

Music in the New Testament

By David Posey (see endnote)

Introduction

God likes music. Anyone who has read his or her Bible knows that. But what kind of music does He want us to use in our worship of Him? The terms *sing*, *sung*, and *singing* are used only a few times in the New Testament, in the following passages:

- “And when they had **sung** a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” (Mt. 26:30; Mk. 14:26)
- “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and **singing** hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them.” (Acts 16:25)
- “For this reason I will confess to You among the Gentiles, And **sing** to Your name.” (Rom. 15:9)
- “I will **sing** with the spirit, and I will also **sing** with the understanding.” (I Cor. 14:15)
- “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, **singing** and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” (Eph. 5:18-19)
- “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.” (Col. 3:16)
- “I will declare Your name to My brethren; In the midst of the assembly I will **sing** praise to You.” (Heb. 2:12)
- “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him **sing** psalms.” (Jas. 5:13)

The purpose of congregational singing

Of the passages above, three speak directly to the purpose of singing: Jas. 5:13, Eph. 5:18-19 and Col. 3:16. James 5:13 teaches that singing is a way we express a cheerful heart and perhaps even a form of prayer (expression to God). Praise involves exalting and thanking God, something we typically do in our singing. The Psalms emphasize this aspect of our worship.

Eph. 5:18-19 and Col. 3:16 are parallel passages that, together, tell us that (1) singing is one way we are “filled with the spirit” and let Christ’s word dwell in us; (2) we edify each other by speaking to each other in our singing, teaching and admonishing (warning) each other; (3) we are to sing “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs” – i.e., songs with spiritual content; (4) singing must come from the heart, where we “make melody” (the Greek word is *psallo*; we’ll look at this word in detail below).

The songs and hymns we sing are not inspired by God, though in many cases are “inspired” poetry (in the human sense). It is hard to fathom a world without some of the beautiful songs we are privileged to sing today. However, we should remember the purpose of singing and remember that for hundreds of years, most songs were in the form of chants. The lilting or haunting melodies that move us so today are of relatively late vintage.

We should also remember that any song written by a human can possibly be unscriptural in content. Though we understand the concept of “poetic license” (the liberty a writer takes in expression), the content of the song must still be truthful. The elders need to be watchful in this regard; singing a lie is no different than *speaking* one. The song books we use have greatly reduced the potential for unscriptural messages. The book we use at Folsom, for example, is edited by two good men, R. J. Stevens and Dane Shepard, who are committed to the truth. Sometimes, though, a

verse or two of a song may be in doubt. There is nothing sinful about singing fewer verses than the song has, whether because the omitted verses are doubtful, or because it is more convenient to do so.

Controversy

When a visitor comes to one of our assemblies he may notice, almost immediately, that there are no instruments of music that accompany the singing. Today, churches of Christ are in a tiny minority of churches that abstain from using the instrument. Yet, there is broad admission by historians and religious scholars that instrumental music was not used in the early days of the church and most admit that the passages cited above do not envision its use. But there are several arguments offered to support the use of the instrument.

Arguments for Instrumental Music

“David Used Instrumental Music”

David used instrumental music, because it was commanded by the Lord (2 Ch. 29:25)

1. The OT law which authorized instrumental music has been replaced by the gospel of Christ (Rom. 7:4, 6-7; Gal. 3:23-25; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 2:14-15; Heb. 7:11-12, 18-19; 8:6-13).
2. The NT only authorizes singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 5:13)
3. If we can use instrumental music in worship because David did, can we:
 - (a) Offer animal sacrifices? (Ps. 20:3; 66:13, 15)
 - (b) Dance before the Lord (2 Sam. 6:14)
 - (c) Keep the Sabbath? (Ex. 20:8)
 - (d) Have many wives? (2 Sam. 5:13)

“I Don’t Think God Cares About Music”

He cared when Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit (Gen. 3:1-24)

1. He cared when Lot’s wife looked back (Gen. 19:12-17, 26; Lk. 17:32)
2. He cared when Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire (Lev. 10:1-3)
3. He cared when Moses failed to give Him credit (Num. 20:1-13; Psa. 106:32-33)
4. He cared when Saul offered the sacrifice at Gilgal (1 Sam. 13:8-14)
5. He cared when Uzzah touched the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6:1-7; 1 Ch. 13:1-10)
6. He cared when the man of God from Judah believed a lie and disobeyed Him (1 Kings 13:11-24)

Section 1.02 He cared when Uzziah offered incense on the altar (2 Ch. 26:16-23)

“There Are Harps In Heaven” (Rev. 5:8; 14:1-2; 15:1-3)

Why should we believe that these are literal harps in a highly symbolic book like Revelation?

