

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

1C. The Psalms and more

2C. The Psalter

3C. A particular psalm in the Psalter

4C. 1 Cor. 14.26

How then should we understand the command to sing psalms?

[not a command to sing the Psalter (the 150), and not a command to sing psalms exclusively, but it is a command to sing psalm-like praises to God that have new covenant revelation as their content]

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?

[to sing praises to God; it may be the praise expression of one of the Psalms]

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 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 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?

[to sing poetry intended for song; the content is to reflect the newness of fulfillment as Spirit-given divine revelation]

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?

[The argument is a reductio ad absurdum: to expose the absurdity of a view. It has considerable force given the way defenders of EP argue (i.e. Eph tells us to sing songs that are inspired, Song is such, Song is to be sung). The force comes out from the nature of the Song in the explicit attention its gives to sexual relations of husband and wife; this does not seem fitting for public worship, but it is what EP entails.]

4A. 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?

[we are to sing poetry and psalm-like praises to God that unpack new covenant revelation in Christ]

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?

[how can we sing the unilateral prophetic-song revelations from the Spirit that we do not now have though we may have remnants of them in the NT?]

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.) We will cover this problem next time.]

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.

[Introduction of “spacious” and reduction of text]

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.

[Actually seems erroneous regarding natural revelation denying that all hear His voice]

Psalm 19.7b

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

Psalter: His testimony sure gives wisdom unto men.

[Subjective & misses the fact that wisdom does not come to men in general but to the simple or humble]

Psalm 19.9

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

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

[comparison is inserted perhaps without warrant]

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.

[He does send trouble, but is that developed in this context?]

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

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 is, for example, 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?

[It replaces uninspired hymns with uninspired interpretations that are in the main subjective. They are fallible on one hand and untestable on the other. It is better to have these interpretations made public in sermons and songs to test them for biblical accuracy. The complaint against uninspired songs is a complaint on one level against uninspired interpretations of the Psalms in light of the NT and of the entire gospel of the NT. However, in practice EP involves the people of God in not only uninspired interpretation, but in private interpretation that is in the mind and not codified in writing for inspection, sifting, and correction. This correction is the way to the best kind of singing in relation to the preached word that singing serves in public worship.]

7A. Transition to positive argument