Churches of Christ love music. Singing is a prominent—and favorite—part of each service. Most congregations dedicate a Sunday night each month to learn new songs and to sing old favorites. Annual singings can draw thousands of people. Many Christians sing daily as they go about their tasks (James 5:13).

One prominent feature of music in churches of Christ is that it is unaccompanied by mechanical instruments. While a cappella singing is not unique to churches of Christ (more than 300 million in several religious groups sing exclusively a cappella), it does differ from many churches. Perhaps you are curious as to why. If so, read on.

Why do Churches of Christ not use Instrumental Music?

The practice is predicated on following the New Testament instead of the Old.


The New Testament records this transition:
- Hear Christ, not Moses (Matthew 17:5).
- Preach gospel to all nations (Matthew 28:18–20).
- Judged by Christ's words (John 12:48).
- Loosed/delivered from the law (Romans 7:1–7).
- "Christ is the end of the law" (Romans 10:4).
- "Engraven in stones" law abolished (2 Corinthians 3:7–14).
- Separating wall removed (Ephesians 2:14).
- Old nailed to cross (Colossians 2:14).
- Change in priesthood required change in law (Hebrews 7:12; 9:11).
- New effective after Christ's death (Hebrews 10:9).
- Christ came to take away the first law to establish second (Hebrews 10:9).

A new law changed humanity’s response to God. Christians no longer offer animals, keep the Passover, observe Sabbaths and new moons, or avoid pork and catfish (cf. Colossians 2:14–17).

Worship is not conducted by a special class of priests; blood is not sprinkled on a mercy seat; and unusual ceremonies involving goats, red heifers, and burnt animals are not required.

In the changeover, God omitted such things as burning incense, golden vessels, colorful tapestries, dancing before the Lord, bitter herbs, and instruments.
He kept unleavened bread, the fruit of the vine, prayers, and singing.

Incidental? Hardly. God always meticulously planned worship (Exodus 25–40; Leviticus 1–27). He spent more than six thousand years completing His plan for the church (Ephesians 3:11; Galatians 4:4–5) so nothing was left to happenstance.

The Old Testament is written for our learning but not for our law (Romans 15:4). Going back to the Old Testament for study is helpful in understanding many things, but going back to the Old Testament for any practice obligates one to keep all its ordinances (Galatians 5:1–3; James 2:10).

THE PRACTICE COMES FROM OUR UNDERSTANDING OF WORSHIP AND PRIESTHOOD.

Os Guinness observed, “The modern world has scrambled things so badly that today we worship our work, we work at our play, and we play at our worship.”

Churches of Christ aim never to “play at worship.” Worship is the most important thing humans do. It is a privilege to worship—more specifically, to be one from whom God accepts worship. In the Old Testament, believers offered sacrifices through priests. In the New, all Christians are priests—a kingdom of priests (Revelation 22:18–19). Man is not at liberty to put words in God’s mouth, or to ignore anything we offer. He doesn’t. God has always rejected worship He did not like (Genesis 4:4–7; Isaiah 1:13). He does not like vain worship (Matthew 15:9), which (in the context) ritualistically continues human traditions; ignorant worship (Acts 17:20–23), which results from not seeking God’s Word on the subject; and will-worship (Colossians 2:23), which offers what we want instead of what He wills.

True worship is done in spirit and in truth (John 4:24). Individually, God only accepts worship “in spirit”—that which comes from proper attitudes, such as reverence, thanksgiving, and humility (Hebrews 13:15). We must examine ourselves before worshipping (2 Corinthians 13:5).

Collectively, God only accepts “in truth” worship, which means according to His Word (John 17:17). We have no authority to put words in God’s mouth, or to ignore words from His mouth (Matthew 4:4; Revelation 22:18–19). Man is not at liberty to select a worship form that appeals to him. The danger for any church is to make worship entertainment oriented. The important thing is not what draws a crowd but what pleases God. Loving God supremely means acquiescing to His will (Matthew 7:21; 22:37–38; 23:23; John 7:17).

