CHRISTIAN WORSHIP

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Oh come, let us sing to the Lord!
Let us shout joyfully to the Rock of our salvation.
Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving;
Let us come before Him with psalms.
For the Lord is the great God,
And the great King above all gods.

-Psalm 95:1-3

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Chapter I
The Importance of Worship in the Scriptures

The worship of God is of primary importance in the Scriptures. Praising God may almost be called the greatest joy and privilege in this life and in the life to come. The exhortation to praise God is given many times in the Word of God. All our labor and witness and even our suffering should rebound to the praise of God. “For all things are for your sakes, that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God” (2 Cor. 4:15 NASB).

To be sure, God is to be glorified by every good thing we do as believers, and these good deeds are to result in praise being offered to God. And, of course, we may praise God in conversations, public declarations, testimonies and other ways, but praise in the public worship of God is given a particularly prominent place in the Word.

As we read through the Scriptures we can easily see that great importance is given to worship. The first great problem that arose after man’s fall was concerning the matter of worship. Abel’s worship was accepted, but Cain’s was not. There is worship that is pleasing to God, and there is worship that is not. Each time Abraham built an altar to
worship God seemed to be a climactic time in his life. In the Exodus and also in Leviticus and Numbers worship and matters related to worship occupied the central place.

The importance that God attaches to worship is seen in the great detail in which He instructs Moses concerning the building of the tabernacle and all its furnishings, concerning the ordination and service of the priests, concerning all the various sacrifices and offerings, and even concerning the moving of the tabernacle and all of its furnishings. That God did not consider any of this detail to be trivial is seen in the severity of the sanctions attached to even what might seem to be infractions of minor importance. For instance, when the priests approach the altar they must wash their hands and their feet, “lest they die” (Ex. 30:21). Such warnings are frequently given.

Also, great blessings are promised to the obedient: if you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit... I will give you peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none will make you afraid; I will rid the land of evil beasts, and the sword will not go through your land. You will chase your enemies, and they shall fall by the sword before you. (Lev. 26:3-7)

The subsequent history of God's people seems to have hinged largely on whether or not they worshiped God properly. The prophets denounced various kinds of sins, but most prominent among those sins were the sins of false worship and the neglect of the true worship of God. When Israel worshiped God in truth they were richly blessed, but when they departed from the true worship their enemies came in like a flood.

The importance of worship is further seen in God's providing a wonderful manual of praise in the heart of the Bible—the Book of Psalms. It is the largest book of the Bible, and the one full of the most direct addresses to God. In Jesus' day it was probably the most well-known book of the Bible, and it is the second most quoted book in the New Testament.

By the time the New Testament was given, Israel had made a regular practice of worshiping in the synagogues each Sabbath. They read the Scriptures, sang the Psalms, and prayed. One of the first descriptions we have of the New Testament Church tells us that they were praising God: “They were taking their meals together with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:46-47 NASB). In the Book of Revelation the praise of God is given a place of climactic importance. There can hardly be a more thrilling scene than the description of myriad of angels loudly proclaiming: Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing. (Rev. 5:12)

The praise continues with every creature in heaven and on earth saying: Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever! (Rev. 5:13)

Though the Scriptures place a great deal of emphasis on the worship of God, yet it does not appear that a lot of careful study has been done by the Church with respect to the scriptural principles and practices of worship. Rather than relying on the Scriptures as the guide, the popularity of certain types of worship or the practical effect of songs and music have become the determining factors. Because of this pragmatic approach there has developed a great deal of variety in the forms of worship in the various denominations.

Recently, at a meeting in Osaka, Japan, I was talking with a young Baptist minister about singing Psalms in worship. He said, “Do you really sing the Psalms of the Bible? They’re addressed to God, but in the Church we need songs that are addressed to the people.” I was quite surprised and replied that it is the very nature of worship to address our praise to God.

Henry A. Bruinma, writing in the Westminster Theological Journal, lamented that there is no common musical practice or principle in the assorted Reformed, Presbyterian and other Calvinistic Churches of the 20th century. He says, “We often hear the minister or the older plaintively mourn that we have no standard for music, no measuring stick for judging our church music program.”

There is a great need for the Church to subject its worship to the standard of the Word given by the Holy Spirit. To do that we will have to study carefully the basic scriptural principles with respect to worship.
Chapter 2
Basic Scriptural Principles Concerning Worship

Obvious and Generally Undisputed Principles

First, our worship must be offered to the one true and living God. We may easily fall into a pattern of feeling that the worship service is primarily for the people. But we must continually keep it foremost in our minds that we come together to worship the living God. His greatness and holiness should impress us with the need to worship Him in the way that pleases Him. To be sure, the Church is to worship God in a manner pleasing to Him.

Second, our worship must be sincere. This principle is so often repeated in the Scripture that it is not necessary to prove it. However, we must clearly recognize that "sincere" does not obviate the requirement to adhere to other principles of the Word of God. Some people seem to think that if we are "sincere," almost any kind of worship will be accepted. However, truly sincere believers are led by the Word, so they may worship in spirit and in truth.

The Regulative Principle of Worship

There are two main views with respect to the principle governing

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what should and what should not be included in worship. The first view was espoused by the Roman Catholic Church and followed to a large extent by the Lutheran and Episcopal Churches, that is: That we must worship in ways not forbidden in the Word. In other words, we may add to the worship what is pleasing to us and what seems to be beneficial to the people if it is not forbidden in the Scriptures. William Young states it this way:

The Reformed view of the principle regulative of the external worship of God stands out by way of contrast with the Lutheran view. Lutherans have held that what is not forbidden in the Word of God may be allowed in the worship of God. Ceremonies in worship are thus regarded as to a large extent things indifferent. Adiaphora, i.e. things neither commanded nor forbidden in the Scriptures. The second view is the Calvinistic principle, namely, that God may be worshiped only in the ways commanded or instituted in His Word. We are not free to add anything of our own will. William Young states it as follows:

As opposed to the Lutheran view that there is a substantial area of Adiaphora in the service of worship, the Reformed view has uniformly been that only that which is prescribed by the Word of God may be introduced into the worship of God. Calvin formulated this regulative principle with clarity and applied it with great consistency in the Reformation at Geneva. In one place Calvin makes this principle clear in the following statement:

They deem it enough that they have some kind of zeal for religion, how preposterous soever it may be, not observing that true religion must be conformable to the will of God as its unerring standard, that He can never deny Himself and is no spectre or phantom, to be metamorphosed at each individual's caprice. It is easy to see how superstition with its false glosses mocks God, while it tries to please Him.

The Regulative Principle in the Old Testament

Let us look now at some Old Testament passages to see what the principle of worship is there. The first explicit and detailed directions
with respect to worship were given by Moses. When God commanded Moses to build the tabernacle, He said, “According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture, just so you shall construct it” (Ex. 25:9 NASB). Then God proceeds to describe in great detail the furniture and the tabernacle and all the utensils to be used. But frequently interspersed in these descriptions are warnings such as, “See to it that you make them according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain” (Ex. 25:40; also 26:30; 27:8).

