing old will soon disappear.*

*Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. ² For a tent
was constructed, the first one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the
Presence; this is called the Holy Place. ³ Behind the second curtain was a tent called the Holy of
Holies. ⁴ In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides
with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded,
and the tablets of the covenant; ⁵ above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the
mercy seat. Of these things we cannot speak now in detail.*

Hebrews 8:1-9:10

⁶ Such preparations having been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties; ⁷ but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year, and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people. ⁸ By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing. ⁹ This is a symbol of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, ¹⁰ but deal only with food and drink and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right ...

Hebrews 8:1-9:10

Jesus made an important contrast between the worship of the Jews and “worship in spirit and truth.”

The woman said to him, “Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem.” ²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming” (who is called Christ). “When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

John 4:19-26

The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

John 1:17

Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! ³ For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh—⁴ even though I, too, have reason for confidence in the flesh.

If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more:⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷ Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ.

Philippians 3:2-7

The distinction between the covenants, recognising that Christ fulfilled the old covenant and superseded it with the establishment of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:1-13), is the theological basis of the New Testament church's practise of singing *a cappella* praise. Instrumental praise passed with the other types and shadows of the Law. It is not surprising therefore that the New Testament is silent regarding instrumental music in Christian worship – *By God's design, it simply doesn't belong there.*

Mechanical instruments of music are not mentioned in the New Testament because they were not employed by the New Testament church. This conclusion is supported by the teaching and practise of the early church.

Though radically counter-cultural in our modern social context, commitment to our vision of becoming a church of God's dreams – a community of Christians pursuing God's design and purpose for His church as revealed in the New Testament – leads us to honour the apostolic tradition of singing *a cappella* praise to God.

Historical Footnotes:

The history of church music is worth considering briefly lest the rejection of instrumental music in Christian worship be dismissed as a novel eccentricity or fanaticism. After all, our experience is likely to be drawn only from present practices in Western Christendom (Roman Catholicism and Protestantism) and their practise today, with only a few exceptions, *includes* instrumental music in worship. But we may be interested to learn that instrumental praise is a ***relatively new kid on the block*** in Western denominations. We may be even more interested to know that Eastern denominations [e.g. the Greek Orthodox Church, the Russian Orthodox Church, *et al.*] generally *have not and still do not* employ musical instruments in worship [and today, those denominations incorporate many millions of followers].

Timothy Ware, Bishop of Diokleia and assistant bishop in the Orthodox Archdiocese of Thyateira and Great Britain, states the Orthodox situation in 1985 this way:

“In the Orthodox Church today, as in the early Church, singing is unaccompanied and instrumental music is not found, except among certain Orthodox in America - particularly the Greeks - who are now showing a ***penchant*** for the organ or the harmonium”

Ware, Timothy. (1985). *The Orthodox Church*. Middlesex: Penguin Books, 274-275, emphasis his.

There always seems to be a few exceptions to the rule, but Ware expresses disapproval of their practise and makes it clear that their use of instrumental music in worship is an *aberration*.

The fact is, *even today*, a very significant part of Christendom continues in the apostolic tradition of *a cappella* singing in worship. It is not now, nor has it ever been, a practise peculiar to ‘non-instrumental’ churches of Christ.

Turning to the West, it is not at all certain just when the Roman Catholic Church introduced instrumental music into its worship. McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia makes the following comment:

“The Greek word *psallo* is applied among the Greeks of modern times exclusively to sacred music, which in the Eastern Church has never been any other than vocal, instrumental music being unknown in that Church, as it was in the primitive Church. Sir John Hawkins, following the Romish writers in his erudite work in the *History of Music*, makes pope Vitalian, in A.D. 660, the first who introduced organs into churches. But students of ecclesiastical archaeology are generally agreed that instrumental music was not used in churches till a much later date; for Thomas Aquinas, A.D. 1250, has these remarkable words: ‘Our Church does not use musical instruments, as harps and psalteries, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize.’ From this passage we are surely warranted in concluding that there was no ecclesiastical use of organs in the time of Aquinas. It is alleged that Marinus Sanutus, who lived about A.D. 1290, was the first that brought the use of wind organs into churches, and hence he received the name of *Torcellus*. In the East, the organ was in use in the emperor's courts, probably from the time of Julian, but never has either the organ or any other instrument been employed in public worship in Eastern churches; nor is mention of instrumental music found in all their liturgies, ancient or modern.”

Kurfees, M. C. (1975). *Instrumental Music in the Worship*. Nashville, Gospel Advocate Company, 153.

F. LaGard Smith's comments add to this somewhat:

From the *Catholic Encyclopedia* comes this important acknowledgement: 'Pius X, in his *motu proprio* on church music (22 November 1903) in paragraph IV, says, 'Although the music proper to the church is purely vocal music, music with the accompaniment of the organ is also permitted' ... Not until the last 30 years has there been any official pronouncement giving the organ formal approval. Hardly surprising in the wake of centuries of unofficial 'permission' for the organ's use, we now have the 1963 pronouncement of Vatican II's liturgical constitution (paragraph 120) saying that the pipe organ is held in 'high esteem'. But it was not always so.

LaGard Smith, F. (1992). *The Cultural Church*. Nashville, 20th Century Christian, 200.

