

Back To Basics

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SPECIAL ISSUE: MECHANICAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP

Johnie Edwards

God has always specified what He wants in worship. God has authorized the kind of music He wants in the church. Since God has made known His will in this matter, it is not up to man to decide. God's requirements in church music are:

1) **VOCAL MUSIC.** There are only two kinds of music: vocal and mechanical. God requires vocal music. The apostle to the Hebrews stated, "...in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee" (Heb. 2:12). Mechanical music in the worship of the church is an addition of a kind of music that God has not commanded.

2) **FOR EACH CHRISTIAN TO SING.** Paul admonished the Ephesians, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). Singing is required of each one and to attend services of the church and fail to sing is failing to meet God's requirements. Since the Lord has told each one to sing, this does away with choirs, solos, and the like. If a mechanical instrument is required, then each one would have to play and sing! If not, why not?

3) **SINGING WITH THE SPIRIT AND UNDERSTANDING.** Paul said, "What is it then?...I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also" (1 Cor. 14:15). Our singing must be spiritual, if we are to sing with the spirit. We must study the words of the songs to understand them.

4) **SINGING WITH GRACE.** Writing to the Colossians, Paul penned, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom...singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord" (Col. 3:16). To sing with grace is to sing with gratitude toward God and that being prompted by God's extended favor.

5) **TEACHING AND ADMONISHING.** Colossians 3:16 states, "...teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing..." Only vocal music can teach and admonish. A mechanical instrument cannot teach and admonish.

6) **THE INSTRUMENT IS THE HEART.** Paul penned, "...singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19). The Lord has specified man's heart as the instrument from which the music must come.



THE MUSIC PASSAGES

John Isaac Edwards



Listed below are all of the passages in the New Testament that have to do with the kind of music to be used in worship unto God. As you read the music passages, please take note of the kind of music involved.

1) **MATTHEW 26:30:** “And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”

2) **MARK 14:26:** “And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives.”

3) **ACTS 16:25:** “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.”

4) **ROMANS 15:9:** “And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.”

5) **1 CORINTHIANS 14:15:** “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”

6) **EPHESIANS 5:19:** “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”

7) **COLOSSIANS 3:16:** “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.”

8) **HEBREWS 2:12:** “Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.”

9) **HEBREWS 13:15:** “By him therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”

10) **JAMES 5:13:** “Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.”

If you believe a mechanical instrument in worship to God is authorized by the New Testament, name the instrument and supply the passage that authorizes it. _____

Back To Basics

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HAND CLAPPING & VOCAL PERCUSSION

John Isaac Edwards

There has been much discussion over the years concerning singing with the accompaniment of a mechanical instrument in worship to God. There are two other musical accompaniments common to contemporary worship that need to be addressed.

1) **HAND CLAPPING.** In worship services of the present period, it is common to see folks clapping their hands and singing. Hand clapping is okay in the home in singing “Patty Cake, Patty Cake,” but it is unacceptable in singing spiritual songs in the church. There is no Scripture where the Lord or the apostles ever instructed anyone at anytime to clap their hands in worship unto God. If so, where is it? And, where is the passage where Jesus, the apostles, or the early church ever engaged in hand clapping in worship? I read about hand cleansing in James 4:8. Where do you read about hand clapping? The New Testament is as silent about hand clapping as it is about a mechanical instrument.

2) **VOCAL PERCUSSION.** This is a new one to some and may need to be defined. *Percussion* is the beating or striking of a musical instrument. Are you familiar with “percussion instruments” that form a section of a band or orchestra? *Vocal percussion* (or mouth drumming) is the production of percussive sounds using only the speech apparatus. Vocal percussion is now a sophisticated component of contemporary a cappella music. Have you heard of such groups as *Octappella*? Octappella’s music is sung entirely a cappella, using no mechanical instruments of any kind, but to hear them you would think they were accompanied by percussion instruments. To say that only vocal music is authorized in worship is in-

adequate. The Lord specified the nature of vocal music when He said, “singing” (Eph. 5:19). If we’re all singing (and we’re all commanded to sing), then there won’t be room for any vocal percussionists in the church. The command to sing is specific and authorizes only *singing*. It excludes whistling, humming, yodeling, vocal percussion, and everything else some designing brother may dream up. The New Testament is as silent about vocal percussion as it is about a mechanical instrument.

In an effort to fill the worship *experience* with excitement and pizzazz, these contemporary services have supplanted that which God designed for our edification and His praise!