- If the golden bowls full of incense are a symbol for the prayers of the saints, why wouldn’t the harps be a symbol for the praise of the saints? (Rev. 5:8)
- If the harps in heaven authorize instrumental music in worship here on earth, do the golden bowls full of incense authorize the burning of incense in worship here on earth? If not why not? (Rev. 5:8)
- Did John hear a harp or a voice? (Rev. 14:1-2, ASV)
- Since all the victorious had harps, shouldn’t every Christian play a harp in worship today? If not why not? (Rev. 15:1-3)
- If harps are authorized by these passages, why do most churches use nearly everything but harps?

- If these passages authorize instrumental music in worship here on earth, why didn't the early church have instrumental music?
- Even if there really are harps in heaven, does this prove that God wants instrumental music in worship here on earth (cf. Mt. 22:30; Heb. 4:14 & 8:4; Rev. 7:16-17)

"Psallo Requires Playing" (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16)

Many scholars maintain that *psallo* merely meant "to sing" in NT times. The "playing" or "plucking" is done on something other than a mechanical instrument.

- The **early Church** did not understand these words to include instrumental accompaniment.
- The **Greek Orthodox Church** did not understand these words to include instrumental accompaniment.
- There is **no standard English** translation of the Bible which indicates that these words include instrumental accompaniment.
- The **principal modern translations** of the Bible do not indicate that these words include instrumental accompaniment.
- The "instrument" upon which we are to "make melody" (*psallo*) is the **heart**, not the **harp**.
- If instrumental accompaniment is inherent in these words, then instrumental music is not an **option** but an **obligation**.
- If instrumental accompaniment is inherent in these words, then **all Christians must play instruments**, because the command is addressed to all Christians. If not, why not?

"God Didn't Say Not To"

When God **specifies something**, He does not have to **specifically exclude** everything else:

- (a) **Gopher wood** for the ark (Genesis. 6:14)
 - (b) A **lamb** without blemish (Ex. 12:3-6)
 - (c) A **red heifer** (Num. 19:1-4)
 - (d) A **brazen serpent** (Num. 21:8)
- God did say to **sing** (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jas. 5:13)
 - And God did say not to **add to** or **take from** His word (Dt. 4:2; 5:32; 2 Jn. 9-11)
 - Can we use **buttermilk** and **cornbread** for the Lord's Supper since God didn't say not to?

The question that we must answer is not "Where did God **exclude** playing?" but rather "Where did God **include** playing?"

"Churches have always used musical instruments."

1. Instrumental music was **not used** in the early church
2. Instrumental music was **introduced many years after** the church was established
3. Instrumental music was **opposed** when it was first introduced
4. Instrumental music has been opposed by many respected religious leaders and scholars

1. Instrumental music was not used in the early church

- "There is **no record in the NT of the use of instruments in the musical worship of the church**. In this regard, early believers followed the practice of the Hebrew synagogue music." ("Music," Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, p. 1163)
- "The primitive Christian community held the same view, as we know from the apostolic and post-apostolic literature: **instrumental music was thought unfit for religious services**; the Christian sources are outspoken in their **condemnation of instrumental performances**. Originally, **only song was considered worthy of direct approach to Divinity**." ("The Music of Post-Biblical Judaism," *The New Oxford History of Music*, Vol. I, p. 135)

- **Edward Dickinson:** “While the Greek and Roman songs were metrical, the Christian psalms were antiphons, prayers, responses, etc., were unmetrical; and while the pagan melodies were always sung to an instrumental accompaniment, **the church chant was exclusively vocal.**” (*Music in the History of the Western Church*, p. 54)
- **Frank Landon Humphreys:** “One of the features which distinguishes the Christian religion from almost all others is its quietness; it aims to repress the outward signs of inward feeling . The early Christians discouraged all outward signs of excitement, and from the very beginning, in the music they used, reproduced the spirit of their religion -- an inward quietude. **All the music employed in their early services was vocal.**” (*Evolution Of Church Music*, p. 42)
- **Dr. Frederic Louis Ritter:** “We have no real knowledge of the exact character of the music which formed a part of the religious devotion of the first Christian congregations It was, however, **purely vocal. Instrumental music was excluded**, at first, as having been used by the Romans at their depraved festivities; and everything reminding them of heathen worship could not be endured by the new religionists.” (*History Of Music From The Christian Era To The Present Time*, p. 28)
- **Lars P. Qualben:** “Singing formed an essential part of the Christian worship, but it was **in unison and without musical accompaniment.**” (*A History Of The Christian Church*, p. 112)
- **Joseph Otten:** “For almost a thousand years **Gregorian chant, without any instrumental or harmonic addition was the only music used in connection with the liturgy.** The organ, in its primitive and rude form, was the first, and for a long time the sole, instrument used to accompany the chant “ (*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, 1913, Vol. 10, p. 657)
- **James Pierce:** “I come now to say somewhat of the antiquity of musical instruments. But **that these were not used in the Christian Church in the primitive times is attested by all the ancient writers with one consentFrom what has been said, it appears no musical instruments were used in the pure times of the church.**” (*A Vindication Of The Dissenters*, n.p.)