The minuteness of details concerning even many of the circumstances of worship are significant. William Young makes the following deduction:

The minuteness of the detail in the divine prescriptions as to the construction of the tabernacle and as to the practice of worship to be performed in it made it perfectly plain to God’s ancient people that whatever was not commanded was forbidden.”

As the construction of the tabernacle progressed the phrases like, “just as the Lord had commanded Moses,” appear frequently (Ex. 38:22; 39:1-7, 32, 43; Lev. 8:35-36 NASB).

In addition, the death penalty is threatened toward anyone who dares to violate even the least of these commands (Ex. 28:43; 30:21, 33, 38; Lev. 8:35; Num. 4:15, 20).

That these were not idle warnings is seen very soon in the fiery death of Nadab and Abihu when they offered strange fire (Lev. 10:1-2) that the Lord had not commanded them, and in the death of Uzzah who touched the ark (2 Sam. 6:6-7).

The Old Testament contains numerous warnings against false worship or inculcating heathen practices into the worship of God, nor are they allowed to add anything to God’s commandments. “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you” (Deut. 4:2; see Prov. 30:5-6).

To sum it up, the Old Testament Scriptures do not allow any man to add anything new to the worship of God without an express command. When David was making plans to build a house for God, Nathan the prophet was told to say to him, “Wherever I have moved about with all

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Israel, have I ever spoken a word to any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd My people, saying, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’” (1 Chron. 17:6). David was not allowed to build a temple. And when it was built by Solomon, and whenever new elements of worship were introduced into the worship, it was always done under God’s direction.

We must conclude that the principle of worship set forth in the Old Testament is the Calvinistic principle that forbids the introduction of anything into the worship of God that He has not commanded. The area of worship is not “Adiaphora” or an area where man is free to be creative and to introduce new forms of worship that God has not commanded. Even in the building of an altar God forbids any creative work. “And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it, you have profaned it” (Ex. 20:25). We are not allowed to supplement, substitute, or supplant anything that God has commanded.

**The Regulative Principle in the New Testament**

We may now ask whether this principle holds fast in the New Testament. It may appear to some that since the ceremonial worship of the Old Testament was abolished, this principle went out with it. This kind of blanket abolition is rather superficial. The ceremonial worship of the Old Testament was typical or symbolic of Christ and His atonement. But principles laid down in the Old Testament are not symbols or types. They are principles. The symbols or types were abolished because Christ is the prototype was manifested and fulfilled the Old Testament types, but the basic principles are never abolished. They carry right on through the New Testament. What we are saying is that any and all changes in the mode or essence of worship should be made clear in the Word, because we have no directive concerning a change in basic principles of worship. We are no more capable of changing basic principles of worship than we are of changing moral laws, or changing doctrines taught in the Word.

In Matthew 15:6-9 (see Mark 7:7-13), Jesus warns against substituting the traditions of men for the Word of God. The issue with which He is dealing is a matter of worship—the dedication of possessions
to God. Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13. In the New International Version, the latter part of the verse is translated: "Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men." Both Isaiah and Jesus condemn this practice of allowing the traditions or inventions of men to alter the true worship that God has ordained or to supplant the form of worship that He has ordained.

Jesus' well-known words to the woman at the well in Samaria reveal the validity of the Calvinistic regulative principle in the New Testament. "God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24) does not mean simply that worshipers must be sincere, though that is required, too. William Hendriksen says in his commentary:

In such a setting, it would seem to us, worshiping "in spirit and truth" can only mean rendering such homage to God that the entire heart enters into the act, and by doing this in full harmony with the truth God has revealed in His Word. John Calvin in his commentary on John 4:24 says:

This is confirmation drawn from the very nature of God. Since men are flesh, we ought not to wonder, if they take delight in those things which correspond to their own disposition. Hence it arises, that they contrive many things in the worship of God which are full of display, but have no solidity. But they ought first of all to consider they have to do with God, who can no more agree with the flesh than fire with water.... This single consideration, when the inquiry relates to the worship of God, ought to be sufficient for restraining the wantonness of our mind, that God is so far from being like us, that those things which please us most are the objects of His loathing and abhorrence.

In other words, Calvin is saying only men directed by the Spirit of God through the Word of God can render to God worship which pleases Him, and that this is the teaching he finds in this verse.

In closing these remarks concerning the regulative principle, let us look briefly at Colossians 2:20-23, which warns against following the traditions of men in "self-made religion" (NASB). The King James Version calls this "will-worship." The Greek word (τελοθοροσκεία) is defined by Calvin as "tirannous modes of worship which men themselves devise or receive from others, all precepts whatsoever which they presume to deliver at their own hand concerning the worship of God." This passage clearly condemns adding the commandments or teachings of men to the true worship and service of God.

Only God can tell us what forms of worship are pleasing to Himself. Only God can change the form or substance of true religion. This is as true in the present age as it was before our Lord was revealed from heaven. We should therefore limit our forms of worship to those prescribed in the Word of God.
Chapter 3
Basic Biblical Doctrines
That Support the Regulative Principle

The Total Depravity of Man

The words of Romans 3:10-18 leave us in no doubt about man's corruption and depravity in his lost state. In part it is:

There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. Even the clear, perfect way to worship is shunned by the natural man and he cannot truly worship God—not to speak of inventing new and better ways to worship Him.

But are not believers who have been regenerated and indwelt by the Holy Spirit capable of devising new ways to worship God which are pleasing to Him?

If we read Romans 3:19-20, who is undoubtedly regenerate, wrote about himself in this way: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells, for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find" (Rom. 7:18-19). "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice."

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(Rom. 7:19). "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24).

Even the Apostle sees such perversity and weakness in himself; we who have never received a special revelation from God, and have never worked miracles or written an inspired letter, should feel very incapable of changing the principles of worship laid down by God and inventing a new form of worship which would please our holy God. Though regenerate men are given the task of preaching the Word, we cannot add anything to the Word of God or to the worship of God. Christ is on the throne of our hearts forever, but all kinds of superstition, pride, and evil lurk in the corridors. In Galatians 5:17 it is written, "For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."

There is plenty of evidence in the Bible that Christian believers commit all kinds of horrid sins. We know this also from our own experience. So we know that warnings against such sins as immorality, sensuality, enmities, strife, pride, factions, self-centeredness, hypocrisy, and the like are not unnecessary for us who are disciples of Christ. How then can we presume to improve on the worship that the Scriptures bid us to render to God? Do we know the mind of God (without the Scriptures) so that we can bring forth something that will please Him more than what He has already commanded us in His Word? Finite man, yes, sinful man, even in his best state is unfit and unable to determine apart from the Scriptures what will please God. Therefore, it is presumptuous to add to or to subtract anything from the worship that God has ordained in His Word.

The Sufficiency of the Scriptures

Another important doctrine, which the Reformed faith fully agrees on, is the doctrine of the sufficiency of the Scriptures. The Westminster Confession of Faith states it as follows:

The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men."
We should note that the whole counsel of God is either "expressly set down in Scripture," or it may be by good and necessary consequences "deduced from Scripture." We should not deny either of these points. The first Scripture passage that comes to mind bearing on this matter is the well-known passage in 2 Timothy 3:16-17:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We may safely say that God didn't leave anything out of the Bible that was necessary for doctrine, for rebuke, for training in righteousness, or for equipping us for every good work. There is no doubt that worship is a good work and is included among those things for which adequate instruction is given. There is no need for God to add any further instruction in a latter age concerning worship or any other matter. Instructions concerning the changes that were to take place in the transition from the Old Testament form of worship to the New Testament form of worship are all in the present Bible. If God wanted us to add or subtract anything from His worship those instructions have been given in the Scriptures.