Many of the founders of the Protestant denominations taught against the use of instrumental music in Christian worship. The Methodist commentator, Adam Clarke, speaks of John Wesley's conviction, and adds his own sentiment on the issue:

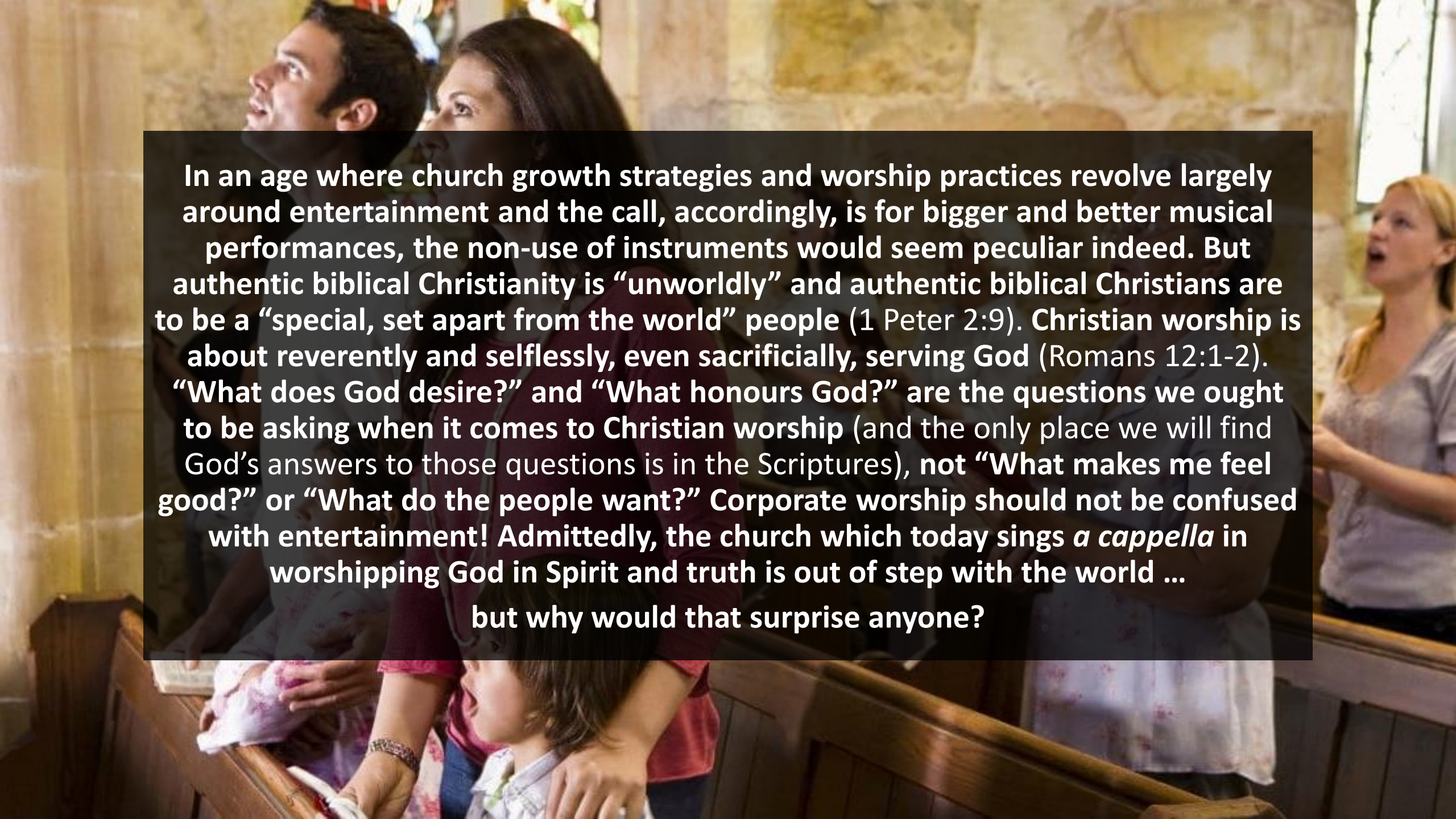
“The late venerable and most eminent divine, the Rev. John Wesley, who was a lover of music, and an elegant poet, when asked his opinion of instruments of music being introduced into chapels of the Methodists, said in his terse and powerful manner, ‘I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen.’ I say the same, though I think the expense of purchase had better be spared.”

Kurfees, M. C. (1975). *Instrumental Music in the Worship*.
Nashville, Gospel Advocate Company, 182.

John Calvin wrote

“But when they [believers] frequent their sacred assemblies, musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. The Papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far more pleasing to him.”

Girardeau, John L. (1888). *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church*. Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 163-164.



In an age where church growth strategies and worship practices revolve largely around entertainment and the call, accordingly, is for bigger and better musical performances, the non-use of instruments would seem peculiar indeed. But authentic biblical Christianity is “unworldly” and authentic biblical Christians are to be a “special, set apart from the world” people (1 Peter 2:9). Christian worship is about reverently and selflessly, even sacrificially, serving God (Romans 12:1-2). “What does God desire?” and “What honours God?” are the questions we ought to be asking when it comes to Christian worship (and the only place we will find God’s answers to those questions is in the Scriptures), not “What makes me feel good?” or “What do the people want?” Corporate worship should not be confused with entertainment! Admittedly, the church which today sings *a cappella* in worshipping God in Spirit and truth is out of step with the world ...

but why would that surprise anyone?