

# ***THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST***

SPREADING THE SOUL-SAVING MESSAGE OF JESUS

## **WORSHIP "Singing"**

### **Introduction by narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

*THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST*. Spreading the soul-saving message of Jesus. And now, Timothy Sparks and Ben Bailey.

### **Ben Bailey:**

"But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them" (Acts 16:25). I'm Ben Bailey.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

And I'm Timothy Sparks. Welcome to our study of singing. This broadcast is brought to you by individuals and congregations of the churches of Christ. We hope you will visit the churches of Christ in your area, and let them know how much you appreciate their support of this broadcast. If you have a Bible question or a spiritual concern, they would be happy to help you with it. If you would like to have a Bible study, they also would be glad to assist you with that. We, too, would like to be of service. Please visit us on our website at [www.thegospelofchrist.com](http://www.thegospelofchrist.com), where we have streaming audio and video lessons of our broadcasts. You may download these and use them to assist you in your study of God's Word. We also are making available DVDs and CDs of these broadcasts, which we will be happy to send you completely free of charge. Plus, written transcripts of these lessons are available as well (accompanied by study questions). These can be obtained either online from our website (in both PDF and html formats), or as bound volumes (which are available from our offices).

In this study of singing in worship, we will be examining what others in the religious world have said about the use of instruments of music in worship, and we will be comparing their statements to what we find in the New Testament.

### **Ben Bailey:**

Religious scholars through the centuries have recognized that instrumental music in New Testament worship is not authorized by God. For example, Catholic scholars (writing in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*), wrote: "The first Christians were of too spiritual a fiber to substitute lifeless instruments for, or to use them to accompany, the human voice." In the Greek Orthodox Church, Constantine Cavarnos said, "The execution of Byzantine church music by instruments, or even the accompaniment of sacred chanting by instruments, was ruled out by the Eastern Fathers as being incompatible with the pure, solemn, spiritual character of the religion of Christ."

**Timothy Sparks:**

John Calvin, in his commentary on Psalms, said, "Musical instruments, in celebrating the praises of God, would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, or 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 apostles is far more pleasing."

**Ben Bailey:**

John Wesley stated very simply, "I have no objections to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither seen nor heard."

**Timothy Sparks:**

In his commentary, Adam Clarke stated, "Music, as a science, I esteem and admire. But instruments of music in the house of God I abominate and abhor. This is the abuse of music. And here I register my protest of all such corruptions of the worship of the Author of Christianity."

**Ben Bailey:**

Martin Luther, upon whom the Lutheran Church is based, said, "Instrumental music was an ensign of Baal."

**Timothy Sparks:**

Well-known Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon said, "I would as soon attempt to pray to God with machinery as to sing to him with machinery."

**Ben Bailey:**

J.H. Garrison of the Christian Church said, "There is no command in the New Testament, Greek or English, commanding the use of the instrument. Such a command would be entirely out of harmony with the New Testament."

**Timothy Sparks:**

John Girardo, a Presbyterian professor at Columbia Theological Seminary and author of *Music and the Church*, wrote: "The church, although lapsing more and more into defecation from the truth and into corruption of apostolic practice, had no instrumental music for twelve hundred years. That is, it was not in general use until that time." We therefore are left with some overwhelmingly powerful statements from those in the religious world who have spoken out about instrumental music. I find it interesting that some of the men who made these statements about instrumental music were leaders of denominations, yet their followers still used instrumental music in worship to God.

**Ben Bailey:**

It is interesting that many of the founders of various denominations knew that instrumental music in worship to God was wrong, yet their followers ended up using it. This, then, leads us to the question, "Where is our authority in worship? Where do we turn to decide

matters such as these? To understand the authority in worship, you and I need turn no farther than the pages of the Bible that we hold in our hands today. We can look there and see that God has authorized certain things in religion, while there are certain things that we do not find in the Bible. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." Jesus has all authority in religious matters. In Ephesians 1:21-23, we learn that Jesus is the Head of the church. He is the One Who designates how we worship. He is the One Who is in charge, and we simply need to follow what He says. Paul said in Colossians 3:17, "Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Paul told the Christians in Corinth that they were not to go beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6). If we study the New Testament, we will find that we have to "go beyond" what it says in order to bring instruments of music into our worship to God. Our authority is the Bible. And in it, we do not find Christians singing to God with the accompaniment of an instrument.