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THE "PSALLO" ARGUMENT

Donnie V. Rader

The Greek verb "psallo" is used five times in the New Testament. It is translated "sing" (Rom. 15:9), "sing" (1 Cor. 14:15, twice), "make melody" (Eph. 5:19), and "sing psalms" (Jas. 5:13). The noun form of the same word (*psalmos*) is translated "psalms" (Lk. 20:32; 24:44; Acts 1:20; 13:33; 1 Cor. 14:26; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). Those who contend that mechanical instruments of music are Scriptural have argued that the word "psallo" justifies the instruments. Their argument says that the word means to pluck or twang. They point out that the lexicons say it is used of playing a stringed instrument. Thus, they contend that instrumental music inheres in the word "psallo."

1) **THE MEANING OF THE WORD.** The word literally means, "a. to pluck off, pull out. b. to cause to vibrate by touching, to twang" (*Thayer*). "To twitch, twang" (*W. E. Vine*). "...probably strengthened from psao (to rub or touch the surface; compare NT:5597); to twitch or twang..." (*Strong's*). "To touch sharply, to pluck, pull, twitch, to pluck..." (*Liddell and Scott*). It is used of plucking hair, a bowstring or a carpenter's line (*Liddell and Scott*). It is also used of plucking the strings of an instrument (*Liddell and Scott, Thayer*). It is used of singing by touching the cords of the heart (*Thayer*). So, the term can be used to refer to plucking the strings of an instrument. The object of the verb does not inhere in the verb. The verb means to pluck, twitch, or twang. It does not tell us what is to be plucked. The *what* is to be determined by the context. If the instrument of music (stringed instruments) inheres in the word, why doesn't "hair" inhere in the word since the lexicons say it can be used of plucking hair? Why doesn't a "bowstring" or

"carpenter's line" inhere in the term? In the New Testament, the word means to sing. Notice what Vine says about how the term is used in the New Testament: "primarily 'to twitch, twang,' then, 'to play a stringed instrument with the fingers,' and hence, in the Sept., 'to sing with a harp, sing psalms,' denotes, in the NT, 'to sing a hymn, sing praise'; in Eph. 5:19, 'making melody'" (for the preceding word *ado*, see SING). Elsewhere it is rendered 'sing,' Rom. 15:9; 1 Cor. 14:15; in James 5:13, RV, 'let him sing praise' (KJV, 'let him sing psalms')." Thayer says essentially the same thing: "...in the New Testament to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song, Jas. 5:13; in honor of God, Eph. 5:19; Rom. 15:9..."

2) **MISSING EVIDENCE.** There is no lexicon that tells us that mechanical instruments of music inhere in the term "psallo." There is no legitimate translation that translates the term as playing on mechanical instruments.

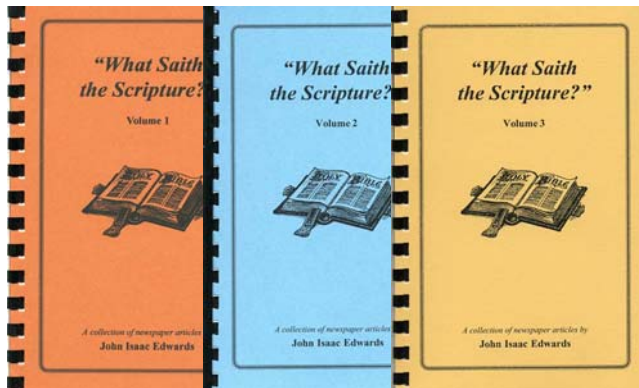
3) **THE INSTRUMENT IS THE HEART.** The object of the verb is specified in Ephesians 5:19, "making melody *in your heart*" (emphasis mine, DVR).

4) **IF THE INSTRUMENT INHERES IN PSALLO.** If the instrument inheres in "psallo," then it must be used. It would be required of all worshipers and not just one who plays for the congregation. If plucking the strings of an instrument inheres in the term, then we must use a harp or a stringed instrument.