2. *Instrumental music was introduced many years after the church began*

- **George A. Klingman:** “The earliest reference is to the use of the flute and the harp in **the second century.** At Alexandria, Clement (155-c. 220) forbade the use of the flute, on the ground that it was ‘too worldly’ and substituted the harp. Ambrose is said to have introduced instrumental music in the **West in the fourth century.**” (*Church History For Busy People*, pp. 92-93)
- **The American Cyclopedia:** “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 one sent as a present by the Greek emperor Constantine Copronymus to Pepin, king of the Franks, in **755.**” (Vol. 12, p. 688)
- **Chambers’ Encyclopedia:** “The organ is said to have been introduced into church music by Pope Vitalian I in **666.** In **757**, a great organ was sent as a present to Pepin by the Byzantine emperor, Constantine Copronymus, and placed in the church of St. Corneille at Compiègne.” (Vol. 7, p. 112)
- **Phillip Schaff:** “The use of organs in churches is ascribed to Pope Vitalian (657-672). Constantine Copronymos sent an organ with other presents to King Pepin of France in **767.** Charlemagne received one as a present from the Caliph Haroun al Rashid, and had it put up in the cathedral of Aix-la-Chapelle....The attitude of the churches toward the organ varies. It shared to some extent the fate of images except that it never was an object of worship....The Greek church disapproved the use of organs. The Latin church introduced it pretty generally,

but not without the protest of eminent men, so that even in the Council of Trent a motion was made, though not carried, to prohibit the organ at least in the mass.” (*History Of The Christian Church*, Vol. 4, p. 439)

3. *Instrumental music was opposed when it was first introduced*

- **John Kurtz:** “At first church music was simple, artless, recitative. But the rivalry of heretics forced the orthodox church to pay greater attention to the requirements of art. **Chrysostom (c. 344-407) had to declaim against the secularization of church music. More lasting was the opposition of the church to the introduction of instrumental accompaniment.**” (*Church History*, Vol. I, p. 376)
- **Edward Dickinson:** “In view of the controversies over the use of instrumental music in worship, which have been so violent in the British and American Protestant churches, it is an interesting question whether instruments were employed by the primitive Christians. We know that instruments performed an important function in the Hebrew temple service and in the ceremonies of the Greeks. At this point, however, a break was made with all previous practice, and although the lyre and flute were sometimes employed by the Greek converts, as a general rule the use of instruments in worship was condemned. Many of the fathers, speaking of religious song, make no mention of instruments; others, like Clement of Alexandria and St. Chrysostom, refer to them only to denounce them. Clement says: ‘Only one instrument do we use, viz. the word of peace wherewith we honor God, no longer the old psaltery, trumpet, drum, and flute.’ Chrysostom exclaims: ‘David formerly sang in psalms, also we sing today with him; he had a lyre with lifeless strings, the church has a lyre with living strings. Our tongues are the strings of the lyre, with a different tone, indeed, but with a more accordant piety.’ St. Ambrose (c.339-397) expresses his scorn for those who would play the lyre and psaltery instead of singing hymns and psalms; and St. Augustine (354-430) adjures believers not to turn their heart to theatrical instruments. **The religious guides of the early Christians felt that there would be an incongruity, and even profanity, in the use of the sensuous nerve-exciting effects of instrumental sound in their mystical, spiritual worship.** Their high religious and moral enthusiasm needed no aid from external stimulus; the pure vocal utterance was the more proper expression of their faith.” (*Music In The History Of The Western Church*, pp. 54-55)
- **McClintock & Strong:** “Neither Ambrose, nor Basil, nor Chrysostom in the noble encomiums which they severally pronounced upon music make any mention of instrumental music. **Basil indeed, expressly condemns it as ministering only to the depraved passions of men...Even Gregory the Great, who towards the end of the 6th century added greatly to the existing church music, absolutely prohibited the use of instruments.**” (*Cyclopedia Of Biblical, Theological, And Ecclesiastical Literature*, Vol. 6, p. 759)