But some may reply that even in the present day we have the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit may lead some to new forms of worship. To be sure, we have the Holy Spirit. The Westminster Confession of Faith acknowledges "the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word." But we should understand that we have the "illumination" of the Holy Spirit and not the "inspiration" of the Holy Spirit. The illumination gives us understanding of the Word. The inspiration gives the infallible Word.

The illumination and guidance of the Holy Spirit are necessary for prayer, and for the preaching of the Word. But this work of the Spirit does not add to the Word of God—it does not make our prayers or sermons infallible as the Scriptures are. They do not become the rule of faith and life. Even if a very devout minister were to preach a very inspiring sermon in which he advocated reading a passage of Calvin's Institutes along with the Scripture at each worship service, we should not give heed to him for a moment. Even the best and most helpful books and sermons

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are not nearly on a par with Scripture. They are not inspired. They are not a supplement to the Word of God, nor are they a part of the rule of faith and life. Their worth must be judged by the Word of God.

There is another point, however, which should be made. The Westminster Confession of Faith states it as follows:

There are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed. We would like to emphasize that not all circumstances of worship are left to the light of nature and Christian prudence. Moreover, in those that are, they must be decided according to the general rules and principles of the Word.

The circumstances which are thus to be decided are such things as the time of the worship, the place, the length of the meeting and so forth. The Bible has not told us these things. Yet in order to worship, a time and place must be set. The tunes to be used in the singing portion of the worship are also not included in the Scripture, yet we are told to sing so we must have melodies. Therefore, we conclude that they are "circumstances" of worship and are to be determined by the light of nature and Christian prudence. The type of clothing to be worn in New Testament worship, the architecture of the church building, the direction that the church building is to face, and many other circumstances that were determined to some extent in the Old Testament are to be determined by the Church today. That is to say, "These circumstances, therefore, which the Church has power to determine at her own discretion are limited to those not prescribed in the Scripture." This principle leads us to truly honor the Scriptures. When they speak about a matter we are not free to do otherwise. But when the Scriptures do not speak directly or by necessary implication concerning circumstances of worship we may exercise Christian liberty.

But no one can rightly say the Word of God has not spoken concerning the essence and content of worship. The whole Book of Psalms and a great many other passages of Scripture give us adequate instruction concerning the essence and content of worship.
Chapter 4
The New Testament Teaching with Respect to the Songs of Worship

Until now we have been speaking of worship in general. In the New Testament the elements of worship are the reading of the Word of God, the preaching of the Word, prayer, praise in song, presenting tithes and offerings to God, and the observance of the sacraments. The Regulative Principle applies to all of these parts of worship. We will now limit our discussion to the praise in song that we are to offer to God in worship.

It is readily acknowledged that the Book of Psalms was provided for the worship of God. The Psalms, given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, came out of a great variety of experiences of the people of God in this sinful world. They, therefore, contain the agonies, the tears, the distresses, the loneliness, as well as the joys, assurances, promises of God’s help, and the hopes of the same. Thus they are based upon and contain a great deal of the history of the Old Testament. At the same time they contain the praise for God, which He rightly deserves as our Creator, our Ruler, and our Helper in every time of need. These are pleasing to God and these are what He has willed through many ages for His people to sing to His praise.

The Psalms themselves bear witness to the fact that God wants them to be sung to Him. The word “sing” appears about twenty times in the

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Psalms, including a number of times in the imperative. Psalm 95:2 says, “Let us sing joyfully to Him with psalms” (NASB).

When the Ark of the Covenant was brought into Jerusalem, David assigned singers to praise and give thanks to God. The words of praise recorded in 1 Chronicles 16:8-36 are from the Psalms (Ps. 105:1-15; 96:13; 106:1, 47-48). We are told in 2 Chronicles 29:25 that the musicians were stationed in the house of God, “with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, of God the king’s ser, and of Nathan the prophet; for thus was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets.” Under Hezekiah the temple worship was renewed and he and the officials “commanded the Levites to sing praise to the Lord with the words of David and Asaph the seer” (2 Chron. 29:30). Nehemiah also renewed the worship of God in the new temple, and singers were appointed to sing praises (Neh. 12:27-28).

The Psalms were probably the best-known portion of the Scriptures during the Old Testament and New Testament times. They were a great source of inspiration, guidance, and consolation to God’s people, and a great instrument of praise. There is no evidence that other than inspired songs were used in the worship of God.

Much of the Old Testament worship was typical or symbolic and it was, thus, fulfilled in Christ, and we have been instructed to discontinue the use of such Old Testament ceremonies. This is true of the sacrifices, the circumcision, the Levitical priesthood, and many other accompanying ceremonies. The sacrifice of Christ, Christian baptism, the priesthood of all believers, and the Lord’s Supper fulfilled or replaced the old ceremonies. We believe that the use of musical instruments in the temple was also symbolic and was fulfilled in the true joy that believers now have. (Calvin allowed no musical instruments to be used in the public worship.)

But what about the Psalms? Was there any change in the praises that were sung in the New Testament as compared with the Old Testament? Did God commission men to write new, inspired New Testament songs to sing? Did He open the door for anyone with skill to write uninspired songs to sing? If so He surely would have made that clear.

Michael Bushell says:

Nothing could be clearer than the fact that the inclusion of uninspired songs in the service of worship, after hundreds of years
of practice to the contrary, would require some drastic changes in the conception of worship inherited by the New Testament saints. The change would be very basic, and it cannot be merely assumed to have taken place; it must be demonstrated. 11

Do we find such a change made in the New Testament? There are a number of passages that might seem to indicate a change, but careful examination does not lead to the conclusion that there is to be a new manual of praise.

In a number of passages we find the word "psalm" (θαλάμος) (Luke 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33). These all refer to quotations from the Book of Psalms. This very definitely associates the word "psalm," and the word corresponding to it (θαλάμος) within the Old Testament Psalms. Without definite proof it would be presumptuous to associate these with any other songs.

After eating the Passover, Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn (θαλαμάστεριον) and went out to the Mount of Olives (Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26). It may seem that we have here a precedent for singing uninspired hymns. But scholars of the Passover agree that it was customary to sing the second half of the Egyptian Hallel (Ps. 115–118) at that time. So this is an instance of Jesus singing the Psalms in the New Testament and it carries the weight of His example. Since it was closely associated with the institution of the Passover and the institution of the Lord’s Supper, it becomes even more significant. If Jesus were going to make changes in New Testament worship, it seems as though our time to do it.

The word of the Psalms Jesus sang at this time must have had great meaning to Jesus. Think about them a little. “For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling” (Ps. 116:8). “They surrounded me like bees; they were quenched like a fire of thorns, for in the name of the Lord I will destroy them” (Ps. 118:12). “I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord” (Ps. 118:17). The stone with the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. (Ps. 118:22). Our Lord died with the words of a psalm on His lips, and many a martyr followed His example (Matt. 27:46; Luke 23:46; John 19:28). There must be something wrong if we find the Psalms unsuitable for us today.