### **Timothy Sparks:**

When we plead with people to come to the New Testament do only what is expressly stated or definitely implied, we see that there is no room in the New Testament for instrumental music. Instrumental music was used in Old Testament worship, and was a command of God, as passages such as Psalm 150 make clear. In the New Testament, however, not only is there no such command, but we see that Christians in the first century were not using instruments of music in worship to God. Christians in the second century recognized that instruments of music were used in pagan worship, which was yet another reason they did not use them. First and foremost, however, we must ask: "What does God say?" He tells us in such passages such as Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 that we are to teach and admonish one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. We must be people who are concerned about the truth—and who want to do only that which God has commanded. The attitude we should have is the same attitude as Mary, the mother of Christ, expressed to servants at a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee when she said of Jesus, "Whatever He says to you, do it" (Jn. 2:5). The attitude that we must have when we come to the New Testament is to ask, "What does God authorize, and what has God said?" We should not ask, "How do I feel about it?," or "What have others said about it?" We must have the appropriate attitude, and not let our pride get in the way. Even though we might think that singing with instrumental music sounds better, we are not going to improve on the will of God by using instrumental music in worship. Actually, we will be violating the will of God if we do this.

### **Ben Bailey:**

Whenever people in the Bible tried to improve on God's will, they always faced severe consequences. Think, for example, about the events of 1 Samuel 15. Saul was the king of Israel. He was commanded by God to utterly destroy the Amalekites, and not to bring anything back with him after he did so. But Saul decided to save the best of the Amalekites' possessions and to spare the king. Saul's excuse to God was, "We did it for you, so we could sacrifice the best to you." God's response to Saul was, "To obey is better than to sacrifice, and to heed better than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22). Saul's attitude was, "We kept back just a little. We did about 95% of everything you told us to do. And the 5% we held back, we were going to give to you to help improve our worship." God's attitude was, "I did not need your help. I simply wanted you to obey me." Consider, too, the case of Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10, which serves as a stern warning to us. As priests, they were preparing an offering to God. But they used unauthorized fire that God

had not commanded. God therefore sent fire from Heaven to destroy them, and they died. Someone might say, "That's a pretty small thing. They still got the fire lit. Who cares where they got the fire to light it?" God cares!

**Timothy Sparks:**

It was a matter of violating the will of God. The fire was profane and unauthorized. Even when someone has the best of intentions, it does not override the will of God. Consider the case of Uzzah in 2 Samuel 6. Uzzah was walking beside a cart on which the Ark of the Covenant was being carried. The oxen stumbled. Uzzah, fearing that the Ark might fall to the ground and be damaged, reached up to steady it. But God had plainly said that the people of Israel were not to touch the holy things of God (Num. 4:15). The text of 2 Samuel 6 says, "God struck him there for his error" (vs. 7). King David was angry that God had slain Uzzah. But good intentions are not enough. They are not what save us. The road to Hell, so it has been said, is paved with good intentions. Look also at the case of Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament (Acts 5). They sold a piece of land so they could give money to the church. But they lied. They told Peter and the other apostles that they had given **all** the money from the sale. In fact, they had kept some back for their own use. God struck them dead, too. Peter told them that they had not lied to men, but to God. Whether or not people have good intentions when they use instruments of music in worship to God is irrelevant. Their actions are still wrong. But the fact remains that we must do what Jesus commanded. Some will say that such an attitude is harsh and narrow minded. But shouldn't we be as narrow minded as the Bible requires, and as broad minded as God allows us to be?

**Ben Bailey:**

There is nothing wrong with wanting to do what the Bible says to do. In fact, that is a highly commendable attitude. Jesus said in Matthew 7:21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." In Luke 6:46, Jesus asked a haunting question of those who followed Him. "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?" Jesus expects us to follow Him! Frequently when the subject of music in worship is under consideration, people will say, "I've read my Old Testament, and the Jews used instruments of music in their worship to God. Yet you say we cannot do that today. Why not?"

**Timothy Sparks:**

There is no doubt that the Jews used instruments of music in worship to God. They were commanded to do so. But we no longer live under the Old Testament. We today live under the last will and testament of Jesus Christ—the New Testament. In Colossians 2:14, Paul spoke of Jesus "having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross." We now live under the commands found within the New Testament. And there, we are told to sing. We are to sing a cappella—that is, with our voices. If God had wanted us to use instruments of music, then He would have commanded us to do so. But the silence of the New Testament in regard to the use of instruments of music in worship to God speaks volumes! If you have a child, and you tell the child to go to the grocery store to buy milk and eggs, and that child returns from the store with milk, eggs, and toy dolls, has the child done exactly what you said to do? No, he has not. He added to your list, which he did not have the authority to do. We must do what God has commanded us to

do—no more, and no less. In 1 Peter 4:11, Peter wrote, “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.” If we, as teachers and preachers of the Gospel, were to instruct you to use instrumental music, or if we were to say, “Go ahead and use it because the New Testament doesn’t say you can’t use it,” would we be telling you the truth concerning instrumental music? Not at all! Whenever God tells us what **to do**, He does not have to give us a lengthy list of things **not** to do. If God had to include in the Bible everything that we **cannot** do, there would be practically no end to the list.

