

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

### Part I: an evaluation of exclusive Psalmody (EP)

#### 7A. Transition to positive argument

To prove that the case for exclusive Psalmody fails is important but not enough. It is an important base and beginning, but not sufficient for the complete story. We need both negative and positive argument because when two views differ, both could be wrong (some other alternative might be better). Showing the opposing view to be wrong does not automatically prove your view right. For example, if we cannot biblically limit singing to the Psalms, it might be the case that we must limit singing to the words of Scripture (like Calvin: include the 10 commandments and the song of Simeon of Luke 2 in our singing).

Broader point: we need the positive argument regarding uninspired hymns because of the RP (the regulative principle).

Why is appeal to the RP at this point appropriate?

*[We want to know what God commands; we ought to want this especially for worship in light of God's jealousy regarding how we worship Him]*

Why do we need more than a negative critique to justify holding a debated view?

*[Both sides could be wrong, negation of ~x is not sufficient to establish x; it is reasonable, fair, and a matter of due diligence]*

#### 8A. Positive arguments for singing uninspired songs in worship

Of course, "uninspired" means "not inscripturated by divine inspiration, not part of the Bible."

1B. Finding the answer within the difficult question

How can we sing new covenant revelation of the gospel?

1C. Problem

To be sure, we cannot access the precise revelatory songs of the apostolic era. Some of these songs are no doubt now within the NT, at least in some residual form (as 1 Tim 3.16 on the great mystery of godliness; cf. other likely texts). The psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs of the time of fulfillment include Mary's *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus* of Zachariah. Still, it is apparent that the NT does not itemize the content of new covenant songs beyond the fact that the songs we are to sing are to have the word of Christ for their content.

We have the commandment to sing that comes to us from the apostolic era in which the command meant the singing of new revelation as part of the oral tradition of the gospel of fulfillment. We have no direct access to those songs.

How can we sing those songs without direct access to them?

2C. Solution

We can sing those songs in the sense that we can sing the gospel that those songs gave us as part of the word gifts of the foundation laying time of the church. We can access this gospel by going to the NT as an interpretation of the OT (so we do not exclude the OT from our singing).

We do not have clear delimitation regarding the revelatory (prophetic and teaching) songs of the apostolic time. *Therefore, to obey the command to sing the gospel of Christ we must now go to the product of that singing and those revelatory gifts that we have in the NT form of the apostolic oral tradition that gradually became the written foundation of the church.*

What does this then mean?

*[It means that we have the command to sing the product of revelatory song by good interpretation of the new covenant gospel, which means by uninspired composition. The argument here is that either we do not sing, which would disobey the command, or we sing conscientious interpretations of the word of Christ. We cannot disobey the command of God to sing, so, by good and necessary inference, we must sing conscientious interpretations of the word of Christ.]*

## 2B. Finding the answer within the Psalms

Furthermore, to sing the fulfillment gospel of Scripture (the word of Christ that God gave us first in the apostolic tradition and then in writing), we must either a) voice the very words of Scripture (in a range of ways from exact duplication to paraphrase, or b) voice the teaching of Scripture in light of fulfillment (in compositions that are theological interpretations). Sometimes there may be minimal interpretation in the songs that voice the very words of Scripture (cf. changes in wording for poetic purposes or for singing purposes).

However, when we voice the teaching of Scripture in song, interpretation is maximal. The psalm revelation carried with it the gift of interpretation according to 1 Corinthians 14. We no longer have Spirit granted infallible interpretation. The songs by which we now sing the theology of Scripture are to be scriptural. How do we do this?

We can go to the Psalms to see if they tell us to sing the very words of the 150 and to determine how we are to approach them as Christians in light of the coming of Christ. Consider the following Psalms and note how they call for praises, thanksgiving, prayers, and confessions *without necessarily being self-referential*.

These are the texts that Schwertley cites saying, “The book of Psalms contains several commands to praise Jehovah with the singing of Psalms.”

“Oh come, let us sing to the Lord! Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving, Let us shout joyfully to Him with psalms” (Ps. 95:1-2; cf. 81:2; 98:5; 100:2; 105:2).