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In Acts 16:25 we read that Paul and Silas in prison "were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them." We are not told the content of these songs, but the Greek word used is the same as that used in Matthew 26:30 and Mark 14:26 (θαλαμάνω). Therefore, this passage cannot provide any authority for singing uninspired hymns. The hymn that Jesus and the disciples sang was a portion of the inspired Book of Psalms, and the probability that Paul and Silas were singing psalms is very great. They were familiar with the Psalms and accustomed to using them. They had no Christian hymnbook in those days, but there were hymns to heathen gods.

The passage in 1 Corinthians 14, especially verses 15 and 26, are somewhat difficult to understand in the present day. Verse 15 reads, “I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding.” Verse 26 reads, “Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”

Firstly, we should keep in mind that Paul is endeavoring to correct certain practices in the worship which were not beneficial to the Church. He is not instituting a new kind of worship, but rather, he is correcting certain misuses of spiritual gifts.

Secondly, we should realize that even if one would hold that the psalms mentioned in this passage are not the Psalms of the Bible, but rather some new charismatic psalms prepared to be sung in the worship services, they are not useful for us today. We have no copies of them and we have no charismatic gifts so as to write such songs.

Thirdly, even if these were charismatic psalms, as some claim, this does not set a precedent for the writing of uninspired hymns and using them in the worship of God. The composition of charismatic psalms could not more set a precedent for the writing of uninspired hymns for worship than the inspired writing of Scripture can set a precedent for the writing of uninspired Scripture to add to the present Bible.

Fourthly, the word "psalm" is used in six other places in the New Testament. In four passages (Luke 20:42; 24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33) it is certain that it refers to the Old Testament Psalms, and in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 there can be little doubt that it refers to the Old Testament Psalms (We will look at these soon.). The New Testament
usage of the word "psalm" lends strong support to the view that in this passage also 1 Cor. 14:26b it refers to the Psalms of the Bible. In the immediate context Paul is writing about the conduct of assembled believers where it was natural that they would sing the Psalms of the Bible, for they had no hymnbooks. In addition, to conclude that all of the things mentioned in verse 26 (psalms, teaching, revelation, tongues, interpretation) were charismatic seems strained. We would have to conclude that the complete worship service was charismatic. Therefore, to interpret the "psalm" here as referring to a Psalm of the Bible seems most natural.

Two parallel passages in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 are very important with respect to the content of the songs of worship. Do these passages authorize a new addition to the songs used to worship God? Do they indicate there were new songs with which we are unfamiliar? Ephesians 5:19 reads, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord." Colossians 3:16 reads, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

First, there is a difference of opinion whether these verses apply to public worship, or private worship, or both. These passages were written to the churches and were to be read in the various churches; therefore, it would appear that Paul had in mind an assembly of people. The words, "teaching and admonishing one another," indicates a number of people would be involved. Nevertheless, some interpret this to mean Christian intercourse in general rather than public worship. If private praise is to be limited to psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, then public worship would surely not be lesser than that. Murray and Young remark in this connection, "if psalms, hymns and spiritual songs are the limits of the materials of song in praise of God in less formal acts of worship, how much more in formal acts of worship."

Second, let us consider the nature of these "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs." Ephesians 5:19 enjoins "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," Colossians 3:16 enjoins "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." The use to be made of these "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" would indicate that they are inspired. They are to be used for teaching and admonishing as well as for singing. We do not find anywhere in Scripture an exhortation to use uninspired writings as the basis for teaching and admonishing. Considering the care that is exercised in the Scriptures to base sound teaching on the Scriptures, it would be a radical departure at this point to exhort the believers to use uninspired writings as the basis for teaching and exhortation. Some have altered the translation with the result of avoiding the problem, but the present translation seems to be accurate. To command people to use uninspired hymns and songs which had not yet been written (as some interpret these verses) as a basis for teaching and admonishing would be going very far from the Scriptural pattern. We have here a strong indication that these "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" are inspired writings.

Another indication that these "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" are inspired is that the immediate context points that way. These words are literally boxed in by the words "Spirit" and "spiritual," "he filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs," is the way it is in Ephesians. We could hardly think that the Word would exhort us to be filled with the Spirit by turning to uninspired writings for teaching and admonishing. On the other hand, the word "spiritual" indicates that at least the songs were given by the Holy Spirit. Warfield says of this word:

Of 25 instances in which the word occurs in the New Testament, in no single case does it sink even as low in its reference as the human spirit; and twenty-four of them are derived from pneuma, the Holy Spirit. In this sense of belonging to, or determined by, the Holy Spirit, the New Testament usage is uniform with the one single exception of Ephesians 6:12, where it seems to refer to the higher though superhuman intelligences. The appropriate translation for it in each case is spirit-filled, or spirit-led, or spirit-determined. 13 If we accept Warfield's interpretation, we naturally assume that the "songs" are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Murray and Young state this conclusion in the following way:

Paul specifies the character of the songs as "Spiritual"—οὖς pneumatikés. If anything should be obvious from the use of the word pneumatikés in the New Testament it is that it has reference to
the Holy Spirit and means, in such contexts as the present, "given by the Spirit." Its meaning is not at all, as French contends, "such as were composed by spiritual men, and moved in the sphere of spiritual things" (Symm. 188:11). It rather means, as Meyer points out, "proceeding from the Holy Spirit, as Theopneustos" (Commentarius on Eph. 5:19). In this context the word would mean "indicted by the Spirit," just as in 1 Corinthians 2:13 οὐκέτι... πνευματικός: are "words inspired by the Spirit" and "taught by the Spirit" (didaktikos pneumatikos)."

The question then arises whether the word "spiritual" modifies only the word "songs," or whether it modifies the words "psalms" and "hymns" also. Were songs only indicted by the Spirit, or were the psalms and hymns also indicted by the Spirit? Murray and Young answer this question by saying that "pneumatikos" qualifies all three. But that its gender (fem.) is due to the attraction to the gender of the noun that is closest to it. Another distinct possibility, made particularly plausible by the omission of the copulative in Colossians 3:16, is that "spiritual songs" are the genus of which "psalms" and "hymns" are the species. This is the view of Meyer, for example. On either of these assumptions "psalms, hymns and songs" are all "spiritual" and therefore all inspired by the Holy Spirit. The bearing of this upon the question at issue is perfectly apparent. Uninspired hymns are immediately excluded.

There is another expression that indicates those psalms, hymns and spiritual songs are inspired by the Holy Spirit. In Colossians 3:16 the clause "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another with psalms and hymn and spiritual songs." It would be strange, indeed, to command the believers to have the Word of Christ dwelling in them richly, but to use uninspired hymns as a basis for teaching and admonishing one another. So in this context it is not reasonable to hold that psalms and hymns are uninspired. The natural interpretation is that the "Word of Christ" is the same as "psalms, hymns and spiritual songs." They are all composed by the Spirit of Christ and part of the Word that He as a divine Prophet has given to His Church.