THE PRACTICE GROWS OUT OF OUR DESIRE TO REPRODUCE THE ORIGINAL CHURCH TODAY.

The church of Christ sang a cappella in the days of the apostles, so the church of Christ sings a cappella today. It really is as simple as that.

Churches of Christ today strive to be identical to the church in the New Testament (Romans 16:16). Before we practice anything, we verify that it was practiced by the first century church. Thus “proving all things,” we hold “fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21; cf. Jeremiah 6:16). It is the safest approach one can take in religion—the way that is right and cannot be wrong.

No scholar (of whom I am aware) says early Christians used instruments. No Bible verse records it. The phrase a cappella, which now means “without instrumental accompaniment,” originally meant “as in church.” Instruments were available and widely used in pagan worship and theaters, as well as the Jewish temple, but they were not used by the church.

Standard reference works and music textbooks confirm this. Emil Nauman wrote in The History of Music. “There can be no doubt that originally the music of the divine service was everywhere entirely of a vocal nature” (Vol. 1, p. 177). Wycliffe Bible Dictionary says, “There is no record in the New Testament of the use of instruments in the musical worship of the Christian church.” The Catholic Encyclopedia reads, “The first Christians were of too spiritual a fiber to substitute lifeless instruments for or to use them to accompany the human voice.”

More than five hundred years passed before instruments were used. Chambers Encyclopedia notes, “The organ is said to have been introduced into church music by Pope Vitalian in 666 A.D.”

At first, the organ was played only before and after the “liturgy” (worship service). Years later, it was moved into the service proper. Then it caused such controversy that in AD 1054 it led to a split between Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. (Orthodox Churches, with few exceptions, continue to use vocal music only to this day.)

Most Protestant churches did not use instruments until the 1800s. In the time
Downgraded

When it came time to issue grades to my ninth grade civics class, I had to give one boy an F. He reacted: “How come?”—as though I had caught him by surprise.

“You didn’t pass a single test,” I explained. “You never turned in one homework assignment. You would not participate in classroom work.”

The boy stood in silence for a moment, then exclaimed, “And you mean you flunked me for that?”

—Contributed by Robert Vasholz

Rabbit Gender

A teacher brought a rabbit to her first grade class. It was passed around to all the children and all were impressed. One boy raised his hand and said, “Is it a boy or a girl?”

The teacher replied, “I’m not sure.”

A little timid girl raised her hand. “I know.”

“How?” questioned her classroom friends.

“Let’s vote on it,” said the little girl.

—Cybersalt Digest

God’s Plan for Saving Man

God’s Grace Ephesians 2:8

Christ’s Blood Romans 5:9

The Holy Spirit’s Gospel Romans 1:16

Sinner’s Faith Acts 16:31

Sinner’s Repentance Luke 13:3

Sinner’s Confession Romans 10:10

Sinner’s Baptism 1 Peter 3:21

Christian’s Work James 2:24

Christian’s Hope Romans 8:24

Christian’s Endurance Revelation 2:10

of the Reformation, churches opposed instruments in stronger language than we would likely use today. Martin Luther, founder of the Lutheran Church, called the instrument “an ensign of Baal” (McClintock and Strong’s Cyclopaedia, from Luther, Martin, Realencyklopadie Fur Protestantische Theologie und Kirche).

John Calvin, founder of the Presbyterian Church, wrote, “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” (Comments on Psalm 33).

John Wesley (1703–1791), founder of the Methodist Church, said: “I have no objection to instruments of music, in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen” (quoted by his personal friend, Adam Clark in Clark’s Commentary, Vol. IV, p. 686).

Adam Clarke (1762–1832), prominent Methodist scholar, wrote: “Music as a science, I esteem and admire: but instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor” (Comments on Amos 6).

