

Two Points of Difference for those holding the Regulative Principle On Psalms and Instruments

Premise: We must worship according to what God commands.

Q: Does He command Psalms only? Does He command the use of instruments?

Note the positive construction of these Qs.

Part I: an evaluation of exclusive Psalmody (EP)

1A. An ironic gap

2A. Some not all

1B. Usage of the word psalm (the Psalms and more, the Psalter, a particular Psalm, and a NT psalm)

How then should we understand the command to sing psalms?

2B. Usage of the word hymn (As a noun: only in Eph 5.19 and Col. 3.16)

Verb form: Mat. 26.30; Mk. 14.26 after instituting communion they “hymned” and went out; this most likely refers to some well known Passover Psalms (115-118). *Particular* psalms from the book of Psalms may be sung or hymned.

Acts 16.25 Paul and Silas in jail “were hymning” (singing hymns, singing praises)

Heb. 2.12 Jesus says in the midst of the church I will sing hymns (sing your praises). This is a quote of Psalm 22: the true Israelite, the true David, will have brothers and sing with them. Thus *a member of the book of Psalms* (like 22) *may* be a “hymn” or a song of praise.

How then should we understand the command to sing hymns?

3B. Songs

We find this word in the titles of many psalms and it occurs within many psalms. A song is an ode, a poem meant to be sung. “Song” is more generic than the other two words. It refers to new songs in Isaiah and Revelation; thus, it is not limited to the Psalter (occurrences: Eph. 5.19; Col 3.16; and Rev. 5.9; 14.3 (new song); 15.3 (song of Moses and the Lamb). These songs are not OT Psalms.

In Eph-Col, song is qualified by “spiritual.” The songs in view are Spirit given.

Poetic hymn-songs-psalms like the Magnificat (Lk 1.46-55) and the Benedictus (Lk. 1.68-79) and other NT hymns (Lk. 2) indicate the gift of the Spirit giving revelation that became part of the NT writings (Eph. 5.14; Col. 1.15-20; 1 Tim. 3.16).

How then should we understand the command to sing songs?

3A. The Song of songs (of Solomon)

Ian Murray cites the “Song of songs” (Song of Solomon) as indication that songs are not restricted in the OT to the Psalms and that per the exclusivist argument Song of songs should be sung in church with prominence. What kind of argument is this? What is its force or weight?

4A. The call for praise in the Psalms

Many Psalms call for praise. 1) For example, Psalm 148 enumerates who and what are to praise the Lord and His name: “Praise him...angels...moon...stars...heavens...fire...hail...snow and mist...” The Psalm says little as to the content of this praise. EP defenders take references that call for singing praises to God as equivalent with the Psalms (which are praises, laments, imprecations, etc), but Psalm 148 does not call for the singing of Psalm 148! Surely, ad hoc praises of all sorts are what the text commands. 2) Psalm 149 calls for imprecation (⁶ **Let the high praises of God be in their throats and two-edged swords in their hands**). One might argue that if the text commands the singing of praises then it tells us not to sing Psalms of lament or imprecation! 3) Psalm 22 calls for praise ultimately because of accomplished salvation. Within Ps. 22, David refers to deliverance in the future that is the basis of the praise he will hymn; reference here (in Heb. 2.12 and Ps. 22.19-23) is to future salvation for which the singer will sing hymns. That content is not a particular Psalm. Moreover, when we see Christ as the speaker, the content of the praise will reflect accomplished salvation; this goes beyond the promises of the Psalms to fulfillment of the NT. What lessons surface in these examples for this debate?

5A. The word of Christ

The context of Colossians 3.16 indicates that the content of the singing is the gospel of the NT: (**Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God**).

This context casts its shadow over the three terms both individually and collectively. What does this tell us regarding the command to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs?

***However, in the end, this line of thought seems to take us too far, to an inability to obey this command—how is that the case?

Cf. how this becomes a trump card for many EP advocates such as Kortering: We consider this threefold description as referring to the Psalms of David. All three (Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs) are designations of the Psalter...if Paul and the Holy Spirit had in mind different kinds of songs other than the Psalms, what songs did He have in mind? It is a historical fact that none existed (*Psalm Singing: A Reformed Heritage*, 7).

6A. One angle on fallible interpretation in worship

Does use of the Psalter do what the exclusivists want to do, namely, avoid fallible interpretation in worship? It appears that both pastors and members in fact engage in fallible interpretation in a full scale way in their use of the Psalms.

1B. On the side of leadership

For singing the Psalms, leaders engage in poetic enhancement of Scripture. Note how this shows up in the way the Psalter of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America translates-enhances-interprets the Scriptural Psalms (cf. Morey, “EP,” 49, *BRR*, Winter 1975).

Psalm 19.1

ESV: **The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.**

Psalter: The spacious heavens declare the glory of our God.

Psalm 19.3

ESV: **There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard.**

Psalter: Aloud they do not speak; they utter forth no word, nor into language break, their voice is never heard.

Psalm 19.7b

ESV: **the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple.**

Psalter: His testimony sure gives wisdom unto men.

Psalm 19.9

ESV: **the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever.**

Psalter: Jehovah’s fear is clean, more lasting than the skies.

Psalm 20.1

ESV: **May the LORD answer you in the day of trouble.**

Psalter: Jehovah hear thee in the day when trouble he doth send.

Unquestionably, there is interpretation here; it has poetic embellishment and some apparent error too. Can you cite some of these things?

2B. On the side of membership

The name Jesus does not occur in any Psalm. The references to the Lord Jesus and His work in the time of fulfillment are veiled in the language of promise. To discover these references by careful study of the Psalms is challenging and yields differences of interpretation as to whether such and such Psalm, for example, is a “messianic Psalm.” When the people of God sing the Psalms with reflection in light of the NT, they make application to Christ and His church today. They do this intuitively and with much accuracy, but what they do is interpret fallibly. Pastors may help the situation by guiding the interpretations, but they cannot devote all their time to explaining the Psalms for the people; the people must interpret them in the light of Christ. They must read the promises in the Psalms in a Christian way, as Christians, and in light of the fulfillment that came with Christ.

How does this affect the EP opposition to uninspired hymns in worship?

7A. Transition to positive argument (and a major loose end)