### **Ben Bailey:**

We could not handle the number of books it would take for God to tell us, “Do not do this, do not do this.... But do this and do this....” When God tells us **what** He wants, that is **all** He wants! In 2 Chronicles 29:25, God allowed the use of instruments. The fact that He allowed the people of that day to use instruments, and told them that they could—while **not** telling us that we can, clearly implies that He does not want us to use them. When God (under the Old Law) wanted instruments of music used in worship, He commanded them to be used, and told the people quite plainly to use them. The silence of the New Testament on this matter—and the very fact that God has **not** told us that He wants us to use instruments of music in our worship of Him—tells us that He does not need or want us to do so. We are no longer under the Old Law. Ephesians 2:14-15 makes it clear that the Old Law was abolished at the cross of Christ. Paul said in Colossians 2:14 that the Old Law was nailed to the cross. We learn from Hebrews 8:13 that the Old Law has passed away. We no longer worship under the Old Law. We do not go to Jerusalem. We do not burn incense. We do not take a sheep from the flock, slit its throat, drain its blood, and offer its body as a sacrifice on a fire. We do not worship as they worshiped, nor are we saved in the same way they were saved. In the New Testament, God has changed some things about our worship of Him. Suppose you called the local pizza parlor to order a pizza. You told them that you wanted pepperoni, black olives, and mushrooms on your pizza. When the delivery boy arrives, you open the pizza box, only to find that while the pizza has pepperoni, black olives, and mushrooms, it also has bell peppers and anchovies. You then say to the delivery boy, “Why are these things on my pizza? I did not order these.” And his response is, “But you didn’t say **not** to put them on your pizza.” Is that acceptable? Of course not! Today, we must understand that God will accept only those things that are commanded in His Word. So, let us ask the question, “What does the New Testament say about singing?”

### **Timothy Sparks:**

In Acts 16, we see that Paul and Silas were singing, and the prisoners in the jail were listening to them. Someone might say, “But they were in prison. They could not have used an instrument if they had wanted to.” True enough. But look at what Paul, writing through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, said in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16. He made it clear that we are to teach each other through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing with grace in our hearts to the Lord. The text of Ephesians 5:19 mentions “making melody in your heart to the Lord.” Someone might say, “If you are not using an instrument, then you are not making music. But we are! We are making melody in our hearts. We do not have to use a mechanical instrument to make music. Our instrument is our heart! We are not commanded to pluck the strings of any type of instrument. We can pluck the strings of our heart, which is the language of the Greek New Testament. It is clear from the New Testament that first-century Christians did not use instruments of music in worship to God. There is a very specific reason for that—God did not command it! If someone asks, “What

is wrong with instrumental music in worship to God?,” our response should be, “What is **right** with it?!” If we can find the authority within the pages of the New Testament to use instruments of music in worship to God, then you can do so. But where we have no authority, we dare not tread. In the New Testament, the matter is very simple. God authorized singing—nothing else. When people say, “God, why can’t I?,” they have the wrong attitude. The proper attitude is, “God, what would you have me to do?”

### **Ben Bailey:**

Saul, in Acts 9:6, asked, “Lord, what would you have me to do?” We are not to ask, “What do **I** think?,” or “What makes **me** feel good?” Rather, we should ask, “Is there any word from the Lord?” (Jer. 37:17). Every passage in the New Testament that addresses the matter of music in worship speaks only of a cappella music. There is not a single reference in the New Testament concerning the use of an instrument in worship to God. For example, in Romans 15:9, Paul said “I will confess to You among the Gentiles, and sing to Your name.” In Hebrews 2:12 we find, “I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.” Look at James 5:13. Does it say, “Is any among you happy? Let him play the fiddle”? No, that is not what it says. It says, “Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms.” Every passage within the New Testament on music in worship teaches us clearly that we must sing to God with our voice—which is the only type of music that is authorized. In 1 Corinthians 14:15, Paul wrote, “I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” In order to make melody in our heart, we must sing the way God has commanded, and we must do it with the understanding of the words that we are singing so that we can glorify God and bring praise to His name. Everything we are to do in worship is without an instrument. God has been clear about what He wants. And this **all** he wants. Too many times we allow people to put us on the defensive by asking, “Why can’t we do this?,” when in reality the question we should be asking is, “What **should** we be doing?”