4. *Instrumental music has been opposed by many respected religious leaders and scholars*

- **John Calvin (1509-1564)** (Presbyterian): “**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.** The papists, therefore, have foolishly borrowed this, as well as many other things, from the Jews. Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far more pleasing to Him.” (*Calvin’s Commentary on the 33rd Psalm*)
- **John Girardeau** (Presbyterian): “It has thus been proved, by an appeal to historical facts, that the church, although lapsing more and more into defection from the truth and into a corruption of apostolic practice, **had no instrumental music for twelve hundred years;** and that the Calvinistic Reformed Church ejected it from its services as an element of Popery, even the

Church of England having come very nigh to its extrusion from her worship. **The historical argument, therefore, combines with the Scriptural and the confessional to raise a solemn and powerful protest against its employment by the Presbyterian Church. It is heresy in the sphere of worship.**” (*Instrumental Music In Public Worship*, p. 179)

- **Charles Hadden Spurgeon (1834-1892)**(Baptist): “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 prettiness of a quartet, bellows, and pipes! We might as well pray by machinery as praise by it.**” (*Commentary on Psalms 42*)
- **Benedict** (Baptist): “**In my earliest intercourse among this people, congregational singing generally prevailed among them....**The introduction of the Organ among the Baptists....This instrument, which from time immemorial has been associated with cathedral pomp and prelatical power, and has always been the peculiar favorite of great national churches, at length found its way into Baptist sanctuaries, and the first one ever employed by the denomination in this country, and probably in any other, might have been standing in the singing gallery of the Old Baptist meeting house in Pawtucket, about forty years ago, when I then officiated as pastor (1840)....**Staunch old Baptists in former times would as soon tolerated the Pope of Rome in their pulpits as an organ in their galleries, and yet the instrument has gradually found its way among them....**How far this modern organ fever will extend among our people, and whether it will on the whole work a RE-formation or DE-formation in their singing service, time will more fully develope.” (*Fifty Years Among Baptists*, pp. 204-207)
- **John Spencer Curwen**: “Men still living can remember the time when organs were very seldom found outside the Church of England. The Methodists, Independents, and Baptists rarely had them, and by the Presbyterians they were stoutly opposed. But since these bodies began to introduce organs, the adoption of them has been unchecked. Even the Presbyterians are giving away, and if we read the future by the past, we can hardly doubt that, in a few years, unaccompanied singing will very seldom be heard. Yet, even in the Church of England itself, organs did not obtain admission without much controversy.” (*Studies in Worship Music*, p. 179)
- **Adam Clarke** (Methodist): “I believe that David was not authorized by the Lord to introduce that multitude of musical instruments into the divine worship of which we read; and I am satisfied that his conduct in this respect is most solumnly reprehended by this prophet: and I farther believe that the use of some instruments of music, in the Christian Church, is without the sanction and against the will of God; that they are subversive of the spirit of true devotion, and that they are sinful. If there was a woe to them who invented instruments of music, as did David under the law, is there no woe, no curse, to them who invent them, and introduce them into the worship of God in the Christian Church. I am an old man, and an old minister, and I here declare that I never knew them productive of any good in the worship of God; and have 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. The late venerable and most eminent divine, John Wesley, who was a lover of music, and an elegant poet, when asked his opinion of instruments of music being introduced into the chapels of the Methodists said, in his terse and powerful manner, ‘I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen.’”

I say the same, though I think the expense of purchase had better be spared.” (*Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, Vol. 4, p. 686)

- **Martin Luther:** “The church rings with the noise of trumpets, pipes and dulcimers; and human voices strive to bear their part with them. Men run to the church as to a theater, to have their ears tickled” (*Commentary on I Cor. 14:19*)

Technical Stuff

Psallo

BAGD: “in our lit., in accordance w. OT usage, *sing, sing praise*....The original mng. of ψ. was ‘pluck’, ‘play’ (a stringed instrument); this persisted at least to the time of Lucian...In the LXX ψ. freq. means ‘sing’, whether to the accompaniment of a harp or (as usually) not (Ps 7:18; 9:12; 107:4 al.). This process continued until ψ. in Mod. Gk. means ‘sing’ exclusively; cf. ψαλτης = singer, chanter, w. no ref. to instrumental accompaniment. Although the NT does not voice opposition to instrumental music, in view of Christian resistance to mystery cults, as well as Pharisaic aversion to musical instruments in worship...it is likely that some such sense as *make melody* is best here. Those who favor ‘play’...may be relying too much on the earliest mng. of ψαλλω...Abs. *sing praise* Js 5:13...” (p. 891)

