

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)

Does the language “psalms, hymns, spiritual songs” bind us to use the Psalms exclusively?

Key verses: Eph. 5.19 (addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart); Col. 3.16 (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).

Introduction: Context of the LXX (the Greek OT)

Defenders of EP (exclusive Psalmody) determine God’s infallible standard for the regulation of worship based on inferences we make as to how the early church viewed the titles of the Psalms. These titles are background for the church in its use of the LXX. The central claim is that the titles of many Psalms use the words psalm, hymn, and song as ways of referring to the Psalms (Ps. 63 has this title: “A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah”). These were available to the Greek readers of Ephesians and Colossians and must tell us that they understood Paul to be referring to the Psalms and commanding their use.

For perspective, in the OT, does God command the use of the Psalms for public worship?
[No]

How does the answer to this Q factor into the case for EP?
[It makes that case more difficult to make]

1A. An ironic gap

Notably, we have no explicit and specific comment from the apostolic church as to how it worked with the titles, which are not part of Scripture, but represent early tradition (The titles are “not original, but early; non-canonical, but reliable” information about authorship and occasion in general terms, *IOT*, Dillard, 219.). For example, we are not sure that David’s experience in the wilderness of Judah is the origin or context of Psalm 63 (we can be more sure for some as Ps. 18 per 1 Sam. 22). Nonetheless, it is argued that these uninspired titles furnish us with a grid that leads us to reject the use of uninspired compositions in worship. This is a bit ironic and seems to be a weak link in discovering God’s commands by good and necessary inference from *sola Scriptura*.

By contrast, in what context should we try to understand the three terms of Eph/Col?
[We need to find the biblical use of these terms-- both individually and as a group of three]

2A. Some not all

Note how Kenneth Stewart of the Free Church in Stornoway, Scotland (Gazette, May 22, 19...?) appeals to the context of the LXX and says, “in which the collection of psalms were variously referred to as ‘psalms’ or ‘hymns’ or ‘spiritual songs’ ...as the word of Christ by the Spirit.” What two facts stand out here relative to the argument and important for evaluation?

[pin down 1) collection, and 2) get focus on “word of Christ”]

Granted, there are references to all the Psalms or the Psalter as a whole (as when “book of” is in the context and refers to the Psalter).

Evidence that draws on these terms in the titles reveals that each term individually may include reference to some of the 150 but no term individually refers to the collection as a whole (to the Psalter); the three terms as a group are not used of the Psalter either (As documented in

the OPC majority report of the 1947 General Assembly and not contested in the minority report by John Murray and others; this report is a modern watershed in Presbyterian circles).

We should consider biblical usage of the three terms to see if we can go further than “some” to “all” in the scope of that to which they refer.

1B. Usage of the word psalm

1C. The Psalms and more

Lk. 24.44 (in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms); here *the* Psalms are in view and they represent everything else besides the Law and the Prophets. Reference is to more than the Psalter.

2C. The Psalter

Lk. 20.42 (For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand)

Acts 1.20 (it is written in the Book of Psalms)

3C. A particular psalm in the Psalter

Acts 13.33 (in the second Psalm)

Acts 13.35 (ESV, in another psalm; NIV accurately shows that the word “psalm” is not here: “So it is stated elsewhere”; no doubt another psalm is in view).

Q: From the three points above, what can we conclude about the usage of the word “psalm” in Eph/Col? [*It refers to the OT beyond the 150, the 150 (book of), and to a particular Psalm; the OT point here points beyond the idea of exclusivity*]

4C. 1 Cor. 14.26

How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

(in v. 15 we have the verb, “to psalm sing” [ψαλῶ] that is related to the noun in v. 26, psalm [ψαλμὸν]). [This verb, to sing praise or to sing psalms or to psalm-sing occurs in the NT in four places: 1 Cor. 14.15; Eph. 5.19; Rom 15.9; James 5.13]

1 Cor. 14.15 (¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise [I will psalm or I will psalm-sing] with my spirit, but I will sing [I will psalm-sing] with my mind also). This is revelatory praying and singing by my Holy Spirit.

Rom. 15.9 (As it is written, “Therefore I will praise [eulogize] you among the Gentiles, and sing [psalm-sing; sing praise] to your name.”) It is written in Psalm 18.49, so, Paul refers to that Psalm, but the singing of praise, the “psalming or psalm-singing, that David speaks of in v. 49 refers beyond Psalm 18 to simply singing God’s praises in some way that flows out of the Psalm; in the Psalm, David says that he will sing praises to God; he is not saying that he will sing this Psalm or the Psalms, but simply that he will sing praises.

Eph. 5.19 (addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody [psalm-singing] to the Lord with all your heart)

James 5.13 (Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise [psalm-sing or sing praise])

Can we conclude that that the four places where the verb “psalm-sing” occurs (and reflects on the noun) necessarily refer to the Psalms as a collection or to a particular psalm of the 150? [*May but not necessarily*]

What leads to the conclusion that “psalm” in 1 Cor. 14.26 is clearly not a reference to an OT psalm or to the book of Psalms?

What does this tell us about the use of the related word, psalm, which occurs in Eph. 5.19 and 1 Cor 14.26? [*That the word refers to NT revelation through singing*]

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*]

Psalm:

- 1) Might refer to the Psalter – clearly with “book of”
 - 2) Might refer to Psalter and more of OT
 - 3) “ to a particular Psalm
 - 4) Does not refer to the Psalter per se
 - 5) May refer to a praise of some kind that is not necessarily sung!
cf. the verb under 4C
 - 6) The accent on exclusivity does not appear to be there
- Per sola Scriptura, we cannot go beyond Scripture (we seek no more and no less)
Restricting worship to EP (so far at least) seems to say more than biblical contexts dictate

2B. Usage of the word hymn