

DOES THE WORD “PSALM” DEMAND INSTRUMENTAL ACCOMPANIMENT?

Dear Bro. Waddey: "You mention the word 'sing' from Ephesians 5:19. You carefully omit the word 'psalm' from your treatise. Is this because you are not aware that the word 'psalm' is a 'song accompanied by an instrument'? That's why the verse mentions 'psalms' and 'hymns' and 'spiritual songs'. This covered all possible bases musically. Singing, accompanied and unaccompanied, is authorized by Ephesians 5:19.

"One other question: where in the context of the text surrounding Ephesians 5:19 is a church worship service ever mentioned? I ask this because you feel that instrumental worship is only wrong in church, but is ok everywhere else? Well, even if the word 'psalm' didn't appear in this verse, this text still wouldn't be referring to a worship service held in church. Why make the argument that Ephesians 5:19 is in any way telling us how to or not to worship in church, when church worship is not mentioned at all in the text? The same applies to Colossians 3:16, another proof text for this doctrine." Brendon

Dear Brendon: Just as our English language has evolved over the years, with some words, becoming obsolete and other losing old meanings while gaining new ones, so did the Greek language. Thus the *koine* Greek, spoken by the average person on the street in first century Roman society, was not precisely the same in every case as that of the Classical period. While the word “*psallo*” originally meant “to touch, pull, pluck, cause to vibrate, play on a stringed instrument, sing” by the first century the word had evolved so that J. H. Thayer in his great Lexicon notes, “in the New Testament to sing a hymn, to celebrate the praises of God in song...”

When Paul instructs us to “sing, making melody (*psallo*) with our hearts (Eph. 5:19), he is clearly using the term metaphorically or figuratively. Note that he specifically says that we are to sing! He specifically tells us the instrument on which we are to make music (*psallo*). It is our heart, not an instrument made by human hands.

It is true that Paul mentions that we are to sing psalms. But it is a mistake to assume that the word psalm *demand*s the accompaniment of an instrument. It is a historical fact that no musical instruments were allowed in synagogue worship, yet each Sabbath they sang psalms. We can read a psalm, sing a psalm without accompaniment or sing it with accompaniment. The early church sang them a cappella, and so should we.

It is a historical fact that no mechanical instruments were used in Christian worship for the first 650 years and they only became generally accepted in the eleventh century. Those who seek to justify their use of these instruments should ponder, why did the early church not use them in worship?

As to the question “Does Ephesians 5 or Colossians 3 refer to the church?” those who question this should consider that the epistles were written to churches. Both contain information pertinent to congregational as well as private life. Note to that he instructs them to speak “*one to another* in psalms and hymns..subjecting yourselves to one another...” (Eph. 5:19-21). Such activity, by necessity, involves more than one lone individual.

Instrumental Music in Worship by M. C. Kurfees is a classic collection of lexical, historical material and comments by Biblical scholars on the subject. It can be ordered from the Gospel Advocate Bookstore 1006 Elm Hill Pk. in Nashville, TN 37210 JHW