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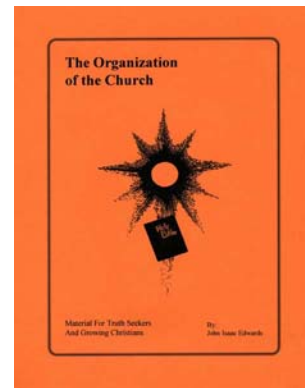
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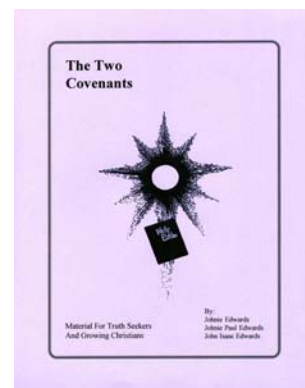
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HISTORY OF MECHANICAL MUSIC IN WORSHIP

John Isaac Edwards

This is not intended to be an exhaustive history, but is designed to provide the reader with some basic points every student needs to know. No matter how deep you dig into this history, the conclusion is the same.

1) THE FATHER OF MECHANICAL MUSIC.

Mechanical instruments of music have been around for a long, long time – since the eighth generation of man. Jubal, mentioned in the genealogy of Cain, “was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ” (Gen. 4:21). Those who think mechanical instruments were not used in New Testament worship because they were not around then are woefully ignorant of sacred and secular history.

2) MECHANICAL MUSIC IN OLD TESTAMENT WORSHIP.

The Lord commanded the use of mechanical instruments in worship during the Old Testament period. Hezekiah “set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king’s seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the Lord by his prophets” (2 Chr. 29:25). Psalm 81 instructed the Lord’s people, “Take a psalm, and bring hither the timbrel, the pleasant harp with the psaltery. Blow up the trumpet in the new moon, in the time appointed, on our solemn feast day. For this was a statute for Israel, and a law of the God of Jacob” (Ps. 81:2-4). The use of mechanical instruments in Old Testament worship does not authorize their use in worship today, no more than the offering of “burnt offerings” or “incense” in Old Testament worship (Ps. 66:13-15) would allow their being offered in the house of God today.

3) MECHANICAL MUSIC IN NEW TESTAMENT WORSHIP.

Though mechanical instruments of music are common today in just about every church known to man, their use was unknown in the worship of the New Testament church. Mechanical instruments of various kinds were readily available in the first century, but no Scripture shows where any church ever used a mechanical instrument of any kind in worship. If so, where is the Scripture? If present-day arguments from the Old Testament, the word “psallo,” or the synagogue or temple practice sustain the use of mechanical instruments in worship, why didn’t the apostles and saints in the first century include them in their worship? Do any of the mechanical music advocates have an answer? Do they know something the apostles, who were guided into all truth (Jn. 16:33), didn’t know?

4) MECHANICAL MUSIC IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE NEW TESTAMENT.

“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 the one sent as a present by the Greek emperor Constantine to Pepin, king of the Franks, in 755” (*The American Cyclopedia, Vol. 12, p. 688*). Though the exact date of the introduction of mechanical music is uncertain, this fact remains: *there is no evidence of mechanical instruments of music in the worship of the church until centuries after the close of the New Testament*. If there was authority for the use of mechanical instruments in worship, why is there no evidence of their use during the centuries immediately following the apostolic period? What do you know that they didn’t know?

5) **MECHANICAL MUSIC OPPOSED BY WELL KNOWN RELIGIOUS LEADERS.** Since the introduction of mechanical music in worship by the Roman Catholic Church, the vast majority of Protestant churches have adopted its use, despite the stern protest of their founders and early leaders. **Adam Clarke**, greatest commentator among the Methodists: “I am an old man, and an old minister; and I here declare that I never knew them (mechanical instruments) productive of any good in the worship of God; and have had reason to believe that they were productive of much evil. 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 against all such corruptions in the worship of the Author of Christianity” (*Clarke’s Commentary, Vol. 4, p. 684*). **John Calvin**, founder of the Presbyterian Church, in his commentary on Psalm 33: “Musical instruments in celebrating the praises of God would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law.” **John Wesley**, founder of the Methodist Church: “I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen” (*Clarke’s Commentary, Vol. 4, p. 684*). **Martin Luther**, whose work led to the formation of the Lutheran Church, called “the organ an ensign of Baal” (*McClintock and Strong, op. cit., Vol. VI, p. 672*). **Charles H. Spurgeon**, the greatest Baptist preacher that ever lived, never had mechanical music in the Metropolitan Baptist Tabernacle where he preached and made this remark in his comments on Psalm 42: “David appears to have had a peculiarly tender remembrance of the singing of the pilgrims, and assuredly it is the most delightful part of worship and that which comes nearest to the adoration of heaven. What a degradation to supplant the intelligent song of the whole congregation by the theatrical prettinesses of a quartet, the refined niceties of a choir, or the blowing off of wind from

inanimate bellows and pipes. We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it” (*The Treasury of David*). **David Benedict**, famous historian of the Baptist Church: “Staunch old Baptists in former times would have as soon tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries” (*Fifty Years Among the Baptists, 1859*). Quotations such as these can be multiplied, and show that many through the ages have opposed mechanical music in worship. Even if no one opposed it, the practice would still stand condemned – being without the authority of the New Testament. Churches that once stood opposed to the use of mechanical instruments in worship now see nothing wrong with them. What has changed?