Thayer: “(fr. ψαω, to rub, wipe; to handle, touch....); a. *to pluck off, pull out*.... b. *to cause to vibrate by touching, to twang*....*to touch or strike the chord, to twang the strings* of a musical instrument so that they gently vibrate....and absol. *to play on a stringed instrument, to play the harp*....Sept. for...and much oftener for...*to sing to the music of the harp*; in the N.T. *to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song*...” (#5567, p. 675)

Vine: “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’...” (p. 730)

M. C. Kurfees: “Again let it be noted that no particular object inheres in the original meaning of the term to the exclusion of other objects, the word merely meaning ‘to pluck off, pull out, to cause to vibrate by touching, to twang,’ regardless of the object that one might pluck off, pull out, cause to vibrate by touching, or twang” (Review Of O. E. Payne’s Book On Psallo, p. 13, via Earl Robertson, “Instrumental Music In Worship,” p. 6-7)

Dr. A. T. Robertson: “The word (psalleteo) originally meant to play on a stringed instrument (Sir. 9:4), but it comes to be used also for singing with the voice and heart (Eph. 5:19; 1 Cor. 14:15), making melody with the heart also to the Lord.” (Comment on James 5:13, *Studies In The Epistle James*, via Earl Robertson, “Instrumental Music In Worship,” p. 25)

Albert Barnes: “*Psallo*...is used, in the NT only in Rom. 15:9 and 1 Cor. 14:15, where it is translated sing; in James 5:13, where it is rendered sing psalms, and in the place before us. The idea here is that of singing in the heart or praising God from the heart.” (Comment on Eph. 5:19, *Notes On The New Testament*, via Earl Robertson, “Instrumental Music In Worship,” p. 26)

Psalmos

BAGD: “in our lit. only *song of praise, psalm*, in accordance w. OT usage. 1. of the OT Psalms... 2. of Christian songs of praise...” (p. 891)

Thayer: “*a striking, twanging*...spec. *a striking the chords* of a musical instrument...hence *a pious song, a psalm*...Eph. v. 19; Col. iii. 16...” (#5568, p. 675)

Vine: “primarily denoted a striking or twitching with the fingers (on musical strings); then, a sacred song, sung to musical accompaniment, a psalm. It is used (a) of the OT book of Psalms...(b) of a particular psalm...(c) of psalms in general...” (p. 901)

Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia: “But this argument would prove that it is as much a duty to play as to sing in worship. It is questionable whether, as used in the New Testament, ‘psallo’ means more than to sing....The absence of instrumental music from the church for some centuries after the apostles and the sentiment regarding it which pervades the writing of the fathers are unaccountable, if in the apostolic church such music was used.” (Vol. 3, p. 1961, via Robertson, pp. 21-22)

Dr. Marvin R. Vincent: “A psalm was originally a song accompanied by a stringed instrument. See on 1 Cor. xiv. 15. The idea of accompaniment passed away in usage, and the psalm in New Testament phraseology, is an Old-Testament psalm, or a composition having that character.” (*Word Studies In The New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 506)

J. W. McGarvey: “And if any man who is a preacher believes that the apostle teaches the use of instrumental music in the church by enjoining the singing of psalms, he is one of those smatterers in Greek who can believe anything that he wishes to believe. When the wish is father to the thought, correct exegesis is like water on a duck’s back.” (Biblical Criticism, p. 116, “Instrumental Music In Worship,” p. 26)

PRAISING GOD WITH MACHINES (Excerpt)

by Dr. Hugo McCord

. . .Some still press the “aid” argument. But in the Old Testament instruments were commanded as part of the worship (Psalm 33:2-3; 71:22), and instruments are used today in many churches when no singing is being done. The “aid” argument collapses. Practically, instead of aiding, mechanical music takes the “thought of the congregation from the words of the hymn” (John Calvin).

Some say that as the pitch pipe aids in getting the first note, so the piano aids in getting all the succeeding notes. On the contrary, the piano accompanies all the succeeding notes and does not aid in getting them. The pitch pipe cannot make music, and it stops before the worship begins. The song book is truly an aid but it introduces no other kind of music than which the Lord has ordered.