Finally, let us consider the question, "What are the 'psalms, hymns and spiritual songs' in these verses?"

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We should assume that Paul was writing about songs that he was familiar with and that the Ephesians and Colossians had available, for he is commanding them to use these in teaching and admonishing. There is nothing in the context to indicate this is a prophecy.

We should also keep in mind that the New Testament was written in Greek and that many of the Greek-speaking people who received the New Testament were readers of the Greek Old Testament, called the Septuagint. Therefore, to some degree they would interpret the New Testament in the light of the Septuagint version of the Old Testament.

Now, as we turn to the psalms in the Septuagint Bible, we find that the words "psalms, hymns and songs" are all used in the titles of the psalms. The word "psalm" is used 87 times in the Septuagint, 67 times in the titles of the psalms. The word "hymn" is used 17 times in the Septuagint, six times in the titles of the psalms. And the word "song" is used 80 times in the Septuagint; 45 are in the Book of Psalms, of which 36 are in the psalm titles.

Bushell notes that in

2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Chronicles and Nehemiah there are 16 examples in which the Psalms are called "hymns" (ἡ τρισαγίων) or "songs" (τριαγίων), and the singing of them is called "hymning" (τριάγιον, τριαγίωντον).

We should also observe that these three words (psalm, hymn, song) do not designate three parts or sections of the Book of Psalms. In many cases "psalm" and "song" occur in the same title, and in at least one case (Psalms 76 in English) all three of these words (psalm, hymn, song) appear in the same title. A bilingual copy of the Septuagint makes this clear.

The New Testament writers and many readers, too, were familiar with the fact that these three words were used to some extent synonymously in the Septuagint, and particularly in the Psalms. The natural conclusion then is that Paul was exhoring the Ephesians and the Colossians to use the Book of Psalms to teach and admonish one another. This is natural because this book of the Bible was probably the most available and the believers were the most familiar with it.

Therefore, we find in these passages no command or authorization to use uninspired hymns or songs in the Church. Instead, we find an
exhortation to use the Psalms for teaching, admonishing, and singing praise to God in the Church. The Apostolic Church heeded this exhortation and was blessed. We should heed it, too.

There are a few other New Testament passages, such as James 5:13 ("Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms"), which might be considered, but we have considered the most significant passages. It should be clear that there is no explicit authorization for introducing new, uninspired songs into the worship of God. Rather, we are told to sing the inspired Psalms of the Bible that have inspired and strengthened believers and have glorified the Name of God down through the ages.

Chapter 5
A Brief History of Psalmody

The Psalms were not all written at the same time; their writing spans the time from Moses to the period of the exile. During the time of Ezra and Nehemiah the canon was being formed and the Psalms were probably brought together in their complete form. Israel and Judah had been guilty of using many forms of false worship before the captivity, but Ezra and Nehemiah were very careful to institute worship which was "according to the command of David and of God the king's son and of Nathan the prophet" (2 Chron. 29:25). There was never a divine authorization for singing uninspired songs in the temple, and the Psalter became the exclusive manual of praise in the temple services. Mowinckle says:

There came a time when every psalm used in the temple service had to be taken from the Psalter. Firstly, this means that the psalms, which had from early times established themselves by regular use in the temple service, would all be included in the Psalter. But secondly, it must be added that in later Jewish times no psalms were used in the temple service which were not found in the book."

Gene W. Spear
Psalms in the Early Church

The New Testament Church followed the Old Testament practice of singing Psalms. After hundreds of years of following this practice, we would expect that if a change were to be made it would be explicit in Scripture. But we have not found such an explicit command to make a change. Instead, we find that the Psalms were the standard manual of praise in the churches. Not only so, but believers so loved the Psalms that they constantly sang them as they went about their daily work. Jerome (d. 419) praises the use of the Psalms in the following way:

Wherever you turn, the laborer at the plough sings Alleluia: the toiling reaper begs its work with Psalms: the vine-treader as he punishes the wine with his curved pruning hook sings something of David’s. These are the songs of this province: these are the laborer’s instruments.26

Philius Schaff says that except for four or five poems or hymns (which may not have been used in public worship) "we have no complete religious song remaining from the period of persecution (i.e. from the first three centuries)." He says:

Excepting these hymns in rhythmic prose, the Greek Church of the first six centuries produced nothing in this field which has had permanent value or general use. It long adhered...to the Psalms of David, which, as Chrysostom says, was first, middle and last in the assemblies of the Christians; and it had, in opposition to heretical predilections, even a decided aversion to the public use of uninspired songs.27

Bushell says:

Extant accounts, for example, of sermons made for the books of the Christians during times of persecution, make no mention of hymns, whereas the canonical Scriptures, and especially copies of the Psalter, are frequently mentioned.23

The aversion to the use of uninspired songs in public worship is evident in the decision of several councils. Bushell enumerates the councils that decreed opposition to the use of uninspired songs sometimes used in the Church. He says:

A series of Councils dealt with the matter by reasserting the sufficiency of the inspired Psalms and attempting to prevent the introduction of uninspired hymns into the worship of the Church. The Council of Laodicea about A.D. 381 prohibited the ecclesiastical use of uninspired or "private psalms." The Council of Chalcedon in 451 confirmed this decree. Apparently this decree did not prevent hymnographers from expressing their religious ideas in the form of poetry, so it was renewed in a more precise but less rigorous form by the Council of Braga (561) which decreed that poetic compositions were not to be used in the service of praise. The Fourth Synod of Toledo in the 7th century reiterated the same proscription.24

Calvin cites Augustine’s opposition to the use of uninspired songs in worship with approval:

Now, what St. Augustine says is true, that nobody can sing things which are worthy of God except those which he has received from God Himself. Therefore when we have gone round everywhere to search, we shall not find better songs, nor more suitable ones to do that, than the Psalms of David, which were dedicated to Him and composed by the Holy Spirit.25

During this period the use of the Psalter was enthusiastically encouraged and even required. In the 5th century a knowledge of the whole Psalter by heart was often required for ordination:

Gennadius, Patriarch of Constantinople (A.D. 458-471), refused to ordain as priest anyone who had not been diligent in reciting the Psalter. Gregory the Great refused to allow John the Presbyter to be consecrated as Metropolitan of Ravenna on account of his ignorance of the Psalter.29

Furthermore:

The second canon of the second Council of Nicaea (A.D. 587), for example, decreed that no one was to be consecrated bishop unless he knew the Psalter thoroughly, and the eighth Council of Toledo (A.D. 653) ordered that "no one henceforth shall be promoted to any ecclesiastical dignity who does not perfectly know the whole Psalter."31

In spite of official decrees to the very contrary, hymns were written and sung in various churches. Valetinus and Marcian brought new hymns to Rome to spread their Gnostic heresy. The Arian heresy was also propagated by hymns. Augustine reproached the Donatists for "singing
psalms of human composition, which arouse them like the stirring notes of the trumpet of the battlefield.  

To counter the pernicious influence of the hymns of heretics, a number of people wrote hymns to teach the orthodox faith. But we have not seen any evidence that these were officially approved for use in public worship. On the contrary, it seems clear that in the church councils there was a definite effort to limit the singing to the inspired Psalms of the Bible.