6) **MECHANICAL MUSIC AMONG CHURCHES OF CHRIST.** In the nineteenth century, mechanical music made its way among churches of Christ as well. In the *American Christian Review*, 1860, L.L. Pinkerton wrote, “So far as known to me, or I presume to you, I am the only ‘preacher’ in Kentucky of our brotherhood who has publicly advocated the propriety of employing instrumental music in some churches, and that the church of God in Midway is the only church that has yet made a decided effort to introduce it.” Still today there are digressive churches that use mechanical music in worship and among those who don’t use it, there can often be found some who see nothing wrong with the practice. If brethren do not continue to teach these basic truths, the time will come when it works its way in those places where those of us who have opposed it have labored.

Regardless of what argument may be made in defense of mechanical music in worship: God did not author it; Christ did not command it; the Holy Spirit did not reveal it; the apostles did not sanction it; New Testament writers did not endorse it; and New Testament churches did not use it.

ANSWERING ADDITIONAL ARGUMENTS

Johnie Edwards

When we state what the Bible teaches about the kind of music the Lord requires in worship, and that the music is only vocal music (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Heb. 2:12), men try to justify mechanical music in the worship by saying:

1) **DOES NOT SAY NOT TO.** Most all bring this up. Did it ever occur to you that the Lord does not have to say not to do a thing for it to be unscriptural? Can you imagine how large the Bible would be, if every time the Lord wanted us to do something, He would list everything not to do? We don't use that argumentation anywhere else. For example, if you order a pair of shoes: color black, size 8-D; do you list every other color and size not to send? Why not? When you specified black, size 8-D, that excluded every other color and size. So when the Lord said "sing" (Eph. 5:19; Heb. 2:12) that excludes playing. Just as when God commanded Noah, "Make thee an ark of gopher wood" (Gen. 6:14) that excluded every other kind of wood, right? If you can see through a barrel with both ends knocked out, you can see that!

2) **APOSTLES WORSHIPED IN THE TEMPLE WITH MECHANICAL MUSIC.** It is true that the apostles often went into the temple like in Acts 3:1. We need to learn one thing right here real quickly: Presence does not always mean approval. It's all assumption that the apostles engaged in the use of mechanical music in the temple, or that there was mechanical music being used there. Ever wonder why they went into the temple? Acts 5:20-21 tells us that, "Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life..." Please take the time to read Acts 5:20-42 to see just how the apostles were treated

for teaching in the temple. They must have taught some things the Jews did not like.

3) **AN AID.** Mechanical music is said to be an aid to the command to sing. Just as waterproof boots aid in baptizing, we are told. But, guess what? When I wear waterproof boots while baptizing, I am just baptizing! Can you see that? Or mechanical music is like an hearing aid, it aids the hearing. While wearing a hearing aid, one is still just hearing; he is not hearing-aiding and hearing. Is he? False teeth may aid one in singing but he is not singing and false-teething. Right? Mechanical music is an addition of another kind of music to the command to sing (Col. 3:16).

4) **MECHANICAL MUSIC IN HEAVEN.** Revelation 5:8 is often used to try to teach this. This is figurative language as Revelation is a book of codes and signs (Rev. 1:1). Anybody read about mechanical music in this passage? The "harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints..." They were really singing: "And they sung a new song" (Rev. 5:9). If there will be mechanical music in heaven, so what. We are not there. We are in the church!

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SETTLING THE MECHANICAL MUSIC ISSUE

Johnie Edwards

The issue of mechanical music in New Testament worship can be settled by observing five basic Bible concepts.

1) **UNDERSTAND WE LIVE UNDER THE LAW OF CHRIST.** Those who have studied the issue of using mechanical music in worship, find folks turning to the Old Testament for their authority for its use. True, instrumental music was a command of Old Testament times (2 Chr. 29:25; Ps. 81:1-4; 150). We do not live under the law of Moses, but under the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2; Mt. 5:17-18; Heb. 7:12).

2) **BY KNOWING THERE ARE ONLY TWO KINDS OF MUSIC.** We only know of two kinds of music: vocal and mechanical/instrumental.