*[Do these texts tell us to praise God with units from the Psalter?*

**ESV Psalm 95:1 Oh come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! <sup>2</sup> Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! <sup>3</sup> For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. <sup>4</sup> In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. <sup>5</sup> The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. <sup>6</sup> Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker!**

Is it not fair to say that this text is not commanding the singing of the Psalms or of a particular Psalm of the 150? What is the content of the thanksgiving (v. 2) and the worship (v.6)? The content is unspecified but it will surely be built on the worshipper’s experience in life and with the word of God and this text. It seems to go beyond the text to say that it prescribes the singing of one of David’s or Asaph’s Psalms. But this does not leave us without divine regulation of worship: the command is to come with thanksgiving without specifying the specific content (just come giving thanks based on your experience and Scripture); to worship (with words of praise and honor surely that are not specified as to exact wording); to make a joyful noise with song of praise is with unspecified content and by context we can get some specifics such as singing God’s attributes with joy.

**Psalm 81:1-7 Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob! <sup>2</sup> Raise a song; sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp. <sup>3</sup> Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day. <sup>4</sup> For it is a statute for Israel, a rule of the God of Jacob. <sup>5</sup> He made it a decree in Joseph when he went out over the land of Egypt. I hear a language I had not known: <sup>6</sup> “I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket. <sup>7</sup> In distress you called, and I delivered you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah**

“Sing” and “raise a song” here do not tell us to sing one of the 150, not even this one. The singing flows from the goodness of God who delivered Joseph and his descendents (v. 6-7). Even if some of that account were sung, even if it were sung in the words of 6-7, the words of 1-5 are not what we are commanded to sing; they give the command to sing. Sing aloud is not self-referring in this way: “Sing and raise this Psalm in which you sing aloud...raise a song.” It points outside of itself for the singing and praise that would no doubt have its grounds in the teaching within it.

**ESV Psalm 98:1 A PSALM. Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him. <sup>2</sup> The LORD has made known his salvation; he has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. <sup>3</sup> He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the**

house of Israel. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. <sup>4</sup> Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; **break forth into joyous song and sing praises!** <sup>5</sup> Sing praises to the LORD with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody! <sup>6</sup> With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the King, the LORD! <sup>7</sup> Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who dwell in it! <sup>8</sup> Let the rivers clap their hands; let the hills sing for joy together <sup>9</sup> before the LORD, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Break into joyous song, sing praises, and sing a new song: is there reason to restrict the new song to this Psalm (98)? Note that in the Greek, sing in v. 1 is psalm: “psalm-sing a new song as v. 5 and v. 4. But do they say sing the Psalms or a Psalm or this Psalm? That does not seem apparent. Also, note the command to break forth into joyous song with sing praises; this is not a command to sing a prayer, lament, or imprecation.

**ESV Psalm 100:1 A PSALM FOR GIVING THANKS. Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth! <sup>2</sup> Serve the LORD with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! <sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. <sup>4</sup> Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! <sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations.**

Psalm only occurs here in the title. Joyful noise (wail loudly), v. 1 and “with singing” (with extreme joy), v. 2, do not command the singing of one of the 150 or the 150, let alone only the 150.

**Psalm 105:1 Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples! <sup>2</sup> Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works! <sup>3</sup> Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice! <sup>4</sup> Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually! <sup>5</sup> Remember the wondrous works that he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he uttered, <sup>6</sup> O offspring of Abraham, his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones! <sup>7</sup> He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth. <sup>8</sup> He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, <sup>9</sup> the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, <sup>10</sup> which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, <sup>11</sup> saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as your portion for an inheritance."**

Surely the remembering begins with the details stated in this Psalm and these take us to Genesis etc in a way that calls us to interpret those passages to fill out our grasp of what to remember and that must come into play in the praises: the praises are fallible interpretations! They are not the Psalms or infallible praises. To make known His deeds in thanksgiving and songs of praise must involve interpretation of the record of His deeds. In 105.14, God allowed no king to oppress Abraham; if we remember this event as the text commands us to do, we will remember how Abraham lied about his wife as sister and God protected him from the wrath of the king teaching us God’s faithfulness to His covenant to sinners like Abraham. Other lies are in the record in Genesis and interpreters may differ on what they remember and how accurately they remember because we will all do, reasonably good, but fallible remembering.