That vocal music is in general more expressive than the mechanically produced tones of instruments is undeniable. Religious feeling finds its most natural expression in vocal utterance, for the human heart is the source of both devotion and song. (Richard Wagner, 1813-1883.)

Some say that the skilled talent of a musician should be utilized in worship, but the same thing could be said of skillful dancers.

The Corrected A-G Has A Mistake. Though the A-G lexicon has corrected its mistake by removing Professor Gingrich’s phrase, “to the accompaniment of a harp,” it has gone too far in saying that *psallo* in modern Greek (that is, since the Old Testament) “means ‘sing’ exclusively... with no reference to instrumental accompaniment” (p. 891).

On the contrary, in the very century in which the New Testament was written, the word could mean either “sing” or “play” dependent on what the writer had in mind. For example, Josephus, in the first century A.D. wrote of some who “psalloed on the harp” (*ANTIQUITIES*, 6. 8. 2), in which example the word could not mean “sing.”

The use of *psallo* with the “meaning to ‘play on a harp’” is found “in literature contemporary with the New Testament,” writes Rubel Shelly, and also is found in Strabo (*GEOGRAPHY*, 1, 23; 14, 2, 26), Lucian (*THE PARASITE*, 17), and Plutarch (*LIFE OF PERICLES*, 1, 5). In addition he writes that “Moulton and Milligan (*VOCABULARY*, *psalmos*) cite a second-century A.D. inscription where *psalmos* is used to signify a song sung to a harp being played by the fingers.”

Likewise, Paul commanded Christians to do two things: *aido* and *psallo* (Eph. 5:19). If in Paul’s time *psallo* meant “sing” exclusively” (A-G, 891) and *aido* meant the same thing, then Paul was commanding “singing and singing.” Apparently then Paul was commanding “singing and playing.”

But what kind of playing did he mean? He did not command that it be done on a harp (as in David’s case. Psalm 33:3; 68:25; 71:22), but on the “heart” (Eph. 5:19). If the instrument was a harp, then the playing necessarily would be literal, with each Christian having his own harp (as David). But the instrument was the heart, on which playing was impossible.

Psallo therefore in Ephesians 5:19 must be figurative, that is, “plucking the strings of the heart.” Professor Danker calls this a “metaphorical usage.” Often the phrase is translated “making melody with your heart.”

So the apostle commanded two things: (1) singing (external, as “the fruit of the lips” Heb. 13:15), and (2) playing (internal, on the “heart”). Since the earliest meaning of *psallo* (strengthened

from *psao*, to touch) is to strike, pull, twang, pluck, it is easy to bring that meaning over into a translation of Ephesians 5:19: . . . speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing [*aido*] and plucking [*psallo*] the strings of your heart to the Lord.

But in the other four occurrences of *psallo* in the New Testament the renowned A-G lexicon says it “means ‘sing’ exclusively . . . with no reference to instrumental accompaniment”: . . . I will acknowledge you among the Gentiles, and I will sing [*psallo*] to your name (Rom. 15:9.)

. . . I will sing [*psallo*] with the spirit and I will also sing [*psallo*] with the understanding (I Cor. 14:15).

. . . Is any happy? Let him sing praise [*psallo*]

A Violation of Three Laws. Three principles which stand out in the New Testament are rejected when one introduces worship by machinery:

(1) The law of faith, set forth in II Corinthians 5:7, “we walk by faith,” coupled with Romans 10:17, “faith comes by hearing” the word of Christ. In Christian worship by the law of faith we sing, pray, read the Scriptures, contribute, and partake of the Lord’s Supper (I Cor. 11:26; 16:1-2; Col. 3:16; 4:16; I Tim. 2:1-2). But one goes beyond the law of faith if he crosses himself with holy water, bows before an image, prays to Mary, burns incense, lights prayer candles, plays an instrument.

(2) The law of worship forbids “the doctrines and commandments of men” (Matt. 15:9), which eliminates holy water, images, musical instruments, vestments, incense, prayer candles.

(3) The law of unity (I Cor. 1:10) requires that, when conscience is not involved, we “follow after things which make for peace, and things that build up one another” (Rom. 14:19; cf. 12:18).

Vigil, May 1994

Endnote

¹ I’m indebted to Kevin Kay for much of this information. Two books, *Music Matters* by Aubrey Johnson (20th Century Christian, 1995) and *Sing His Praise!* By Rubel Shelley (20th Century Christian, 1987) were also helpful.