### **Timothy Sparks:**

In Hebrews 13:15, we read, “Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name.” What can we offer to God that is “the fruit of our lips”? Singing certainly would be one thing. Prayer would be another thing that we could offer (and we **must!**). The passage does not speak about “the fruit of our instruments.” It says, “the fruit of our lips!” Some people say, “But our worship to God sounds so much better with instruments.” God is not concerned about it “sounding better.” In fact, according to God it will **not** sound better—because He will not accept vain worship. This topic should not be at all controversial within the religious world because God has plainly told us what He wants. Yet the topic **is** controversial, and some are offended by a biblical discussion of the matter. Perhaps we should ask, as Paul did in Galatians 4:16, “Have I therefore become your enemy because I tell you the truth?” We want to tell you the truth because we love you and because we love your soul. We hope that you are open-minded enough, and honest enough with the Scriptures, that you will see the truth, accept the truth, and obey the truth—even if that means leaving the church you attend because that church is not practicing New Testament Christianity when it comes to worship in song. We plead with you to diligently search out these issues for yourself. You will not be judged by what we say here today. Rather, you (and we) will be judged by what God says. Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him—the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (Jn.

12:48). We urge you to be like the Bereans of Acts 17:11, of whom it was said, “These were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so.” Singing in the New Testament is depicted as the method by which we pour out our praise to God, and by which we glorify Him without any additions. Through singing, we can magnify the God of Heaven—to His glory.

**Ben Bailey:**

These points bring us full circle—to our very first lesson in this series on worship (“What Is Worship?”). So many people misunderstand what worship is. They think that **they** are the audience, and that everything that is done is to please **them**. Why do we need instrumental music in worship? It is because “it sounds so good,” or “it makes us feel so good.” We must come to understand that God is the audience in our worship. In John 4:24, Jesus said, “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” It is God Whom we are worshiping. Since He is the Creator, then we are the participants in worship. We must simply do whatever He has commanded us to do. God did not tell us to worship Him with an instrument of music. He did not tell us to worship Him in the way that **we** want. Rather, He expects us to follow what He has set forth in the pages of the New Testament. We are here to worship God. We are here to give Him the glory and the honor. The only way to do that is to worship Him in a way that is acceptable to Him. Any other worship—regardless of how it makes **us** feel—simply is not pleasing to God and will not be accepted by Him.

**Timothy Sparks:**

We must not be the type of people who let our emotions run roughshod over Scripture. We must come to the Scriptures with the attitude that whatever God says to do, that is what we will do. We must allow our emotions to be guided by the Scriptures. Then, and only then, will we be pleasing to the God of Heaven. God, in His Word, addresses our minds and intellects. He wants us to be people who think. But He also wants us to “obey from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered” (Rom. 6:17). We plead with you today to consider these things. Go to the Scriptures for your answers. Do not run to your preacher or some other religious leader. Simply consult your Bible.

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**Narrator accompanied by a cappella singing:**

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## STUDY QUESTIONS FOR “SINGING”

1. What did the authors of the *Catholic Encyclopedia* mean when they wrote: “The first Christians were **of too spiritual a fiber** to substitute lifeless instruments for, or to use them to accompany, the human voice”?
2. Why did John Calvin, in his commentary on Psalms, say, “Musical instruments, in celebrating the praises of God, would be no more suitable than the burning of incense or the lighting up of lamps?”
3. J.H. Garrison of the Christian Church said, “There is no command in the New Testament, Greek or English, commanding the use of the instrument.” Is this true? If so, what is the implication of such a statement?
4. Charles Spurgeon said, “I would as soon attempt to pray to God with machinery as to sing to him with machinery.” Can either one of those things be accomplished?
5. According to Matthew 28:18, where does “all authority” lie in religion?
6. According to John 12:48, what will judge us in the last day?
7. What point was God making to King Saul when He said, “To obey is better than to sacrifice” (1 Sam. 15:22)?
8. How does God’s statement to King Saul (from question #7 above) impact us today?
9. According to Numbers 4:15 and 2 Samuel 6:7, why did God slay Uzzah when he was only trying to help?
10. How, according to Colossians 3:17, are we to carry out our worship to God?
11. What did God tell us to do in Ephesians 5:19?
12. What did God tell us to do in Colossians 3:16?
13. How should the principle of how God dealt with Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10 impact our worship today?
14. What do such passages as Ephesians 2:14-15 and Colossians 2:14 have to do with the argument that instruments of music were used in the Old Testament?
15. When people ask, “What is wrong with instrumental music in worship to God?,” what should be our response?
16. According to Ephesians 5:19, what “instrument” are we to use to make our melody for the Lord?
17. Hebrews 13:15 speaks of “the fruit of our lips” being offered to God. Do instruments of music fall into that category?