**Psalms During the Reformation**

By the time of the Reformation, the Catholic Church had denied the Bible to the laity, including the Psalter, and had replaced congregational singing with choral selections in Latin. An important part of the Reformation was to return to the Psalter. Though Luther held that what is not forbidden in worship is permitted, nevertheless he loved the Psalms. His first published book was a German translation and exposition of the seven Penitential Psalms. But Luther and others wrote a great number of hymns.

In sharp contrast, Calvin wrote no hymns and the church printed only the Psalter. The Psalter was not prepared for singing in a short time, but with patience Calvin kept up the struggle to get it completed and in use. In fact, the singing of the Psalms in worship was one of the conditions on which Calvin would return to Geneva after his exile. Calvin returned to Geneva in 1541 and the *first edition of the Geneva Psalter* was printed in 1542. Louis Bourgeois probably composed many of the tunes, and it was he who conducted many sessions of singing instruction to familiarize many with the Psalter. The popularity of the Psalter was astounding. In the first year of publication 25 editions were printed, and in four years 62 editions followed. There is no doubt that the Psalter sung in the worship of God and in many other situations in life was a powerful driving force behind the spiritual reformation.

J. Stanford Reid says: The thing that really grabbed the common man, the ordinary Calvinist soldier, was something much more mundane: his catechetical training and the congregational singing of the Psalms. More than all the fine theological reasoning, both the catechism and the Psalter entered into the very warp and woof of the humblest members' lives. It has been said that Calvin did not stand on the principle of exclusive psalmody and a cappella singing. But the fact that, in spite of long customs to the contrary, Calvin excluded instruments and uninspired songs from the public worship leaves little doubt that he based his stand on principle.

Bushell, who researched this matter carefully has the following to say:

It is undeniable historical fact that non-canonical songs were excluded from the Geneva services and that this state of affairs was due to Calvin’s influence and desire. He is not likely to have followed such a course unless he felt that it was required scripturally, especially considering the importance that he attached to congregational singing. He took great pains to put together a Psalter for use in Strasbourg, translating a number of the Psalms himself. He included no hymns, and that in spite of the fact that the congregational singing of hymns was an established ordinance in Strasbourg. He borrowed some of the German tunes but none of the lyrics, and the choice must have been deliberate. There is also the fact, that, through its long history of development, the *Geneva Psalter* never included a single hymn.

Bushell concludes:

Calvin’s own practice, his insistence on the inspired superiority of the Psalms, and his defense of the Regulative Principle, all point toward the unavoidable conclusion that Calvin limited himself to the Psalms and a few Biblical songs or paraphrases because he thought it would be wrong to do otherwise.

Beyond Geneva, the Psalter became very popular. The Huguenots learned the Psalms by heart and many who were burned at the stake departed from this world with the Psalms on their lips. It is also well known that the Scottish Presbyterians adhered to the principle of singing Psalms only without instruments. Concerning the Church of England Benson wrote:

The hymn of human composition, that had won so hardly a restricted place in the liturgy of the Latin Church, that had developed so phenomenally in the German Reformation, is now excluded from Reformed worship. The inspired songs of Scripture, substantially the Old Testament Psalter, furnish the exclusive subject-matter of praise.
Gene W. Spear

The Westminster Assembly gave considerable attention to the singing of the Psalms and sanctioned the use of an improved Rouse version. The position of the Assembly was undoubtedly that the Psalms alone were to be sung in worship. Some elements of worship were described in the Westminster Confession, Chapter XXI, Paragraph V:

The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear; the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding faith, reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart.

For two and a half centuries the Reformed churches sang only the inspired Psalms of the Bible in the worship of God. It is no coincidence, I think, that these very people were so bold in defying the enemies of Protestantism and so courageous when suffering persecution. The Psalms on their lips gave them authoritative guidance and comfort. The inspired promises that they sang gave them a true sense of value enabling them to see that the principles and the cause of Christ are of much greater value than life itself. And the Psalms which they sang led them into the presence of Christ and enabled them to worship Him in spirit and truth.

**Psalms in Worship in America**

"The first book," according to Bushell, "printed in English America was the first edition of the Bay Psalm Book, or New England version of the Psalms, printed at Cambridge in 1640." Psalm-singing was the accepted practice in the Reformed churches in America. But the influence of Isaac Watts brought on a long-lasting controversy over psalmody. Paraphrases were introduced and contested for a considerable time. These uninspired hymns were introduced and contested. There was a gradual slide towards the use of uninspired hymns instead of the inspired Psalms of the Bible. Hymns were not adopted as appropriate for the worship of God after a careful study of the principles of the Word of God, but came in gradually, little by little, and then after they had become the custom in the churches, some churches changed their standards to conform with their practice. The New York Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church declared in 1765 that "they look upon the inspired Psalms in Scripture to be proper matter to be sung in divine worship, according to their original design and the practice of the Christian churches." Yet

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they did not forbid the use of Watts' imitations of the Psalms of David. Later it was left up to the congregations to make their own choice. Eventually, about the end of the 18th century, paraphrases and hymns began to be accepted and were eventually sanctioned.

In this way a part of the glorious heritage of the Church, which was received from the Apostolic Church and from the Reformation, was gradually given up. The uninspired hymns did not in most cases supplement the singing of Psalms set long. They supplanted them. Do not the words of Jesus in Mark 7:2 apply to this situation, too? "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition."
Chapter 6
The Blessings God Gives
Through the Psalms

A great many noted Christians of all ages have found the Psalter to be a great blessing. Please allow me to quote three of them:

Athanasius, an influential, highly orthodox bishop of Alexandria, wrote in 367 A.D., after naming all of the 27 books of the New Testament for the first time:

I believe that a man can find nothing more glorious than these Psalms: for they embrace the whole life of a man, the affections of his mind, and the motions of his soul. To praise and glorify God he can select a psalm suited to every occasion, and thus will find they were written for him.

Ambrose, one of the strongest leaders the Church had known, wrote in about 385 A.D.:

The Law instructs, history informs, prophecy predicts, correction censures and morals exhort. In the Book of Psalms you find all of these. The Psalter deserves to be called the praise of God, the glory of man, the voice of the Church, and the most beneficial confession of faith. Luther, one of the first reformers, wrote:

The Psalter ought to be a precious and beloved book, if for no other reason than this: it promises Christ's death and resurrection so clearly—and pictures His kingdom and the condition and nature of all Christendom—that it might well be called a “little Bible.” In it is comprehended most beautifully and briefly everything that is in the entire Bible. It is really a fine enrichment or handbook. In fact, I have a notion that the Holy Spirit wanted to take the trouble Himself to compile a short Bible and book of examples of all Christendom or all saints, so that anyone who could not read the whole Bible would here have anyway an entire summary of it, comprised in one little book."