3) **ASKING “WHICH HAS THE LORD COMMANDED: VOCAL OR MECHANICAL?”** It’s time now to read the New Testament to see which is commanded. By reading the sum of the passages that deal with music in the New Testament, you will find that the only kind of music authorized is vocal. Read Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26, Acts 16:25, Romans 15:9, 1 Corinthians 14:15, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, Hebrews 2:12, 13:15, James 5:13). Did all these refer to vocal music? Read anything about mechanical music? Using the words of the apostle Paul, we learn that each person is to sing. “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). By the way, whatever you are told to do I am told to do and that makes for congregational singing – no choirs or solos included.

4) **REALIZE HOW THE BIBLE TEACHES.** The word of God teaches by:

- Statement of fact.
- Direct command.
- Approved example.
- Necessary inference.

Since there is no statement of fact, direct command, approved example, or necessary inference authorizing mechanical music in the New Testament, it must not be used in our worship. To do so is to add a kind of music not authorized by the Lord. To add to the word of God is sin and causes one to not have God (2 Jn. 9; Rev. 22:18-19).

5) **RESPECT FOR THE SILENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES.** Since we are taught to “speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet. 4:11), and to be silent where the Bible is silent, we do not have the right to use mechanical music in our worship. To do things when God “commanded not” (Lev. 10:1-2) brings the wrath of God. When God “gave no such commandment” (Acts 15:24), we must respect God’s silence.

These five basic concepts will forever help us understand what the Bible teaches about the use of music in worship.

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Kids Activity Page

Paul Adams

Memory Verse: *“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name” (Heb. 13:15).*

Matching

Match the book of the Bible to the chapter and verse where you can read about singing in the New Testament. You will find nine passages that tell us about singing. You will find none that mention mechanical instruments.

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| ___ MATTHEW | A. CHAPTER 2 VERSE 12 |
| ___ MARK | B. CHAPTER 3 VERSE 16 |
| ___ ACTS | C. CHAPTER 5 VERSE 13 |
| ___ ROMANS | D. CHAPTER 5 VERSE 19 |
| ___ FIRST CORINTHIANS | E. CHAPTER 14 VERSE 15 |
| ___ EPHESIANS | F. CHAPTER 14 VERSE 26 |
| ___ COLOSSIANS | G. CHAPTER 15 VERSE 9 |
| ___ HEBREWS | H. CHAPTER 16 VERSE 25 |
| ___ JAMES | I. CHAPTER 26 VERSE 30 |

*“Suffer the little children to come unto me,
and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God” (Mark 10:14).*

Question: *“Why don’t churches of Christ observe Easter Sunday, like most everybody else? Easter is in the Bible, isn’t it?”*

Answer:

Most religious folks have been led to believe that there is a special day set aside by God called, “Easter Sunday.” The Bible knows nothing about “Easter Sunday.” The religious world has been taught that Christ resurrected from the dead and that we are commanded to remember Him on “Easter Sunday” as communion is served.

1) **THE WORD “EASTER.”** The word “Easter” does occur in the King James Version of the Bible. “And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternion of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people” (Acts 12:4).

2) **THE PASSOVER.** The word translated “Easter” in Acts 12:4 is translated “Passover” 28 times in the New Testament. Only this time did the translators render it “Easter.” The American Standard Version correctly renders it, “Passover.” Passover was a Jewish feast day of the Old Testament (Ex. 12).

3) **NO EXAMPLE OF OBSERVANCE.** Read the Bible as much as you please. You will not find a command, example, or necessary inference of the Lord’s church observing a special day called, “Easter.” We do read of early Christians meeting on the “first day of the week” to break bread (Acts 20:7). We also find them being told to “lay by in store on the first day of the week” (1 Cor. 16:2). But nowhere are we told that they met for an “Easter Service.”

4) **THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.** The Bible teaches us to remember the death of Christ. As we partake of the Lord’s supper every Sunday, the death and resurrection of our Lord is remembered (1 Cor. 11:23-26). This is to be done weekly, not just once a year! Since every week has a first day, and this observance is to be on that day, what would we do differently on “Easter Sunday,” than we did the Sunday before or after?

5) **REMEMBER GALATIANS 4:11-12.** Paul penned, “Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.” Let’s just observe what the Lord taught us to observe (Mt. 28:20).

Have A Bible Question? Send to: Back To Basics, P.O. Box 251, Ellettsville, IN 47429

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