Charles Spurgeon, widely-recognized as the greatest Baptist preacher, wrote in his comments on Psalm 42: “We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it” (Treasury of David, Volume 1, 272).

He never allowed instruments in his ten-thousand-seat Metropolitan Tabernacle in London.

These quotations are not given as authority, and certainly not to offend, but simply to show that church history is firmly on the side of a cappella singing.

THE PRACTICE STEMS FROM OUR CONVICTION THAT WE MUST ADD NOTHING TO THE SCRIPTURES.

Churches of Christ believe strongly in having divine authority (a scripture) for all we teach and practice. We do this because the Bible says, “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Colossians 3:17). “Whatsoever” and “all” are comprehensive words. To do a thing “in Jesus’ name” means to do it by His authority. The Bible warns against venturing beyond “that which is written” (1 Corinthians 4:6) or adding anything to the Bible (Revelation 22:18–19). We must not go out of bounds (2 John 1:9).

What are the bounds regarding worship? The New Testament does not say much about music in the early church.

The one time music is used (Luke 15:25), is not even talking about worship, but about the party held for the returning prodigal. A few verses mention pipes and harps (e.g., Matthew 11:17; 1 Corinthians 14; Revelation 14–15), but none in the context of church worship. Singing, however, is mentioned seven times in that context (Acts 16:25; Romans 15:9; 1 Corinthians 14:15; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; Hebrews 2:12; James 5:13).

Singing is definitely “in bounds.”

• It is commanded (Ephesians 5:19).

• There are examples of Christians singing (Acts 16:25; 1 Corinthians 14:15).

• It is in the principle of offering God the fruit of our lips (Hebrews 13:15).

On the other hand, the New Testament is silent on playing songs for God. It is not commanded nor is there any example of the early church using it.

We pray that God will give all of us wisdom as we continue our spiritual journey toward eternity (James 1:2–4).

All who love the Lord share a delight in His praise. Truly may God in all things “be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom the praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:11).
Marriage is made on three different planes. The first (eros) is the physical plane and is fulfilled in the sexual relationship.

The second plane is the mental or psychological relationship and relates to the companionship/friendship aspect of marriage (philia).

The third plane (agape) is the spiritual relationship and is enjoyed when Christians marry Christians. Many marriages never get beyond the first level—and many do not last long.

Elaine Walster, psychology and sociology professor at the University of Wisconsin, found that for most couples, intense passion lasts from six months to about two-and-a-half years. If this type of love is the only mortar holding the marriage together, trouble looms ahead.

When husbands or wives have only the second kind of love, they feel that an obligation exists, so they try to keep the marriage together because of duty. With a marriage license and a marriage certificate, they feel they are bound together, but they may lack an emotional connection.

Real love is binding, but it binds with the cords of voluntary service. “No cord or cable can draw so forcibly, or bind so fast, as love can do with a single thread” (Burton).

When a husband has only the second kind of love, he and his wife have a lot of fun together. This love depends on worth and admiration. If more worth and admiration arises in somebody else, then he will change wives as he does bowling partners. But if it is a part of the whole of his love, it can add a great dimension to his marriage.

Ideally, when eros begins to lessen, philia can reinforce it, even enhance it. When a husband loves his wife with the deepest love, it is not based on good looks or legal backing or a flawless personality. It is based on no assignable causes, as God’s love for people is not understandable.

The Bible commands, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Ephesians 5:25). God could have said, “Husbands, eros your wives” or “Husbands, philia your wives,” but He did not. He used the word agape.

This word has to do with looking out for the other person’s highest good. God’s way to a successful marriage focuses on what husbands and wives put into it, not on what they can get out of it.

The wise man said “A threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12). When you have God as the third partner in marriage, you can have a wonderful marriage.

“O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.”

PSALM 34:3
In Psalm 34, David is on his knees pouring out his heart to God in repentance, thanksgiving, faith, and in request to God for assurance, strength, deliverance, and instruction. He says, “I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (34:4).