The Psalms do truly exalt Christ before our eyes if we understand them. We find that He is the Good Shepherd in Psalm 23. He is the Conqueror and the Bridegroom in Psalm 45; the mocked and ridiculed Savior upon the cross in Psalm 22. He is the Son before whom all kings must bow in Psalm 2. He is the Firstborn from the dead in Psalm 16; the King to whom all the kings will bring tribute in Psalm 72; and the list could go on and on. One notable thing is that in the Psalms the greatness, the authority, the majesty, and the justice of Christ are strongly emphasized. It is in sharp contrast with the weak concept that many modern Christians have of Jesus, who is the Judge of all the earth, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

It should not escape our notice that during the times when the Psalter was most loved and sung some of the greatest things happened in the Church. The early Church overcame the persecution and hostility of the Roman Empire. The Reformation Church brought men back to the Bible. And the Scottish Church won religious liberty.

Notes: Another important matter to be considered in respect to worship is the matter of musical instruments. It was the conviction of John Calvin and many reformers that musical instruments should not be used in the worship of God. This is the conviction of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America. An additional article explains the scriptural basis of this conviction.
Appendix

The New Testament Church and Instruments

The worship of God is one of our most sacred privileges. Every pastor wants to have a "good" worship service. But what is a really "good" worship service? There is not much agreement about this. For some, it must be modern with various musical instruments and various new songs. For others, a traditional service with old hymns accompanied by the organ is more satisfying. There is not much uniformity of opinion, and the changes that come from time to time leave some confused or so dissatisfied that they may even change churches.

The Central Purpose of Worship

This leads to the very important question, "What is the central purpose of the church's worship, including the music?" Some ministers are quite sure that the music of the church is to draw people to the church and give them a witness. Some devout people are pretty sure that the musical part of the service is to prepare people's hearts for the minister's message. Drawing people, giving a witness, and preparing people's hearts for the message have their merits, but are these the central purpose of the worship?

Worship Pleasing to God

We can imagine that whatever pleases us would be pleasing to God, but is that so? We have studied and understood that the Psalms of the Bible are the songs which are pleasing to God. They are perfect because they are inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, the very words God gave us to praise His Name. We may imagine that organ music or many other kinds of music is pleasing to God, but in the New Testament age is that what God wants? The Testimony of the Reformed Presbyterian Church states, "The Psalms are to be sung without the accompaniment of instruments, which are not part of the New Testament pattern of worship." (Ch. 21:6) Now is this what God teaches us in the Word? Nearly all of the churches are using musical instruments in their worship services, and some of it is excellent music. Probably most church members think that it was always the practice of the Church.

The New Testament Worship

What kind of worship did the apostolic Church offer? Do we find even one word in the New Testament which indicates that they were to use musical instruments in worship? To be sure, there was no lack of musical instruments in the world since Jobal of the family of Cain first
played the harp and flute. But the New Testament Church made no use of them. We don’t even hear of an archaeologist finding musical instruments in any first or second-century Christian churches. We hear of trumpets in the Book of Revelation, but they only signaled the coming of an important event, as trumpets are used in the army to sound the alarm. Moreover, we cannot regard them as real instruments made of earthly materials. They are symbolic just as the streets of gold and the pearly gates. We must say that there is no passage in the New Testament which furnishes a command or example for using musical instruments in the worship of the New Testament Church. Every example of singing in the New Testament was unaccompanied by instruments. For example: Jesus and His disciples (Matt. 26:30), Paul and Silas in prison (Acts 16:25), Paul instructing the Corinthians about worship (1 Cor. 14:15), Paul’s instruction to the Ephesians (Eph. 5:19), and to the Colossians (Col. 3:16). We are not free to add more than that which is commanded by the Word of God.

**Musical Instruments Added to the Worship**

So when were organs and other musical instruments introduced into the New Testament worship?

The *American Encyclopedia* reports:

Pope Vitalian is related to have first introduced organs into some of the churches of Western Europe, about 670; but the earliest trustworthy account is that of one sent as a present by the Greek Emperor Constantine Copronymus to Pepin, King of the Franks, in 755. (Vol. 12, p. 688)

The *Catholic Encyclopedia* gives a similar report:

The organ is said to have been first introduced into church music by Pope Vitalian I in 666 A.D. In 757, a great organ was sent as a present to Pepin by the Byzantine emperor, Constantine Copronymus, and placed in the church of St. Gotthard at Compiegne. Soon after Charlemagne’s time [748-814] organs became common. (Vol. 7, p. 112)

The *Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia* reports:

In the Greek church the organ never came into use. But after the eighth century it became more and more common in the Latin church; not, however, without opposition from the side of the monks. **—The

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Reform Church discarded it; and though the church of Basel very early introduced it, it was in other places admitted only sparingly and after long hesitation. (Vol. 2, p. 1702)

Other encyclopedias give similar reports.

It is clear that musical instruments were not used in the worship of the New Testament Church until at least six centuries after Christ. Church historians, such as Eusebius, Nestes, Mosheim, Schaff, and Fisher, make no mention of it for hundreds of years after Christ. And it appears that it was introduced by emperors, but was always met with opposition from the theologians. Oscar Cullmann wrote a book entitled, *Early Christian Worship*, and though he covers the subject rather thoroughly he does not once mention instrumental music in worship.

**Musical Instruments in Old Testament Worship**

It is well known that instrumental music was a part of the Old Testament worship. Musical instruments were not prescribed as a part of the worship in the tabernacle in the wilderness, nor were they used during the reign of King Saul or during the first part of David’s reign. There were times of national rejoicing such as after the crossing of the Red Sea, and the rejoicing over the dedication of the Temple when the people of Israel rejoiced and sang with instruments. But until God commanded it, instruments were not used in the regular worship of God.

God first gave to David detailed plans for the Temple and he gave those plans to Solomon:

Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the vestibule, its houses, its treasuries, its upper chambers, its inner chambers, and the place of the mercy seat: and the plans for all that he had by the Spirit, of the courts of the house of the Lord, and all the chambers all around, of the treasuries of the house of the Lord, and of all the chambers all around, of the treasuries of the house of God, and the treasure for the dedicated things; also the division of the priests and the Levites, for all the work of the service of the house of the Lord... “All this,” said David, “the Lord made me understand in writing, by His hand upon me, all the works of these plans.” (1 Chron. 28:11-13, 19)

More specific directions were given to the Levites which they obeyed in their singing and playing of instruments:
And the Levites who were the singers, all those of Asaph and Heman and Jeduthun, with their sons and their brethren, stood at the east end of the altar, clothed in white linen, having cymbals, stringed instruments and harps, and with them one hundred and twenty priests sounding with trumpets—indeed it came to pass, when the trumpeters and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the Lord and when they lifted up their voice with trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the Lord, saying “For He is good, for His mercy endures forever,” that the house of the Lord was filled with a cloud, so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God. (2 Chron. 5:12-14)

Somewhat later we read of King Hezekiah restoring the Temple worship:

And 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 God the king’s seer, and of Nathan the prophet, for thus was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets. (2 Chron. 29:25)

So it is clear that all of this ceremonial worship, including the singsing and the playing of instrumental worship, was ordained of God. David did not introduce all of this simply because he liked it, but rather because God ordained it. And God ordained it because it pleased Him.

Old Testament Worship was Changed to New Testament Worship

A great change took place when the Son of God became flesh and dwelt among us. The Old Testament priesthood ceased to function because our Great High Priest was among us. The offering of a multitude of animal sacrifices ceased because Jesus, the Lamb of God, offered Himself once for all His chosen people. Prayer changed because Jesus Christ opened a new and living way into the Holy of Holies. The Old Testament ceremonial ritual was changed into the New Testament pattern consisting of the reading of the Word, prayer, praise, the giving of an offering, the sermon, and the sacraments. It is only natural that the music would also change. Actually, the New Testament worship was similar to the Jewish synagogue worship that was practiced all over the land. That is, in the synagogues there was the reading of the Word, the singing of Psalms, prayer, and sermons, but there were no musical instruments.

John Girardeau, who wrote extensively on this subject writes, “The writers who have most carefully investigated Jewish antiquities, and have written learnedly and elaborately in regard to the synagogue, concur in showing its worship was destitute of instrumental music” (Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church, p. 39). But why were there no musical instruments in the synagogues not later in the New Testament church?

Musical Instruments were Ceremonial

God commanded the use of musical instruments during the offering of sacrifices, but not after the sacrifices were finished. In 2 Chronicles 29:26-29 we read:

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 assembly worshiped, the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: all this continued until the burnt offering was finished. Moreover King Hezekiah and the leaders commanded the Levites to sing praise to the Lord with the words of David and of Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshiped.

We notice that the song of the Lord and the instrumental music began when the burnt sacrifice was offered. And all this music continued until the burnt offering was finished. That is, it ceased when the sacrifice was finished. So the instrumental music was a part of the ceremonial worship.

After this, separate from the sacrifice, “Hezekiah and the leaders commanded the Levites to sing praise to the Lord with the words of David and Asaph the seer. So they sang praises with gladness, and bowed their heads and worshiped.” There is no mention of instruments here because the sacrifice was already finished. They sang the psalms of David and Asaph a capella. This is why the Jews did not use instruments in the Christian worship.
synagogues. There were no sacrifices offered in the synagogues so no instruments were used. And this is why no instruments were used in the New Testament Church. There were no animal sacrifices in the Church, so no musical instruments were used. This is why they should not be used in the churches today. There are no sacrifices in the churches.

Scholarly Men of God Reject Instruments in Worship

Many today are his is some kind of private opinion. But through the ages, godly men of great learning and great renown have spoken out against the use of musical instruments in New Testament worship. Let us see what they have to say.

M.C. Ramsay writes, "In the early centuries eminent Christian leaders such as Justin Martyr, Basil, Chrysostom, Jerome and Augustine all practiced in their churches singing unaccompanied by musical instruments" (Purity of Worship, p. 34).

Thomas Aquinas, one of the learned scholastic professors in the 13th century said, "Our church does not use musical instruments, as harp and psaltery, to praise God withal, that she may not seem to Judaize" (A Summa of Theology, Vol. 3., p. 137).

John Calvin, the leading scholar of the Reformation, declared: "To sing praises of God upon the harp and psaltery formed part of the training of the law and of the service of God under that dispensation of shadows and figures; but they are not now to be used in public thanksgiving" (Reported by John Giraudou). "Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting of lamps, and the restoration of the shadows of the law" (Calvin's Commentary on Psalm 33).

John Wesley, the Father of Methodism said, "I have no opposition to the organ in our chapel provided it is neither seen nor heard."

Charles Spurgeon, commenting on 1 Corinthians 14:15, remarked, "I would as soon pray to God with machinery as to sing to God with machinery."

James Glasgow gave his view as follows: "The early Church did not use instrumental music in its worship... They considered the practice as pagan or Jewish rather than Christian." (Needham, The Presbyterian, #32, p. 35)

Christian Worship

Instrumental Music Mentioned in the Psalms

It is quite natural that musical instruments are mentioned in the Psalms. They were commonly used in connection with the sacrificial system of worship. But some say that if instruments are mentioned and even commanded as in Psalm 150, they should be used in the New Testament church. It seems to be a strong argument until we recall that words such as altar, sacrifice, priests, and incense also appear in the Psalms. We are commanded to sing Psalms in the New Testament, but are warned against returning to Old Testament ceremonial worship. Instead, we should recall what these symbols and shadows of things to come meant so that our praise will be more full of meaning. The sounds of the trumpets, cymbals, harps and other instruments were symbols of the joy of salvation through the atoning sacrifices being offered. Now we understand much better and are to express that joy with our own voices. In a similar way, we recall the Old Testament history, which is often included in the Psalms, and sing with greater appreciation for all that God has done for us in the past as well as in the present.

New Testament Blessings on Scriptural Worship

We live in an age of rich blessings. The Son of God has come with all the fullness of His grace and power, and by His sacrifice He has taken away all of the sins of all who believe in Him. He has given us His Holy Spirit to dwell in us, and He enlightens our minds, assures us of His love, empowers us for every trial and the work which Providence has put in our path. We should no longer depend on Old Testament shadows and symbols such as sacrifices or instrumental music. We do not need a crutch to help us sing with joy. The Holy Spirit is given to each one of us to enable us to worship in spirit and in truth. Notice Paul's exhortation to worship in Ephesians 5:18-19: "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." There is nothing said about musical instruments here. The Psalms and the grace of the Spirit are perfectly adequate and pleasing to God. Also, in 1 Corinthians 14:26-33, Paul speaks about a number of elements in New Testament worship, but there is no mention at all of musical instruments. They are not needed. We can sing the Psalms.
with deep meaning and great joy and greater skill than we might suppose. Actually, churches that sing *a cappella* are able to sing much better than those who lean on instrumental accompaniment. And as they train their voices to glorify God, they are able to enjoy continual improvement.

"Therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God, the fruit of our lips, making melody to Him in our hearts, offering the sacrifice of praise with the fruit of our lips, that is, the fruit of our lips to God, who rejoices in our joy. To the Lord belong vivid righteousness and steadfast love.

If you are not familiar with the singing of Psalms, you might like to obtain a copy of *The Book of Psalms for Singing*. Also, there are excellent recordings of the Psalms being sung by church choral groups and special groups of young people. To listen to the Psalms being sung will be a blessing to you, and it is a very fine way to become familiar with tunes which you may not know now. These can be obtained from Crown & Covenant Publications, 7408 Penn Ave., Pittsburgh, PA 15208. Phone: 412-241-0436. Web site: www.psalms4u.com.

End Notes

3. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p. 56.
17. Ibid.
18. M. Bushell, p. 72.
19. Ibid., p. 55, 122.
20. Ibid., p. 122.
22. Ibid.
24. Ibid. p. 123.
27. Ibid., p. 125.
28. Ibid., p. 124.
29. Ibid., p. 135.
30. Ibid., p. 136.
31. Ibid., p. 139.
32. Ibid., p. 141.
33. Ibid., p. 137.
34. Ibid., p. 152.
35. Ibid., p. 159.
36. Ibid., p. 94.
37. Ibid., p. 93.
Worshiping God is one of the greatest privileges God has given us. Yet there is little agreement as to the content and manner in which we should worship. People of various national backgrounds and traditions prefer various widely differing kinds of worship. It is time to look carefully into the Scriptures to see what kind of worship God prefers and prescribes. Perhaps we will be able to see that God has already fully provided for the content and manner of our worship.