A main theme in this Psalm is peace: “What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it” (34:12–14).

Peace comes to those who refrain their tongues from evil. The tongue can be one of the most evil members of our bodies if we allow it to be so (Proverbs 18:8; Titus 3:2). It can make the whole body ugly. The tongue is not bad in and of itself. It is only the instrument used to convey thoughts and feelings. James said: “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell” (James 3:6).

We must keep our tongues bridle (James 1:26). Our tongues will be used for good or for evil (Proverbs 13:3; 21:23). Our tongues will be used to gossip or to tell the good news. It is important to ask, “How do we use our tongues?”

Peace comes to those who depart from evil. Christians must shun evil every time they come in contact with it. We must never follow that which is evil (3 John 1:11; John 7:7). Real peace is found in our relationship with God. That relationship is established when we oppose the things of the world (2 Timothy 2:3–4; 1 John 2:15–17). We are warned to “abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Peter 2:11). Attain real peace by departing from evil.

Peace comes from doing good. We glorify God by our good works (1 Peter 2:12). I realize that there are some who believe that good works are not important, but the Bible clearly teaches otherwise (Matthew 5:16; Ecclesiastes 3:12; James 4:17; 3 John 1:11). As Christians we must set our minds to do good things. What is good? Anything and everything that God has chosen for us to accomplish (Ephesians 2:10). ”Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 7:21).

To have peace we must speak no evil, depart from evil, and do good. Seek peace. —Toney L. Smith

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“To look is one thing. To see what you look at is another. To understand what you see is a third. To learn from what you understand is something else. But to act on what you learn is all that really matters.”

JAMES 1:22

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A ninety-year-old man approached a preacher after worship. The man had been blind from birth and told the preacher he wanted to “see” him. He ran his fingers over the minister’s face and then began to cry.

He asked, “When I open my eyes for the first time, you know who I will be looking at, don’t you?”

The preacher said, “Yes, you will be looking at Jesus.”

The man then cried out with joy, “It is worth being blind for ninety years to know that the first time I open my eyes, I will be looking at Jesus!”

“Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him.”

REVELATION 1:7

Three buddies were discussing death, and one of them asked the others, “What would you like people to say about you at your funeral?”

One said, “I would like them to say about me, ‘He was a great humanitarian, who cared about his community.'”

The second said, “I want them to say, ‘He was a great husband and father, who was an example for many to follow.'”

The third guy said, “I want them to say, ‘Look, he’s moving!’ ”

Jesus “moved” . . . He is alive today!

“He is not here: for he is risen.”

MATTHEW 28:6
He Never Published a Book

The effect of Jesus’ teaching upon the world has been unsurpassed. All of time dates from His birth in that barn in Bethlehem.

How did He accomplish such an amazing reach?

Remember that He founded no colleges to promulgate His doctrines. He committed His name and teaching to a few humble fishermen who lacked education and influence (Acts 4:13).

Looked at from the human side alone, how great was the probability that everything He had said would be forgotten within a few years?

He never wrote a sermon. He published no books. Not a thing He said was engraved upon stone or inscribed upon brass so far as we know, yet His doctrines have endured for 2,000 years. They have gone to the ends of the earth and have changed the world wherever they have gone. They have lifted nations out of darkness and degradation and sin, and they have made the wilderness to blossom as a rose.

Jesus painted no pictures; yet some of the finest paintings of Raphael, Michelangelo, and da Vinci received their inspiration from Him.

Jesus wrote no poetry; but Dante, Milton, and scores of the world’s greatest poets were inspired by Him.

Jesus composed no music; still Haydn, Handel, Beethoven, Bach, and Mendelssohn reached their highest perfection of melody in the music they composed in His praise.

Every sphere of human greatness has been enriched by this humble Carpenter of Nazareth (Henry G. Bosch, Our Daily Bread).

“Come and see” (John 1:46).